



Health Promotion

Narrative report 2019-2020



Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

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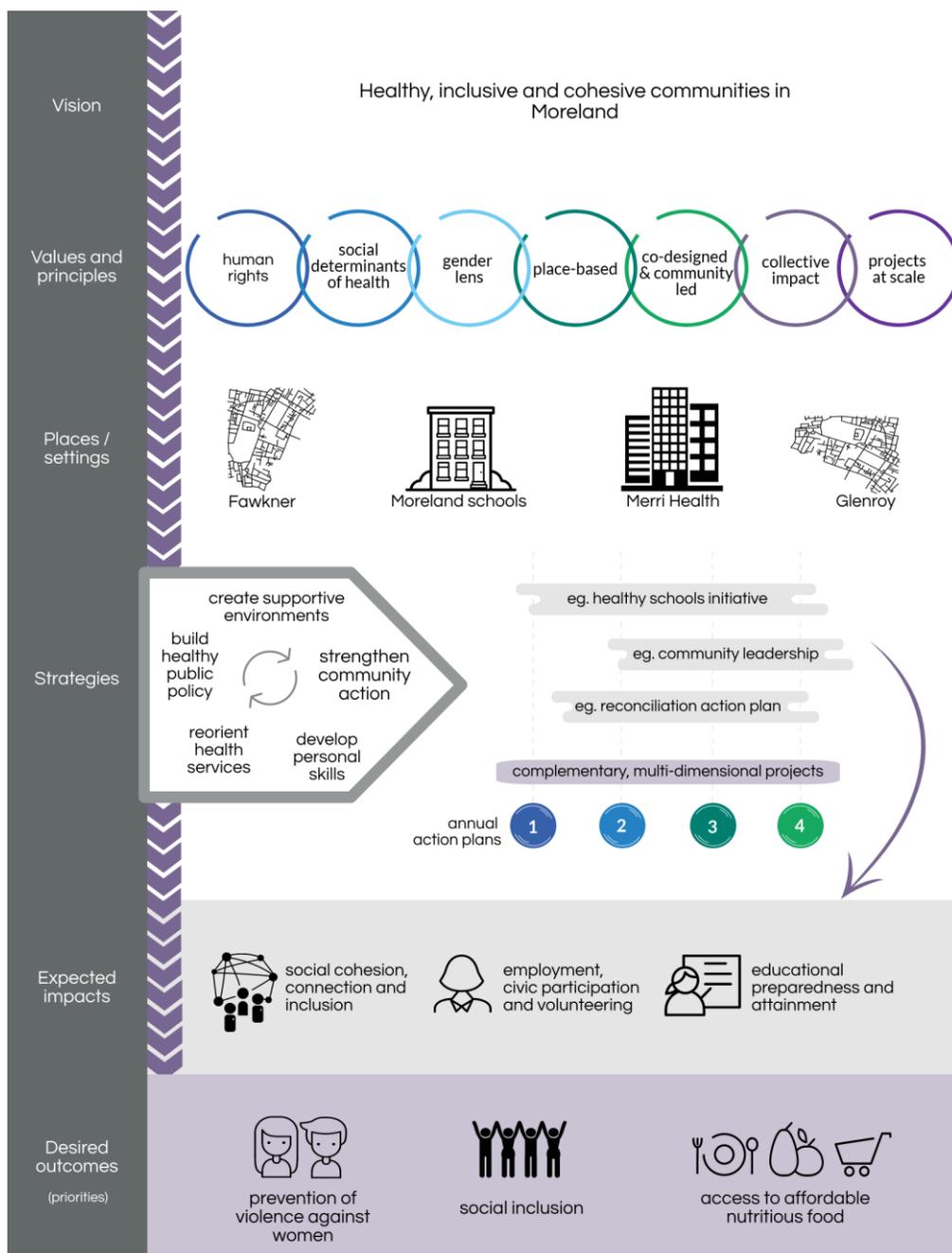
Introduction

This narrative report forms part of Merri Health’s annual report for activities implemented in 2019-2020 under the *Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan 2017-2021*.

It sits alongside the *Integrated Health Promotion Progress Report 2019-2020*, but aims to provide more detail of the stories behind the projects implemented this year.

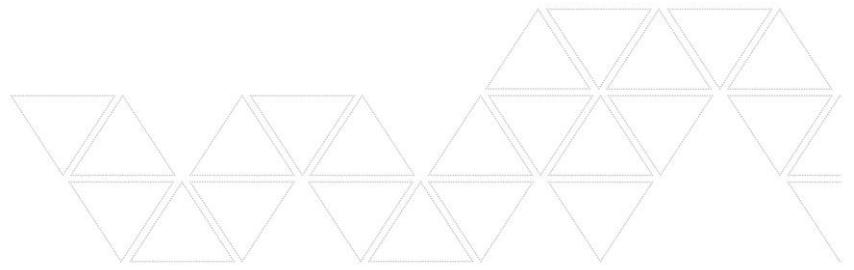
Merri Health’s *Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan* and associated annual action plans are implemented by the community wellbeing team, which includes the:

- community health promotion team
- youth health promotion team



A photograph of a fire burning in a metal fire pit. The fire pit is a dark, bowl-shaped metal container supported by four dark, tapered legs. It is filled with a pile of sticks and dried leaves, which are burning brightly. A large, intense flame is rising from the left side of the fire pit, reaching towards the top of the frame. The background is a concrete surface, and a person's leg in dark pants is visible on the right side. The overall scene is outdoors, possibly in a park or a public square.

Overview
of initiatives



Merri Health

Reconciliation Action Plan

Merri Health began developing its new Reconciliation Action Plan in 2019. However, we were unable to complete this process due to high turnover of membership within the RAP Committee. Attendance at RAP Committee meetings was also challenged by the onset of COVID-19.

Despite this, Merri Health has continued its efforts to be a culturally secure organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community members. Efforts this year have focused on staff training and awareness raising in relation to the RAP, the history of key community events, and relevant organisational policies such as the Acknowledgement of Country policy.

This year, we also worked in partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled organisation – The Long Walk Trust – to deliver Speak Up, Speak Out (more details below).



Leanne Brooke, General Manager of The Long Walk Trust congratulating a Speak Up, Speak Out participant

Employment

As a large organisation, Merri Health has the capacity to support employment outcomes for local community members through the way we do our business.

During this reporting period, the community wellbeing team has created two new positions for people who are from target communities:

- 1 project officer role for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
- 1 project officer role for a young person from LGBTIQA+ communities

We also submitted five funding applications incorporating community engagement positions for local people, however, these were all unsuccessful.

We look forward to expanding on this commitment with four new community engagement roles in the community wellbeing team, funded through the Working for Victoria initiative.

COVID-19

The arrival of COVID-19 brought unanticipated and unprecedented change to the delivery of Merri Health initiatives under the 2019-20 Action Plan and to the organisation's delivery of services more broadly.

Since March, Merri Health has worked with the Department of Health and Human Services and other partners in a range of capacities to support the public health response to the pandemic. This has included the establishment of three temporary community testing clinics in the Moreland local government area.

Following the movement to work from home from late March, the community wellbeing team has implemented a range of strategies to:

- move initiatives to an online or phone format
- suspend activities which could not be delivered in line with physical distancing guidelines
- develop new activities that directly respond to the needs of community

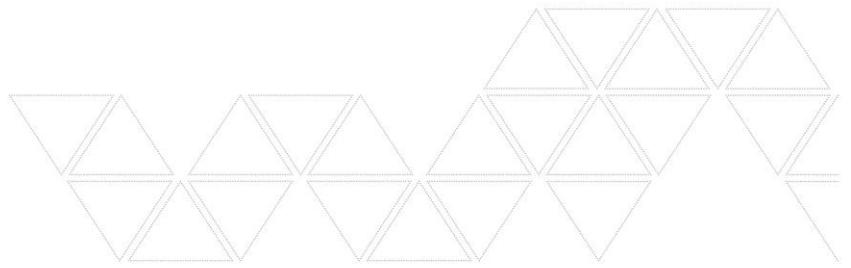
The following initiatives – or key activities – were suspended altogether due to COVID-19:

- RAP Committee meetings (temporary)
- Count Me In Too (permanent; project was due to finish in June 2020 and no additional funding was secured)
- Hello, Fawkner!'s community-led Harmony Day activities (temporary)
- Upstander training (temporary)
- Young Change Makers (temporary, but pending approval of an extension of timeframes from funding body)

The following initiatives moved all or some of their existing key activities to a remote working environment:

- Ready, Set, Prep! transition network and steering committee
- Hello, Fawkner! The Great Idea Program
- YGLAM queer youth theatre ensemble

We have received both positive and negative feedback from community members, partners and stakeholders about the move to an online environment.



The community wellbeing team supporting the Glenroy COVID-19 testing site

The team also implemented a range of new activities to complement existing initiatives, or in response to community need during the pandemic. This included:

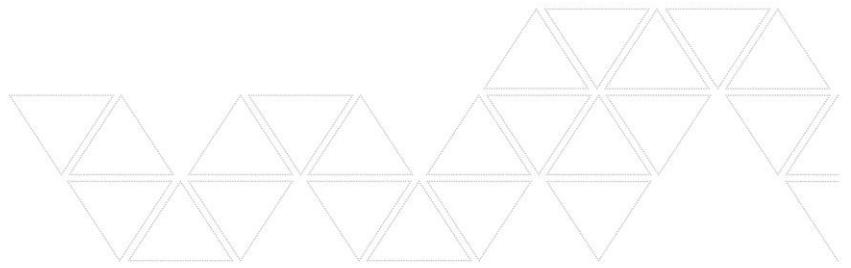
- more (and more targeted) social media engagement for Ready, Set, Prep!, particularly supporting families struggling with home schooling
- an organisation-wide communications strategy around COVID-19
- supporting the establishment of COVID-19 testing clinics in Moreland
- community engagement in relation to COVID-19 and linking community members to essential information, supports and services
- collaboration with Moreland Council in relation to COVID-19, including participation on newly established sub-committees
- advocacy on behalf of community needs

See a detailed case study below about the community engagement undertaken during the reporting period.

Over the next six months, Merri Health will continue to work with DHHS, Moreland Council and partners to respond to community need and to plan for recovery.

Key themes include:

- greater capacity and flexibility amongst some community members and stakeholders to attend meetings (no need to travel, and not as many competing priorities)
- increasing computer screen / online engagement fatigue as time went on, particularly for younger community members



Fawkner

Count Me In Too

Count Me In Too (2) was a sports participation program that supported girls and women from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds to participate in sport.

The project was delivered in partnership with Moreland City Council, and was primarily funded through the Victorian Governments *Free from Violence Local Government Project Grants*.

More than 620 girls and women were engaged through the Count Me In Too project.

See a detailed case study of this initiative below.



Some of the Hello, Fawkner! team at the Fawkner Festa 2019

Ready, Set, Prep!

Ready Set Prep is a four-year, collective impact approach to improving school readiness, family engagement and transition processes in schools and early childhood services in Fawkner. Since commencement, the Ready, Set, Prep! partnership has grown from just six partners – mostly primary schools in Fawkner – to more than 20 partners across the early childhood and education sectors.

Reaching its final year, and with a view towards the next phase of implementation, the initiative has undergone a series of changes to build the infrastructure needed to expand to northern Moreland.

See a detailed case study of this initiative below.

Hello, Fawkner!

Partially funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, this project is a place-based approach to improving social cohesion in Fawkner.

Hello, Fawkner! focuses on building leadership capacity of local residents to develop and implement initiatives that bring community members together.

Key activities include:

- The Great Idea Program (leadership training)
- community-led Harmony Day activities
- a community newspaper
- a monthly e-newsletter

This year, participants of The Great Idea Program implemented projects they had designed for the Fawkner community. See a detailed case study of The Great Idea Program below.

Hello, Fawkner! also released its second edition of the Fawkner Times community newspaper, with 2,000 copies delivered to households, businesses and community venues across the suburb.

More than 25 editions of the e-newsletter were also distributed during the reporting period, with 526 subscribers. The e-newsletters included approximately 140 different articles celebrating Fawkner's diversity, with almost 30% of articles contributed by residents.

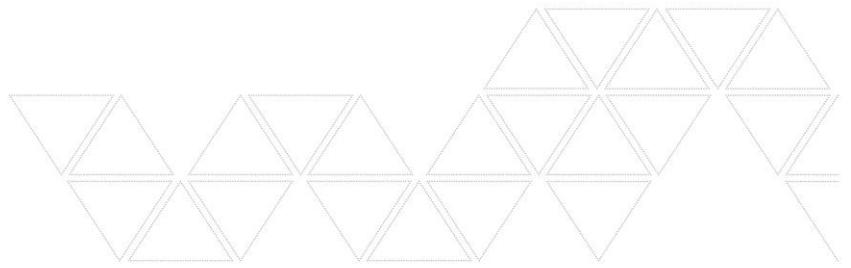
Although most of this year's community-led Harmony Day events were postponed due to COVID-19, we look forward to supporting Fawkner locals to reconnect with their community over the coming 12 months.



Urdu Women's Group

The Urdu women's group is a weekly social gathering at the Fawkner community house. It's a central point for women who are newly arrived in Melbourne to connect with each other and with local services.

At the beginning of this year, Merri Health provided ad hoc support to the volunteer committee of management who had taken over the delivery of this project.



Youth Settings

Speak Up, Speak Out

Speak Up, Speak Out was a pilot project delivered in partnership with The Long Walk Trust. It aimed to trial a new approach to preventing violence within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Over two programs, *Speak Up, Speak Out* engaged 26 Aboriginal young people aged 9-12 years from the Moreland and Hume local government areas.

See a detailed case study of this initiative below.

Self Care: An Anti-Musical

Operating for more than 20 years, the YGLAM queer youth theatre and performing arts ensemble combines weekly peer support and skill development workshops, with large-scale public art.

This year, YGLAM prepared a performance for the Melbourne Fringe Festival called 'Self-Care: An Anti-Musical'. Delivered in September 2019, the performance drew on the stories of queer young people's experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and also the self-care strategies they use to keep going.

See a detailed case study of this initiative below.

The Domino Effect

Working with students from schools across Moreland, Victoria Police and other community partners, the Domino Effect aimed to show the power of the bystander.

Starting with one small action, a bystander (or 'upstander') can start a chain of events – much like the falling of dominoes – that can have a real impact on the experiences of those affected by discrimination.

In collaboration with YGLAM queer youth theatre ensemble and Stand Out groups from local secondary schools, a large-scale public art event was filmed to motivate inclusivity and positive action.

Across three school ovals, thousands of students created messages of solidarity with coloured cardboard, which were filmed from the sky.

Check out the short film [here](#).



Coburg High School students create a giant rainbow.

Upstander training

This year, Merri Health has delivered 'upstander' training in six different settings, including local schools, Moreland City Council and Yarra Trams.

Upstander training (or bystander training) focuses on building the knowledge, skills and confidence of participants to safely and appropriately intervene in situations where they feel uncomfortable, or where they disagree with what is happening.

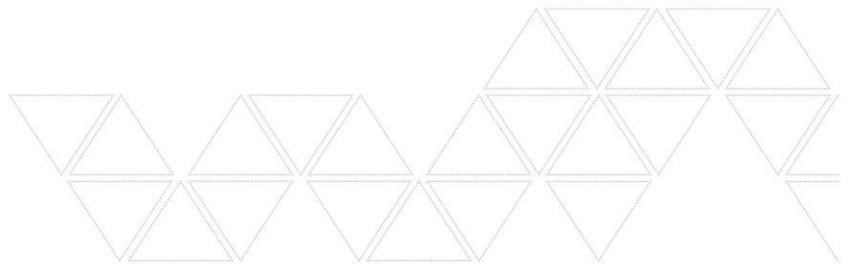
Young Change Makers

Partially funded by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Young Change Makers aimed to build the leadership capacity of primary school students to lead change in their communities.

In partnership with Corpus Christi Primary School in Glenroy, two different types of training was delivered to students from years 4-5:

- upstander (or 'bystander') training delivered to 72 students
- leadership training delivered to 10 student leaders

Student leaders were then supported to design a project that would promote harmony and celebrate diversity in their school community. Due to COVID-19, this part of the project has been postponed until face-to-face learning is resumed.



Partnerships

Working together

Our work is firmly embedded in partnerships and collaboration, and this is evident across the projects detailed within this report. Over this past year, we have engaged with more than 80 different partners, 25+ networks or committees, 10 teams across our organisation, and six different funders.



Ready, Set, Prep Transition Network

Local government

Moreland City Council is a critical partner for this action plan. Our work directly meets with the municipal public health and wellbeing plan and its Victorian counterpart, creating a transparent line-of-sight from state policy through to local action.

The strength of our partnership has been clearly evident throughout COVID-19, with Merri Health and Council staff collaborating to better support the needs of community members.

Beyond COVID-19, our collaboration spans about 70% per cent of all projects delivered under this strategy in 2019-20, with different roles played by Council for each initiative.

Regional partnerships

As part of our *Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan 2017-2021*, we have continued our commitment to working with regional partners on shared priorities.

In 2017, we recommitted our participation in the [Building a Respectful Community](#) partnership led by Women's Health in the North (WHIN). We are proud to work alongside WHIN, community health organisations, local government and other organisations in the northern metropolitan region to prevent violence against women in our community.

Merri Health also continues its commitment to working with the Inner North West Primary Care Partnership (INWPCP) on our shared priority around social inclusion. We are an active member of the INWPCP's governance group, prevention alliance, access and equity alliance, and Koolin Balit partnership.

We were also involved in the INWPCP's initiatives to develop shared measurement tools to strengthen monitoring and evaluation practice. Merri Health participated in a pilot to assess the applicability of the [Social Inclusion Measurement Framework](#) in relation to the *Hello, Fawkner!* initiative.

We also worked with the Hume Moreland Prevention Partnership, led by the Department of Health and Human Services, to explore opportunities for collaborative planning and projects in relation to social inclusion.

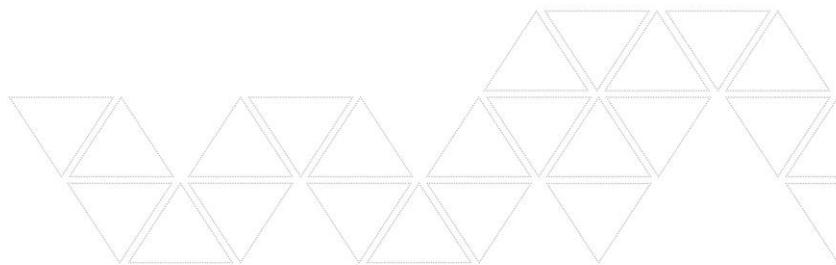
*Possum skin burning activity
Speak Up, Speak Out*



Case studies



Merri Health



COVID-19

Community engagement

Introduction

On 7 April 2020, Merri Health established a community engagement response to COVID-19. We connected with local Moreland community to understand their experiences during COVID-19 and learn about their needs and access barriers. The community engagement informed service planning and aimed to support residents to access the supports they needed during the lock down and recovery period.

The team shared fortnightly updates both internally and externally with stakeholders. Each update included 1-2 case studies to illustrate the complexity and diversity of people’s circumstances, and highlight where local, state and federal systems and policies are not meeting community needs.

Merri Health also shared regular social media posts through Facebook and other social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Viber community groups. Content included updates from the Victorian Government and Moreland City Council, mental health and wellbeing services, food relief options, financial services, culturally specific services and employment opportunities in the area.

Prior to the second stage of lockdown, more than 300 community members were engaged through:

- in-depth, one-on-one phone interviews or focus groups
- an online community survey

One-on-one interviews and focus groups

Merri Health staff facilitated the focus groups and conducted the phone interviews, with most interviews lasting for up to an hour.

A total of 79 participants, mainly from Moreland area (over 86%), were engaged through one-on-one phone interviews and four focus groups. Feedback and advice from Merri Health staff and stakeholders helped design the consultation questions.

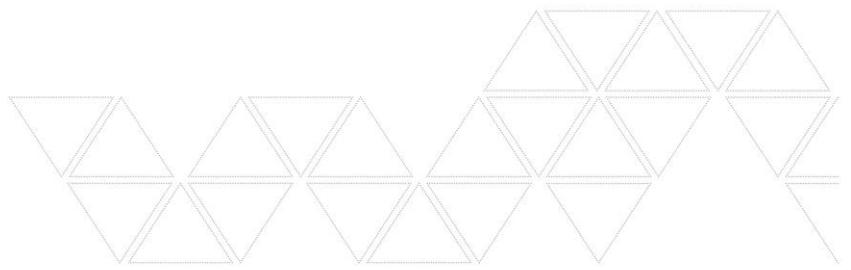
Questions asked included the following topics:

- key current concerns
- health and wellbeing
- supporting pre-school and school-aged children
- access to food, medical, support services, information employment and education

The table below outlines key demographic information* for community members engaged through one-on-one interviews and focus groups

Demographic information	Responses
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person	3, with one person acknowledging they are a descendant of the Stolen Generations
People who speak a language other than English	58
Cultural backgrounds	14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pakistani (35) – Indian (9) – Lebanese (6) – Australian (8) – Indian Muslim (2) – Bosnian (1) – Chilean (1) – German (1) – Italian (2) – Irish (1) – Maltese (1) – Russian (1) – Sri Lankan (1) – Sudanese (1)
Languages spoken	21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Auslan (1) – Arabic (7) – Balochi (1) – Chinese (1) – English (46) – Gujrati (1) – Hindi (6) – Hindko (2) – Kannada (1) – Marathi (1) – Pashto (3) – Portuguese (1) – Punjabi (8) – Russian (1) – Saraiki (1) – Sindhi (2) – Singhalese (1) – Spanish (1) – Tamil (2) – Turkish (2) – Urdu (43)

*Please note, responding to demographic questions was optional so figures may not reflect total numbers.



Demographic information	Responses
Age groups	9 young people aged 4-12 13 young people aged 12-25 41 people aged 25-65 years 1 person aged 65+ years
Lives in	Moreland – 86% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fawkner (48) – Glenroy (7) – Brunswick (3) – Coburg (1) – Brunswick West (2) – Pascoe Vale (1) Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broadmeadows (2) – Campbellfield (2) – Dallas (1) – Mernda (1) – Reservoir (1) – Strathmore (1) – Viewbank (2)
Gender identity	Non-binary – 1 Non-binary / agender – 1 Lesbian / non-binary – 1 Female – 56 Male – 11
People who identify as LGBTIAQ+	4

Below are key themes and reflections from conversations with community members.

Mental health and wellbeing

Many participants reported social isolation restrictions during the first lock down negatively affecting their mental wellbeing, the wellbeing of family and friends. Many parents expressed concern for their children, with some citing changes to their child’s behaviour due to reduced socialisation.

Many community members have cancelled travel plans to visit family overseas, even in instances where family is sick, frail or needing support. The inability to support family during this time is affecting the mental wellbeing of community members.

“I am really worried about my family overseas.”
– Participant

“My Mum is sick and she is alone overseas, I can’t sleep thinking about her.”
– Participant

For some participants financial uncertainty, due to loss of income, has resulted in additional mental stress and anxiety.

“I have started fighting with husband a lot due to frustration. Husband has also been affected. He is

stressed due to financial situation. My son also gets frustrated and misses his Kinder.”

– Participant

One young person reported that they will *“struggle mentally if the restrictions continued for any longer”*.

“I know mental health support is accessible online but you can’t open up to people if you are talking to them online, there isn’t that personal connection”

– Young person

When young people were asked about whether social isolation or restrictions have influenced their mental wellbeing, most young people did not immediately identify this as a concern. However, when asked about whether they have noticed changes in their moods, irritability or feelings of frustration, most indicated they have noticed these changes in themselves.

Physical health and wellbeing

Some community members reported delaying medical attention for non-serious health concerns, because they were concerned about leaving home and getting infected at medical facilities.

Participants also reported exercising less, with many adults and children fearful of leaving the house due to the risk of infection.

Some participants reported they have lost motivation to stay active and have put on weight due to the lack of physical activity.

Some young people have reported feeling physically flat, after falling out of their usual exercise routines. The lack of access to gyms and team sports has been a challenge, and some expressed excitement about gyms reopening (after the first lockdown).

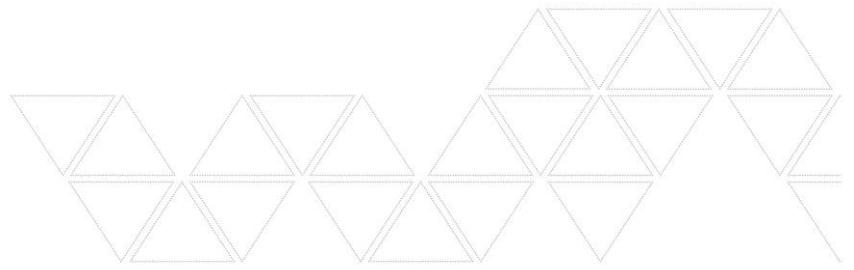
Employment / business

Many participants reported loss or reduction of income and business. Participants also reported work placements; study and business plans were also delayed and affected their employment opportunities.

Many mothers reported losing or giving up employment/income to support their families, despite wanting to be financially independent.

“I am worried that I might not be able to get my job back easily even after things get back to normal”

– An interview participant who was volunteering and upskilling to get a job for 4 years. She recently secured a job and lost it after two months of employment.



Access to information and services

Although most adults regularly accessed COVID-19 information, they also reported confusion about what was/wasn't allowed due to frequent changes. Most participants reported they received COVID-19 information from social media, news, friends and partners. Some participants reported they felt overwhelmed by all the information that was available.

Many participants did not have information about essential services, particularly mental health supports, the availability of telehealth, and COVID-19 testing sites.

"Why isn't this advertised properly so everyone knows, it's such a useful option?"

– Participant (referring to telehealth options)

Home schooling

Many parents found it difficult to manage their children's learning from home.

Some mothers report feeling a sense of guilt about ability (or perceived inability) to support their children with home schooling, indicating they have to spend significant time understanding the work before being able to support their child to complete it.

"I feel guilty that I am not a good mum as I couldn't support the remote learning well"

– Participant

"I was a little concerned sending kids back to school. Kids will have to catch up on the school learning. I feel guilty I didn't teach them as well as required."

– Participant

Some parents report concerns about changes in their children's behaviour, which they believe is related to social isolation. One parent indicated their child has really struggled to settle back into school despite having previously transitioning well to prep.

Families with multiple children found it especially difficult to support each child's learning equally.

"It's challenging having kids of various ages and they all needing support at the same time."

– Participant

Some parents of multiple children reported that *"kids were using phone to submit school work and took*

turns using devices" due to insufficient devices at home. Some parents have also reported issues with internet speed.

"Internet connection is very slow compared to before"

– Parent

Some mothers from non-English speaking backgrounds reported they found it difficult to understand the Australian curriculum and method of teaching. In these instances, some fathers helped children with their studies while also managing their work from home.

"Study here is hard for me to understand so their Dad has to support their learning"

– Parent

Some parents reported concern about excessive use of devices by children.

"Kids are exposed to devices for a longer period"

– Participant

"They (children) are not managing online learning well and can't do serious work at home."

– Parent

"I can't support kids learning like they do at school."

– Parent

Parents also expressed concern about their children's development.

"Communication and social skills in kids have been effected negatively"

– Parent

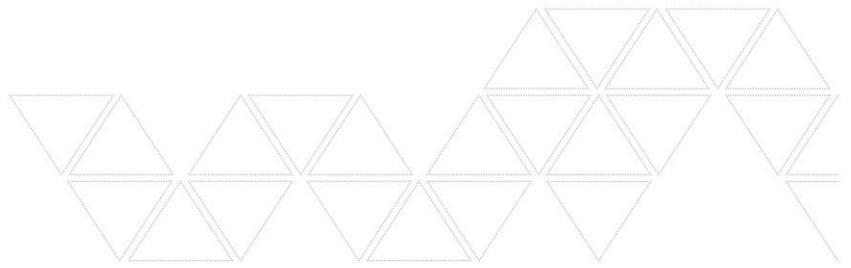
"I am concerned if the virus doesn't stop it will impact my son's school readiness."

– Parent

This concern was also echoed by participants who work in schooling environments.

"I was impacted initially as I had to learn and deliver learning for students online. Some of the students who have come back to school require additional support as they have missed out on so much"

– Local school teacher



Rukhsar, parent living in Fawkner

Rukhsar lives in Fawkner with her 3 children. Her husband has been stranded in their home country since the pandemic began. She lost her casual shift work and was managing remote learning with her children alone. As she is very diligent with following rules, her children were very frustrated and found it difficult to understand. This burden of responsibility has significantly impacted her mental wellbeing.

"I was also frustrated that my husband wasn't here to support (during) this difficult time..."

"I am feeling like a single mum... I am no longer a fun parent."

Her husband is trying to get home, but the few flights available sell out quickly. He is missing them all and finding it hard. She has written to the Australian High Commission for support with getting her husband back home and awaiting a response.

"I just want my husband back! I need that emotional support."

Being new to Australia and naturally quite introverted, she hasn't been socially connected through this period.

"I don't really take care of myself. I hardly socialise."

She is asthmatic, and was worried that she would catch COVID-19 and pass it onto her children. Initially, she would go shopping for essential items daily in case she got sick.

"I felt like I needed to stock enough food as I didn't have any one else to fall back on if things got bad... worried if something happens to me, who will look after (my) kids?"

When the pandemic hit, her daughter became unwell with fever. She had a very distressing experience with a GP, who made her believe that it could be something serious. Due to this, she isolated her daughter in one room to protect the rest of the family. It wasn't until a friend recommended she contact nurse on call that she was able to consult with another GP, who advised the illness wasn't serious. She was not aware of telehealth services until being interviewed.

"It was such a hard time for me as I felt so guilty."

While the experience has helped her and her children appreciate the things they'd once taken for granted, overall it has been an extremely stressful period for her.

****Since being interviewed, Rukhsar's husband has been able to secure a flight home to Melbourne and the family have reunited.****

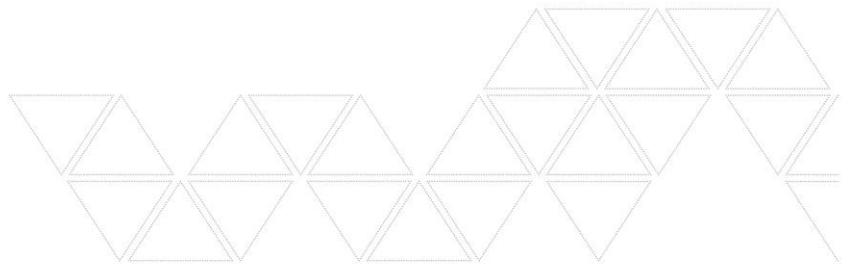
Please note, real names have not been used in these case studies.

Primary school-aged children

We spoke with nine young people aged 4-12 years and 13 young people aged 12-25 years.

Children aged 4-12 years reported enjoying spending more time with their families. However, they also missed their friends, extended family and (in some cases) their teacher.

Community members report concerns about changes in their children's behaviour, which they believe is related to social isolation. One parent indicated their child has really struggled to settle back into school when school reopened at the end of first lock down, despite having previously transitioned well to prep.



Sarah, Grade 5 student living in Fawkner

Sarah, 10, lives with her parents, grandmother, and 2 younger siblings. Her dad is working from home, while her mother's study has moved online, and business plan has had to be put on hold. She has found learning at home really challenging, as her brother makes a lot of noise and distracts the whole family. Her youngest sibling is 4, and requires a lot of attention from her mum.

Sarah also finds it hard to concentrate on remote learning, as she doesn't have the morning routine of going to school to wake her up. She feels that she had more energy when she went to school, and could play sports and do PE class.

"Now I know how important school can be. Lots of people have forgotten about what school was."

Sarah is a very social person and really misses seeing her friends and extended family. Ramadan and Eid felt very different this year because they couldn't celebrate with their loved ones.

"Having visitors and going to other people's houses is my favourite thing."

Sarah had not visited shops until a couple of recent occasions, one of which was visiting a mall. She says she felt different, a sense that she must stay away from people. Sarah feels that the danger was higher a little while back, but is aware that she's developed an anxious habit when she is in those public places.

"I think I'm taking too many measures. I keep covering my nose and mouth with my scarf. I feel like I look weird when I'm doing it because not everyone is wearing a mask, but I can't help it."

"I think coronavirus is in the air... I feel like if I breathe in the air I might get it."

Sarah only experience these anxieties when she goes outside, and she feels safe when she's at home or around people that she knows and trusts. Whilst she is excited to return to school and see her friends and teachers, she's nervous about the germs that could be everywhere at school.

"The only thing I wouldn't feel comfortable about at school is how much things are cleaned... Because we've been away so long they might be really dirty."

Secondary school-aged young people

Most young people aged 18-25 years reported significant disruptions to all aspects of their life – home, learning, employment, with many sharing concerns for the future.

Some young people in years 8-10 reported enjoying spending more time at home, more so than students in older and younger year levels. They appreciated being able to do their studies in their own environment and on their own schedule. This is supported by an anecdotal report from a high school representative that this cohort has found studying at home a welcome relief from the social pressures they feel at school.

Most students feel their learning experience has negatively been affected by not having face-to-face communication with teachers, particularly when

clarifying tasks or concepts that they are struggling to understand.

"Missing school because in class you don't have to come up with all of the answers. If you're not sure you can listen to what classmates have to say, but now you have to figure it all out yourself."

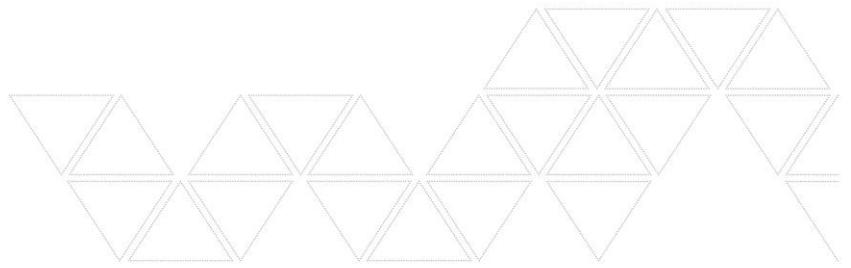
– Young person

"Support from the school isn't sufficient."

– Year 10 student doing VCE subject

Some young people also reported an increase in caring responsibilities for younger siblings, placing additional strain on their learning.

Most students reported feeling more stressed upon returning to school, as they had to catch up on learning and make up for delayed assessments.



Zimal, 16, Year 11 student living in Fawkner

Zimal is the eldest of three children. Her VCE studies have been significantly impacted by remote learning and she and her friends are feeling anxious about how this year will impact their options for tertiary study.

Zimal felt as though she didn't make much progress in learning at home. It was difficult to maintain attention during video classes, and she was too tired to get all her work done. As her parent needed to focus on helping her youngest sibling learn, Zimal relied on friends when she needed help. They had frequent video call sessions so that they could study together. Often her studies and exams would be interrupted by her younger siblings needing help with technical issues.

"It doesn't feel like you have to pay attention."

When school reopened, Zimal and her friends were relieved to be back, but were also more stressed and anxious. They felt as though they have a lot more work to do now to catch up. Their teachers told them that although their Unit 1 and 2 studies would be marked with more leeway, Units 3 and 4 will be back to regular marking standards. While learning at home she would go for walks and bike rides, but returning to school, she had no time for exercise or self-care.

"I have no time to do my own thing... (I'm) up until 2am studying."

People with visas

International students, temporary residents and migrants reliant on visas were significantly affected. Participants reported seeing visitor visas cancelled or reduced, permanent residency applications delayed, and study visas affected by online study constraints.

"We are concerned my Mother in law's Visit visa might expired then we will have to re-apply. she is alone overseas, we are finding it hard".

– Participant

Many community members' have cancelled or delayed travel plans to see family overseas, even in instances where family is sick, frail or needing support.

"We are closely monitoring as we are looking forward to travel restrictions being lifted so we can bring mom here who is overseas, she is sick and living alone".

– Participant

International students were particularly affected by financial stress, impacting housing, food and mental health.

Hamid, international student living in Fawkner

Hamid lives in a rental property in Fawkner with four friends, who are also international students.

Already struggling financially before COVID-19, Hamid had to support the household for a couple of months after all four housemates lost their jobs. Hamid has also seen their work shifts reduced by more than 60%.

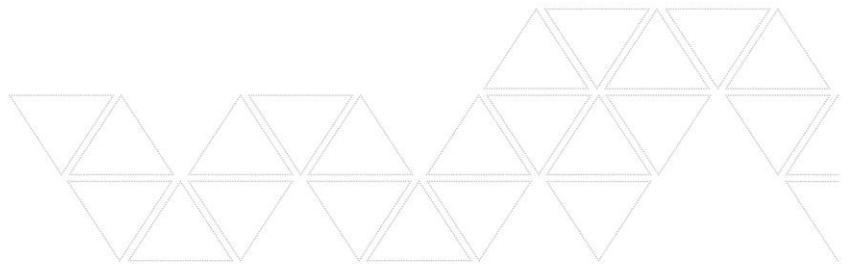
"In the first few weeks of COVID-19, sometimes we only ate once or twice a day to save for fees and rent."

They have seen no relief in paying for rent or university fees, and have found it difficult to access the supports available for international students. They reported that the application process is hard, and requires a lot of irrelevant information and documents, some that are very difficult to obtain at the moment.

They shared that some of their friends are now sleeping in cars because they can't afford the rent. Hamid said they have accessed food boxes from community groups for friends, who are shy and hesitant to access support themselves.

Hamid expressed frustration and disappointment about the lack of support from Australian governments, citing the contribution of international students to the Australian economy and culture. Despite the financial difficulties, Hamid says: *"We need moral support more than financial."*

They said the lack of support left them feeling like they weren't valued by the Australian government, and that they did not belong in the community.



Online survey

In June/July 2020, Merri Health worked with DHHS and partners to establish three test sites in Fawkner, Glenroy and Brunswick. After test sites were established, engagement from the community was initially very high. However, this engagement dropped off and there were reports that particular communities were not turning out to get tested. In order to ascertain the reasons why local people were not getting tested, the community wellbeing team at Merri Health conducted a survey.

The COVID-19 test survey was conducted between 7-10 July, 2020. The survey consisted of just four questions. The team received total of 225 responses.

Questions included:

- Have you been tested for COVID-19 within the past two weeks?
- Why have you not been tested for COVID-19 in the past two weeks?
- Do you have any feedback about the testing?
- Which suburb are you from?

Summary of survey results

- Total responses: 225
- Out of 225 respondents, 70% (n. 159) had been tested for COVID-19 recently
- Out of 225 respondents, 86% (n. 193) reported they were from the Moreland area
- The three most common reasons for not getting tested were:
 - They did not have any symptoms (57%, n. 31)
 - They were not in a lock down suburb (33%, n. 18)
 - They were worried about being around large crowds at testing sites (22%, n. 12)

105 people provided feedback about their experience around COVID-19 testing and accessibility issues. The feedback reflected varying experiences – both positive and challenging.

Some of the feedback received included:

- home testing kits were not collected, or not collected in a timely manner
- people waited a long time to receive results
- lack of information at test sites and during wait time in queues
- information about testing sites and the details of the restrictions was coming from unofficial sources - social media, local community groups, etc. and not as much from official channels
- the doorknockers weren't fully aware of the rapidly changing situation
- delay in test results was disruptive, community members couldn't return to work or send kids to childcare until they received test results

- privacy issues – suggestion for screens for those who did not want to be tested in front of a crowd
- self-test was challenging to administer
- unclear messaging around whether people needed to isolate after test if they are asymptomatic
- insufficient information around where kids can get tested and/or how they're being tested

"We had self-testing kits. Even though I am a nurse it was hard to properly test my family with the nasal swab."

– Participant

"Our results took 8-9 days, this is too long, results are now almost irrelevant. Also there was no clear information about where testing sites were, or if walk up or drive through were more time efficient"

– Participant

"I thought the drive-through testing was pretty well organised and run. The doctor who took my swabs was lovely. The only downside was that it took over a week to get my results. I was vaguely "symptomatic" when I got the test done, so I was asked to self-isolate until I got the results"

– Participant

"Muslim women had to lift their niqab in the drive through and I feel they would have preferred doing the test in a private room as I insisted to have mine done. Thanks to all personal who arranged that for me. Don't forget to advise you have that room ready to go"

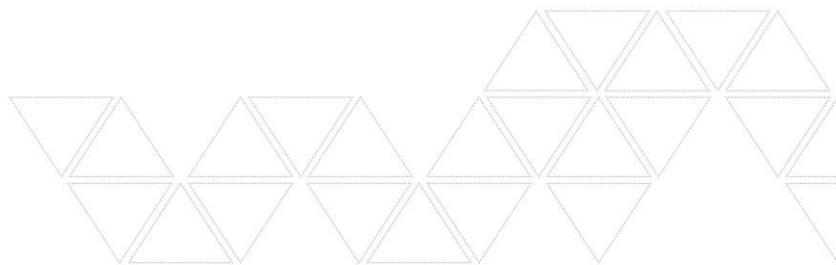
– Participant

"It was all a smooth process. Given the circumstances"

– Participant



Fawkner



Count Me In Too

Engaging culturally diverse women and girls in sport across Melbourne's north

Introduction

This case study outlines project activities and evaluation of the Count Me In Too project from December 2018 to June 2020.

Count Me In Too (CMIT) was delivered in partnership with Moreland City Council through the Victorian Governments' *Free From Violence Local Government* grants program. The Department of Social Services and Tennis Victoria also contributed funding to support the delivery of the project until June 2020.

The project aimed to increase participation by girls and women from diverse backgrounds in mainstream sporting clubs, as a means to create local leadership and embed gender equity and inclusive practice in sport settings across northern Moreland.

This project is aligned with Merri Health's Integrated Health Promotion 2017-2021 priorities of prevention of violence against women and increasing social inclusion.

Project overview

CMIT followed the pilot project Count Me In, which aimed to enhance children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds participation in sport. The project found that girls and women faced additional barriers to sports participation. For more information, see the 2018-19 IHP Narrative Report.

CMIT aimed to:

- increase participation and engagement of women and girls from diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream sports.
- empower women and girls from diverse backgrounds to participate in CMIT planning and delivery
- support and enhance women and girls representation and leadership within sports clubs
- support clubs to strengthen their cultural competency and inclusive practice

Quick Facts

Years implemented

December 2018 - June 2020

Reach

- 621 direct participants
- 1,076 engagements with direct participants above
- 58 sports program and events
- 65 sports club volunteers, leadership and training opportunities were availed by Count Me in Too participants
- Extensive stakeholder partnerships including 10 sports clubs and 3 sports associations

Key partners

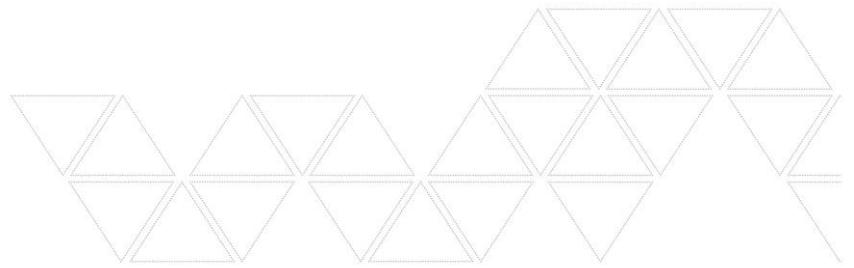
- Moreland City Council
- Fawkner Tennis Club
- Moomba Park Tennis Club
- Fawkner Bowls Club
- Glenroy Bowls Club
- Haigh Fawkner Cricket Club
- Glenroy Neighbourhood House and Learning centre
- Cricket Victoria
- Netball Victoria
- Tennis Victoria

Key achievements

- 621 culturally diverse women and girls participated in sport
- girls and women took up 65 leadership, personal development and volunteer opportunities
- 10 clubs built their capacity in cultural inclusion and delivered culturally inclusive sports programs for women and girls
- Establishment of Fawkner Lawn Bowls Social Women's Sub-committee

Challenges

- Limited resources to continue this work beyond funding period
- Initiative suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19
- Future work has been put on hold due to COVID-19



Project activities

Key activities delivered from December 2018 – June 2020 included:

- sports programs
- events
- sports facilitation trainings
- professional development
- volunteer engagement
- media and communications
- referral and service access
- resource development/sharing
- monitoring and evaluation

Sports programs

Fifty eight sports programs and events were designed and delivered in partnership with ten local sports clubs, schools and community organisations.

Sports included:

- lawn bowls
- cricket
- tennis
- golf
- netball
- football
- basketball
- badminton
- boxing
- yoga

Over the duration of the project, 621 women and girls participated in culturally inclusive sports programs. Participants represented 28 diverse cultural backgrounds, were aged 3-75 years, and came from 33 suburbs across Melbourne.

Events

Many events were designed and delivered in partnership with sports clubs and stakeholders, including:

- Fawkner Lawn Bowls Ministerial visit
- Tennis Victoria's Kids on Court Program
- Tennis Victoria's Government House visit (postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions)
- 2 Tennis holiday programs (one at Moomba Park Tennis Club in partnership with Melbourne City Mission holiday program and the other at Fawkner Tennis Club in partnership with Goodlife Education Program)
- Netball clinics at Darul Ulum College of Victoria
- Supported the delivery of YMCA programs at private schools including Darul Ulum College of Victoria in Fawkner and Australian International Academy in Coburg North

Sports facilitation training

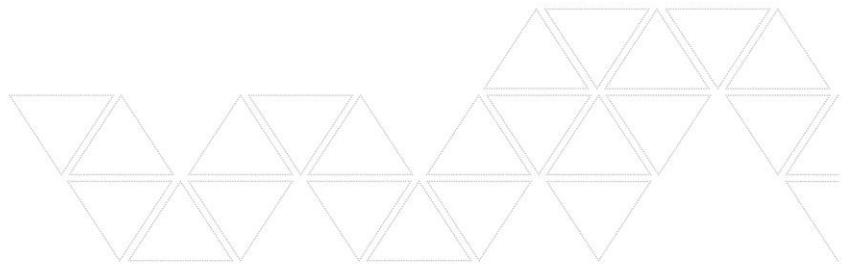
Sixteen women and girls completed Tennis Victoria's Open Court Sessions Host training, to learn the skills needed to facilitate community tennis sessions.



Professional development

Women and girls participated in many professional development opportunities through CMIT, including:

- 11 in the CMIT promotional video
- 16 in a Tennis Facilitation Training run by Tennis Victoria
- 3 girls completed a leadership training provided by the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Islamic Council of Victoria
- One woman took up a PVAW Bystander action training through Women's Health In the North.
- Four women spoke publicly at the Ministers visit to Fawkner Bowls Club
- 2 women provided interviews for an SBS news article and video
- 2 women provided interviews for Tennis Victoria's case study video
- 8 women took part in the consultation meeting at Fawkner Tennis Club
- 5 women formed a subcommittee for Fawkner Bowls Club
- Merri Health's bicultural Community Engagement Officer contributed as a panel speaker at two key stakeholders events - Tennis Victoria's Tennis Associations meeting and Moreland City Council's Female Retention Workshop sharing expertise and learnings with more than 60 sports club committee representatives in attendance
- One woman participated in family violence upstander training provided by Women's Health In the North



Volunteer engagement

Merri Health worked with sports clubs and participants to facilitate volunteer opportunities for nine volunteers registered with the CMIT program. The following volunteer opportunities were provided:

- Haigh Fawkner Cricket Club – 2 women facilitated 2 cricket training sessions
- 1 woman coordinated a BBQ at Fawkner Tennis Club
- 1 woman participated in the CMIT Steering Group
- 5 women formed Fawkner Lawn Bowls Social Women's subcommittee

Media and communications

The following media and communication pieces were shared with stakeholders:

- Merri Health media release 9 August 2020 [Women's Badminton in Fawkner](#)
- Moreland Council media release 25 October 2019 [Women bowling their way to wellbeing and inclusion](#)
- Merri Health media release 17 Jan 2020 [Fawkner Women take on Tennis](#)
- Merri Health media release 13 March 2020 [Women and Girls Say Count Me In Too](#)
- SBS news [article](#) and video
- [Merri News](#) volume 23 December 2019
- Merri Health Research and Innovation [Newsletter](#) volume 15 January 2020
- Count Me In Project Facebook [page](#)



Gabrielle Williams, Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, plays lawn bowls with CMIT participants in Fawkner

Referral and service access support

Merri Health's bicultural Community Engagement Officer provided over 20 referrals to support community members to access the following services:

- Merri Health clinical services
- Family Violence services

- Mental Health Services
- Other health services
- Moreland City Council services
- Education services
- Employment services
- Partner projects

Resource development

- Merri Health CMIT promotional [video](#)
- Merri Health/Haigh Fawkner Cricket Club case study
- Tennis Victoria case study [video](#)
- Tennis Victoria case study report
- Visual planning tool; engaging culturally diverse women and girls in sport
- Sports Club Volunteer Registration form

Evaluation

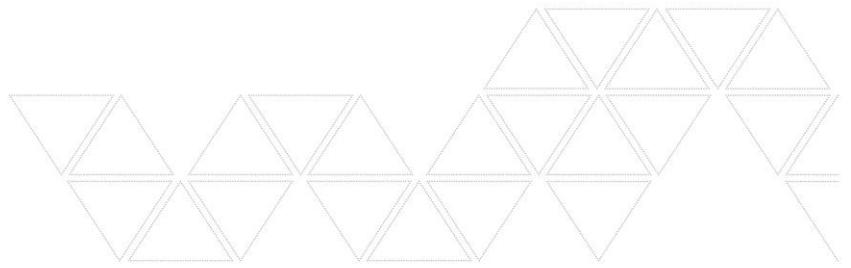
Process and impact evaluation was conducted throughout the project, including:

- Attendance records for each sports session
- 78 women and girls registered as members of the following sporting clubs; Northern Badminton Club, Haig Fawkner Cricket, Fawkner Tennis Club, Moomba Park Tennis Club, Northern Saints Football Club, Islamic Society of Victoria Basketball Program
- 3 participant focus groups were held
- 83 participants responded to the consultation survey which informed the design and delivery of CMIT
- Project team meetings were held monthly
- Steering Group meetings were held bi-monthly
- A project logbook was kept

Aim 1: women and girls are involved in the design of culturally inclusive programs

Participants were engaged in formal and informal consultation to determine their interest in a) trying different sports, b) participation in volunteer opportunities at sports clubs and c) attending sports facilitation trainings. Consultation informed the design and delivery of programs, including; the social nature of programs, timings, duration and cost.

Consultations also highlighted the need for women coaches and women-only sports sessions where children were welcome. Cultural considerations such as making available a suitable space for prayer were also incorporated.



"I loved the Badminton session. I only travelled this far because it was ladies only"

Badminton participant

In addition to the initial project consultation in February 2019 which engaged 95 women and girls through focus groups and surveys, 7 women also participated in a focus group with Fawkner Lawn Bowls in March 2020 to determine the ongoing design and delivery of the women only bowls program. A further 19 women completed feedback surveys following the delivery of a four week social tennis program and approximately 10 women and girls participated in a feedback meeting with Fawkner Tennis Club, Tennis Victoria and Merri Health to design the ongoing delivery of the women's Sunday social tennis program. Feedback received reflected the satisfaction of the program model, particularly that it was no cost, had women coaches, and that the female only indoor environment encouraged women and girls to attend and try out the sport).

"I haven't played in a long time but I love playing now and I feel I am doing something for myself"

Fawkner Tennis Club participant

"I love the club, they are so respectful towards us, especially the club president"

Parent of Northern Saints Football club member

club leaders to support CMIT programs. Activities included:

- two workshops for AFL clubs on 'Girls Rule Aussie Rules' including a cultural inclusion lens
- Glenroy Football Club participating in the Centre for Multicultural Youth's 'Game Plan' leadership development program
- liaising with State Sporting Associations regarding opportunities to support CMIT. The team successfully engaged Cricket Victoria, Tennis Victoria and Netball Victoria to support program delivery
- supporting clubs to access the following grants to support female participation:
 - Moreland Council's Female Participation Grant received by Fawkner Netball Club
 - VicHealth's This Girl Can Grant received by Fawkner Bowling Club
 - Change Our Game grant received by Haigh Fawkner Cricket Club.
- delivering the Female Sport Retention Workshop in December 2019, attended by more than 60 club committee representatives. The CMI2 Community Engagement Officer was a panel speaker and provided club organisers with information around cultural inclusion.

Aim 2: more than 50 women and girls in Fawkner and Glenroy are engaged in local sport clubs

- 238 participants were from Fawkner, Glenroy and Hadfield
- All 10 clubs were situated in Fawkner and Glenroy

Aim 3: build the capacity of sports clubs to design and deliver inclusive programs for women and girls

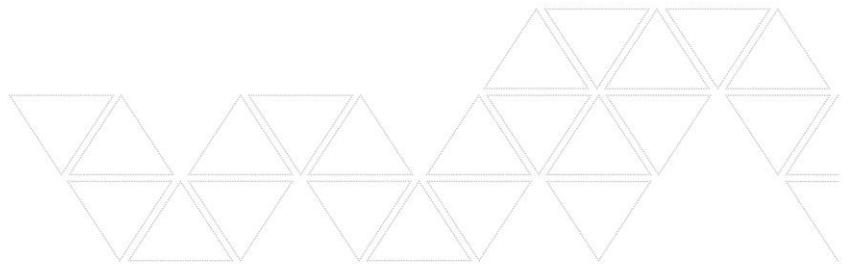
Moreland Council's Female Sport Participation Officer worked in partnership with Merri Health's bi-cultural Community Engagement Officer to facilitate community connections, club readiness and engage

Unexpected outcomes

While the key objective of Count Me In Too was to increase women and girls participation and representation in mainstream sporting clubs, it became evident that sports programs, volunteer and professional development opportunities delivered through the project enhanced women and girls feelings of social connection and mental wellbeing.

"I can feel I have increased confidence in myself after attending regular sessions"

CMIT participant



"I felt depressed and lonely after moving here but after attending these sessions, I feel more happy and healthy now"

CMIT participant

Women also shared how participating in sport enabled role modelling within the family unit.

"I love bringing my children with me because they can see me role modelling"

CMIT participant

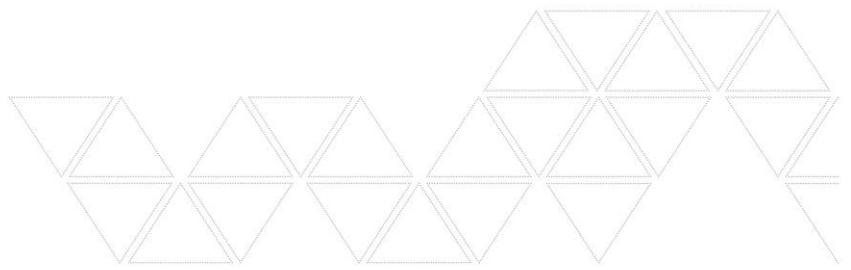
This project also provided an opportunity to provide referral and support pathways for women experiencing family violence.

Key supporters

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of the following partners to the success of this project:

- Moreland City Council
- The Count Me In Too Steering Committee
- Tennis Victoria
- Fawkner Tennis Club
- Merlynston Tennis Club
- Moomba Park Tennis Club
- Cricket Victoria
- Haigh Fawkner Cricket Club
- Northern Badminton Club
- Fawkner Bowls Club
- Glenroy Bowls Club
- Netball Victoria
- Fawkner Netball Club
- Northern Golf Club
- Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- Fawkner Neighbourhood House
- Melbourne City Mission
- Darul Ulum College of Victoria
- Australian International Academy

This project was also funded by grants from the Department of Social Services, Tennis Victoria and through Integrated Health Promotion funding from the Department of Health and Human Services.



Ready Set Prep

Changing our approach to support school readiness and child development in Fawkner

Introduction

Ready, Set, Prep! (RSP) is a place-based, collective impact initiative aimed at improving school readiness in Fawkner. Funded by the William Buckland Foundation philanthropic trust, this initiative aligns with Merri Health's 2017-2021 Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan; most notably, to increase educational preparedness and attainment in Fawkner.

This case study details work occurring in the 2019-2020 financial year.

Project overview

In 2015, results from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicated that over one-third (37%) of children in Fawkner were starting school developmentally vulnerable in one or more areas. The RSP partnership was therefore established to improve school readiness in Fawkner. Since 2017, the initiative has developed innovative and evolving local solutions to support all children to have the best start in life, to primary school and beyond. The aims are to:

- Improve school readiness for Fawkner children and their families.
- Promote access to community services for children aged 0-6 years that can support child health and development.
- Increase family engagement in Fawkner kindergartens and primary schools.
- Extend and/ or improve transition processes and communication between settings.



Quick Facts

Years implemented

January 2017 – ongoing

(this case study reports on 2019-20 financial year)

What is it?

- Ready, Set, Prep! is a whole-community approach to supporting school readiness and health outcomes for children and families in Fawkner.

Reach

- Creation of video series involved 200+ community members and stakeholders.
- Video series reached more than 14,000 families across Merri Health social media platforms in six weeks.

Key partners

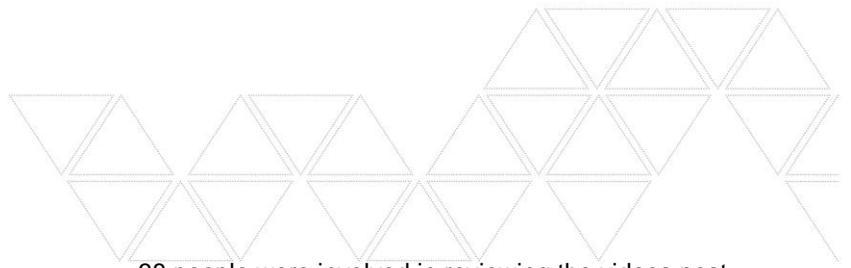
- 5 primary schools in Fawkner
- 5 kindergartens & childcare centres in Fawkner
- Moreland City Council – including Maternal and Child Health and Moreland City Libraries
- Other Merri Health Teams

Key achievements

- Sharing key messages via the video series
- Launching new Transition Network co-designed by partnership
- Hosting annual morning tea for families
- Supporting complementary activities in the community

Challenges

- Adapting to support community during COVID-19
- Designing new vision for RSP beyond current funding
- Maintaining momentum over the duration of the initiative



Project activities

In 2019-2020, RSP continued with its new strategic direction as determined by stakeholder and community consultation in early 2019. This involves a capacity building model, which will promote the sustainability of the initiative and ongoing distribution of its key messages. The scope of the initiative has also broadened, now focusing on families earlier in the lifespan; ages 0-6 years rather than just the kindergarten to school transition period.

Transition Network

As the focus of the initiative broadened, there was a chance to develop relationships with more partners. Since the start of the initiative in 2017, the RSP partnership has increased from six partners to over 20 partners, with Merri Health as the backbone organisation (see stakeholder mapping in Attachment A). With the addition of new partners, a new Transition Network model was co-designed by the RSP partnership to better meet the needs of the partners. The aims of the RSP Transition Network are to strengthen links and relationships between schools, early years and community services and to provide a platform for collective professional development.

The first meeting with the new model of the Transition Network was held in Term 1, 2020. A total of 19 representatives from early years health and education services attended, including the Department of Education and Training, Moreland City Council, supported playgroups, kindergartens, foundation teachers and school leadership. The Term 2 meeting was held virtually in response to COVID-19 and social distancing. At this meeting, the 30 'attendees' heard from a guest speaker, and also participated in interactive polls to check on staff wellbeing, student attendance rates, engagement strategies and support needs.

RSP resources: videos and posters

Following the extensive consultation in early 2019, the key messages and themes were identified for the video series. Once the scripts and storyboards were developed, local social enterprise Youthworx were contracted to film the production. Over two days, the six videos were filmed, featuring 73 people in 12 locations in Fawkner. This aligned with the goal of filming local Fawkner 'places and faces', while still having key messages that are relevant and appropriate beyond the suburb of Fawkner. A further

38 people were involved in reviewing the videos post-production; bringing the total to over 220 stakeholders and community members involved with the co-design of the videos.

The [suite of six videos](#) will support children and families to have the best start in life, to primary school and beyond. Incorporating both stakeholder and community knowledge and perspectives, the videos share key messages about early health, wellbeing and learning opportunities. They aim to de-mystify the Victorian early years health and education systems; which can be a confusing and frustrating process for newly-arrived families, families with English as a second language and first time parents and carers.

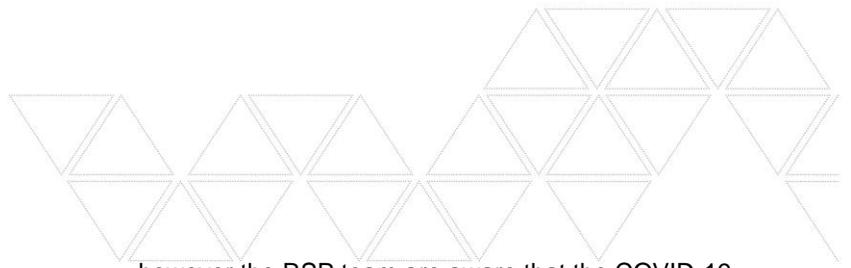
The videos are supported by an illustrated ['journey to primary school'](#) poster that highlights key places and spaces that support early childhood development and learning prior to starting school. This poster has been translated into six languages which families can download from the Merri Health website.



'Journey to primary school' poster released with videos

The videos and illustration were launched virtually due to COVID-19, with one video launched per week over May and June 2020. Links were shared on a range of platforms, including:

- Merri Health social media (Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter)
- Emails to RSP partners, community members and stakeholders who participated in the video consultation or filming



- Viber and WhatsApp community groups by Community Engagement Officer in team.

In addition, the links were also picked up by other organisations and shared:

- ARACY eBulletin
- By Five WSM Early Years project e-newsletter
- DHHS Health Prevention blog
- Melbourne City Mission EarlyLinks "What's On For Fawkner Families" e-newsletter
- Fawkner Primary School website
- Fawkner Kindergarten Facebook page
- Fawkner Service Provider Network email list
- Glenroy Service Provider Network email list
- MCC Supported Playgroups Facebook page (closed page)

The whole series and illustration is available on the [Ready, Set, Prep! page of the Merri Health website.](#)

Interactions	#
Views- YouTube	2,039
Engagements and impressions- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn	1,518
Shares- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn	52
Poster downloads on Mailchimp	26
Total reach across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn	14,053

Collective numbers as of June 30, 2020

Kindergarten support

Kindergartens have started to play a larger role in RSP over the last year. To support their involvement, kindergarten programs were offered an opportunity to apply for small grants of up to \$3,000 to assist school readiness in their settings. This small grant supports the wider Victorian school readiness funding from the Department of Education. Settings were provided with an evidence-based suggestion 'menu', but were also able to be innovative and tailor to the needs seen in their settings. Funding guidelines were put in place to ensure that multiple cohorts of children would benefit, with a focus on sustainability. Kindergartens were therefore required to briefly document their plans, based on lessons learnt from the school grant provision in the first year of the initiative. Only one completed grant application was received by the RSP team. This was despite following up with services,

however the RSP team are aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has altered current priorities for services.

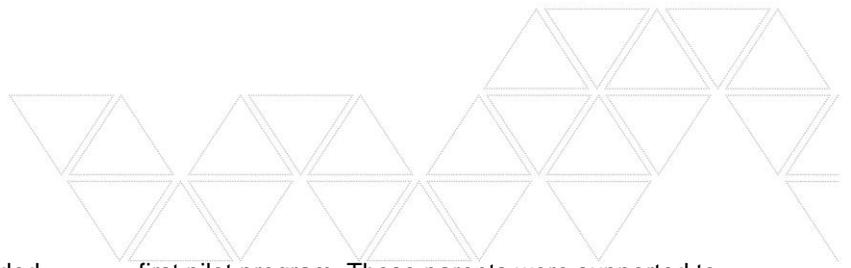
Family Information Session

An information session was held for families to further assist with the dissemination of messages and to familiarise families with local services. It was set up in the style of an 'expo', with stakeholders holding 'stalls' that families could walk between and engage with. The event was targeted at parents of 3 year old children, and was set-up to be informal and in the familiar setting of the Major Road Community House in Fawkner. Services represented at the event included: CarerLinks North, Community Wellbeing Team at Merri Health, Department of Education and Training, HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) Moreland, leadership from local schools and kindergartens, MerriKids NDIS, Moreland City Libraries, playgroups, and Pre-School Field Officers.



'Expo-style' set-up for family information session, including activities for children

100% of the attending stakeholders rated the event as valuable; they had an opportunity to make connections with other stakeholders. Their main suggestion was that the event should be held earlier in the year, to align with the opening of school and kindergarten enrolments. This will be taken into account in future years (post- COVID-19). Feedback acknowledged that they hope this event grows in the future, and that it is 'hard with new things'.



This is reflected in the fact that nine families attended the event, despite promotion and sharing of the event details. Of the families that attended, 8/9 or 89% of people rated it with a 'happy face' (3 point scale). The promotion of the event in the future is something that will be further explored, with discussions around supporting and encouraging community 'champions' to bring along other community members.

Professional Learning Day

Throughout the initiative, the RSP partners have identified areas in which to build capacity. Schools in particular have focused on being ready for families and having welcoming spaces when reviewing and improving their transition programs. In July 2019, a professional learning day was organised, with a total of 23 RSP partners attending. The first part of the day was a session on "family engagement", delivered by Parent Engagement for Learning and Wellbeing consultant, Julie Di Noto. The second session was "cross cultural responsiveness", which was delivered by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Participants were provided with an evaluation survey at the end of each of the two sessions on the day, to assess their pre- and post-session knowledge. On average, the family engagement session saw a 43% increase in knowledge, while the cross cultural responsiveness session saw a 27% increase in knowledge of the topic.

Following this, further work was planned to support schools to review their plans and policies, and to embed family engagement. However, these individual consultant sessions have been indefinitely postponed due to COVID-19. Similarly, another professional learning day was planned for 2020 but is currently on hold.

LEAP

Another element of capacity building has involved partnering with other services to develop and deliver programs in the community that are complementary to RSP. In 2019, HIPPY Moreland received funding from the Commonwealth Department of Social Services to run LEAP (Learn, Engage, Appreciate, Play). The RSP team provided evaluation support for this project, and are planning to facilitate the second pilot program of LEAP later in 2020.

The five week LEAP Group was designed for parents with 2-3 year olds, who have children with additional needs. This included speech delay, developmental delay, Autism or a health condition that impacts on a child's development. 11 parents participated in this

first pilot program. These parents were supported to access occasional care for their children during the sessions, in order to provide an opportunity to fully engage with the content and speak openly with facilitators, guest speakers and other participants.

HIPPY Home Tutors facilitated the sessions, which were interactive and allowed parents to share their experiences. An occupational therapist and a speech therapist were invited as guest speakers to share their expertise. The last session included guests from MerriKids NDIS and CarersLink North. Topics covered included:

- Building language in everyday routines
- Setting routines
- Strategies for positive behaviour
- Parent self-care
- Screen time – tips for balance

What did you enjoy most about LEAP?

"Meeting different people. I had a lovely time and I loved to be part of every session."

Parent A

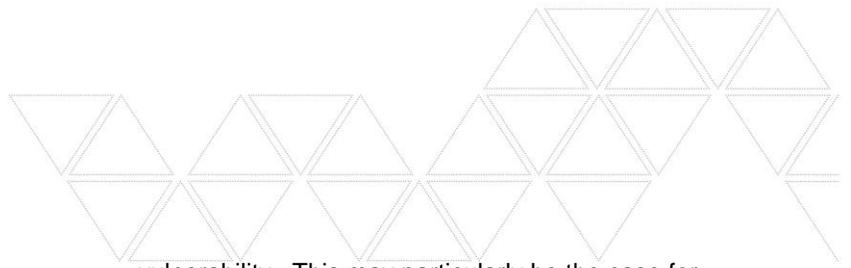
"Information provided accordingly to individual person's problems and bringing changes in daily routines."

Parent B

"Friendly environment and gives confident to every speaker even though I have not much competent in speaking English but they gave me opportunity too. I appreciate this."

Parent C

Overall, evaluation showed positive outcomes in all areas. There was a relatively high attendance rate, averaging 86% across the five week program. The parents participated in a pre- and post-survey (91% response rate). The post-survey results showed positive changes across a range of areas, highlighting that LEAP met its aims of connecting participants with other parents and carers in the Fawkner community, broadening their social networks and increasing their



knowledge about services and resources that can support them in their parenting. In particular:

- a higher number of participants felt more confidence talking to their friends about their child's development needs or disability
- a higher number of participants felt more confident to access services and information to support them and their child
- a high level of satisfaction with the group, with all survey respondents indicating they would recommend it to others
- most of the participants found the session on 'strategies for positive behaviour' was the most useful of the topics covered

Overwhelmingly, participants reported they have formed new friendships through the program (90% of respondents). At the conclusion of the program, the participants set up a WhatsApp group to keep in touch with one another, and to share updates about any community events.

The second pilot program will be refined based on recommendations from the first pilot, as well as restrictions related to COVID-19 (delayed face to face program delivery due to COVID-19).



Activities at session during the first pilot program of LEAP

Sooner or Later

Sooner or Later was a research project that investigated the extent and implications of early school starting age in Fawkner. This was based on local anecdotal feedback from RSP partners that children in Fawkner start school at a younger age, or first year eligible (where there is a choice for children born between January and April). It was hypothesised that early starting age may contribute to the AEDC statistics showing higher levels of

vulnerability. This may particularly be the case for children with additional needs, who may benefit from a bonus year of kindergarten. This work was conducted in partnership with CarerLinks North, who contributed funding and staffing for the research.

A total of 36 local community members participated in eight focus groups, providing their perspectives on school starting age. In addition, RSP partners were informally consulted. Four local primary schools also provided their enrolment data for data analysis, combined with data received via a formal data request process from the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

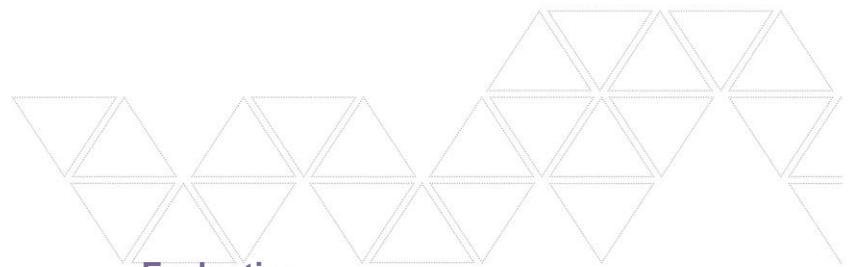
The findings showed that foundation students in Fawkner do start school at an earlier average age than the Victorian and Moreland average, and that school starting age is associated with Language Other Than English (LOTE) background, and additional needs. There was also found to be many influential factors around school starting age. This acknowledged:

- Parents' decisions about school readiness may be influenced by their country of origin, with different social norms and systems to Australia
- Parents desire additional support in understanding school readiness and school systems in the Victorian context
- Kindergartens and maternal and child health services are important sources of understanding about school readiness
- Concern about child development prompts some families to consider an earlier, rather than later, start to school
- Many carers of children with additional needs do not access carer support services

From this research, a total of 20+ recommendations were made. These were across five areas:

- Carer services (specific to CarerLinks North)
- Community programs and activities
- Service development
- Utilise community leaders to influence social norms
- Further research and needs assessment

The implementation of these recommendations will continue to be explored in 2020. There will also be further investigation into how starting age links to the AEDC results, with more data requests in progress. A summary of the current findings from Sooner or Later can be found in Attachment B.



Evaluation

Response to COVID-19 pandemic

It has been mentioned throughout this case study that COVID-19 altered the work of RSP partners in 2020. Many settings such as schools, playgroups and libraries were closed and adapted to off-site learning and digital content delivery. For other settings, such as kindergartens and child care, services remained open but had lower attendance; at the Term 2 virtual Transition Network, 64% of respondents indicated that service attendance was at only 0-5% of normal capacity.

Currently, some elements of RSP have been postponed, with the hope that they can be delivered in the second half of 2020 as restrictions ease. This includes the family information session and second LEAP pilot program. For other elements, the RSP partnership's commitment to work alongside the community through this time has seen them adopt innovative approaches, including:

- Delivering a virtual Ready, Set, Prep! Transition Network for Term 2. This included a guest speaker as well as interactive polls to check on staff wellbeing, student attendance rates, engagement strategies and support needs.
- Sharing hand-picked, relevant information with families through social media platforms, to provide culturally inclusive COVID-19 related information, and activities to support health, wellbeing and learning at home.
- Undertaking community consultations to gather insight into some of the key issues facing children, parents, carers and stakeholders in Fawkner, to inform a COVID-19 recovery phase and refer individual families to relevant services.
- Commencing a virtual launch of the video series and associated illustration. Now more than ever, the partnership wants to share these resources far and wide to support all children to have the best start in life, to primary school and beyond.



Video #1: Everywhere, every day, everyone

As the RSP team has worked with schools to improve transition processes, they have also supported their evaluation. In 2019, data collection tools were piloted electronically. This allows for schools to collect, access, and review their own results via a data dashboard. In addition, schools were able to use this data dashboard to compare to results from previous years, as well as the average of other partner schools. It is hoped that this will provide a more efficient means of data collection, and allow for quicker comparison of results.

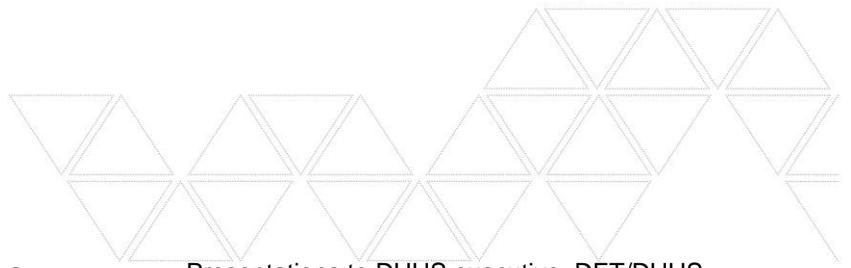
Since RSP began in 2017, all schools have expanded their transition programs. This includes increasing the numbers of sessions offered, as well as covering more topics. Schools have also worked on developing relationships with their 'feeder' kindergartens to support a more efficient transition to school.

Transition session processes	2017	2019
% schools offering ≥7 transition sessions	40%	100%
Number of topics covered by all schools at transition	2	9
Number of different topics covered by all schools	4	12
% schools having relationship with 'feeder' kindergarten	67%	100%

Schools continue to refine their transition processes each year based on feedback. Combined with changes to overall school processes and policies, this has resulted in benefits for families.

Perceptions of families*	2018	2019
% families feeling welcomed at schools	84%	100% (↑19%)
% families satisfied with transition program	81%	100% (↑23%)
% families confident about their child's readiness to start school	63%	100% (↑59%)

*3 point scale



Foundation teachers were also asked to complete a customised 'mini-AEDC' tool, to quickly track the percentage of children starting school vulnerable on each of the five domains. This acts as an indicator in-between the years of official AEDC data collection (collected every three years).

Mini-AEDC Domain (% vulnerable)	2017	2018	2019
Physical	9	6	4
Social	20	10	9
Emotional	17	12	18↑
Language	38	22	16
Communication	20	21↑	21

From the mini-AEDC, it can be seen that there have been improvements, with less children starting vulnerable on all but one domain in 2019, compared to 2018. This can be compared with the official data from the AEDC, where there has also been a significant improvement in the proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in one or more domain.

AEDC Domain (% vulnerable)	2015	2018
Physical	16	7
Social	14	13
Emotional	12	6
Language	12	12
Communication	19	13

Source: [AEDC Data Explorer](#)

The creation of data dashboards and their usability is still yet to be evaluated; Term 1 is busy for schools with new foundation students settling in, and Term 2 saw new busy-ness as schools adapted to off-site learning due to COVID-19. Therefore this meta-evaluation has been delayed. However, the RSP team have anecdotally found that data collection was more prompt, with less follow-up required to schools.

This data has been very positive and therefore the RSP partnership has been very keen to share their story. This includes:

- Presentations to DHHS executive, DET/DHHS Hume Moreland Compact meeting, Moreland City Council
- Submitted written stories to DHHS Health Prevention Blog, Merri Health website, case study for AEDC website
- Meetings with other project teams with similar aims, such as By Five (Vic) and the Hive (NSW) (this is reciprocal with the RSP team learning too)
- Award nominations, including Moreland Awards and Victorian Early Years Awards

Future activities

As has been highlighted, RSP is thinking about activities in both its current funding cycle (until December 2020), and also the next phase for northern Moreland. This phase will continue working in Fawkner, but will also expand to include Glenroy and Hadfield, where there have not been improvements in AEDC results.

The RSP team will be working with Clear Horizon Consulting to plan a workshop for later in the year. This workshop will invite stakeholders and community members to co-design the next phase of the initiative. Prior to this, the RSP team will be undertaking stakeholder and community consultations to help understand the system. This will also assist with relationship development, and contribute to the Moreland City Council Early Years and Youth Plan. Polls undertaken at the Transition Network showed that 100% of respondents were happy with Merri Health continuing as the backbone for RSP, and were in support of the expanded and scaled-up vision of RSP allowing room for co-design (see Attachment C for proposed skeleton of this vision). The RSP partnership will therefore also continue to seek funding and undertake advocacy for this expansion.

In addition, the RSP team will continue to refine its processes. This relates to:

- Access to virtual meetings (either as only method or combined with face-to-face delivery). This is because there was higher attendance when the Transition Network was held virtually during COVID-19, and would also allow for a wider range of guest speakers to participate.
- Sharing messages on social media has played a greater role in the initiative, and may be a suitable way to provide updates going forward.
- The voices of children and parents/carers will become more central, with parent representatives



being sought for representation on the Steering Committee, system stories to be collected and a plan for consultation with children.

Key supporters

The overall funding for the initiative is from the William Buckland Foundation and Victorian Department of Health and Human Services via their Integrated Health Promotion funding.

RSP has also worked with other organisations on complementary activities of the initiative. This has helped build partnerships and develop capacity. Funding for these projects has come from:

- Commonwealth Department of Social Services (LEAP)
- CarerLinks North (Sooner or Later)
- Public Libraries Victoria Network (Word Play)
- State Library Victoria (Word Play)

The RSP partnership is comprised of:

Primary schools

- Darul Ulum College of Victoria
- Fawkner Primary School
- Moomba Park Primary School
- St Mark's Catholic Parish Primary School
- St Matthew's Catholic Primary School

Kindergarten and childcare centres

- Joybelle Child Care Centre and Kindergarten
- Fawkner Kindergarten
- Matrix Early Learning Centre
- Lorne Street Kindergarten
- Moomba Park Kindergarten

Playgroups

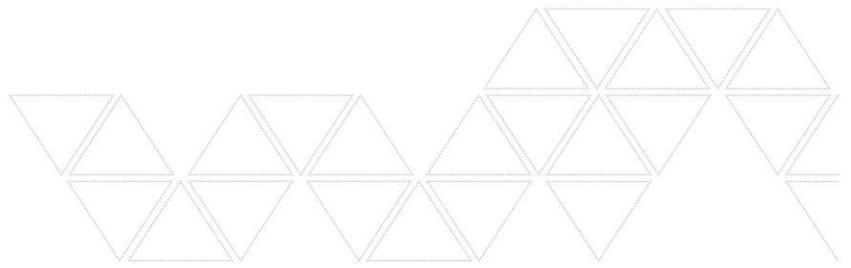
- Fawkner Outdoor Playgroup
- Moreland City Council Supported Playgroup
- Ummah Jameelah Islamic Rostered Playgroup

Other service providers and networks

- Department of Education and Training (DET)
- Fawkner Service Provider Network
- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) Moreland
- Maternal and Child Health- Moreland City Council
- Melbourne City Mission
- Moreland City Council
- Moreland City Libraries

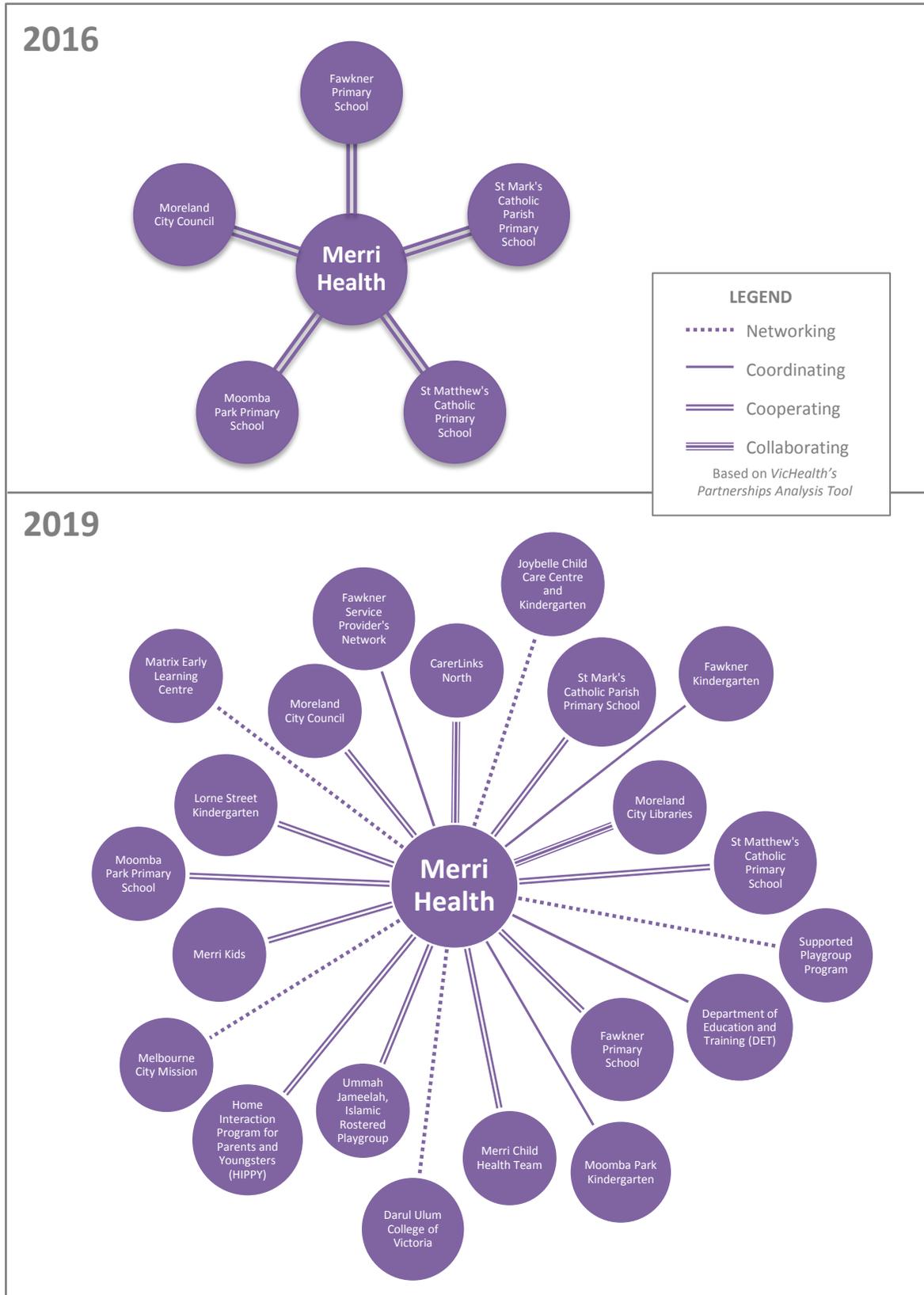
Merri Health teams

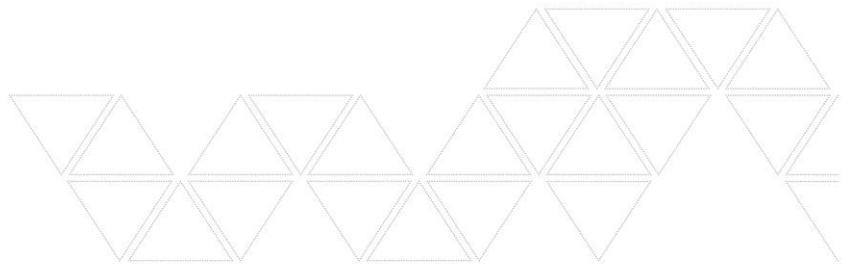
- CarerLinks North
- Merri Child Health Team
- MerriKids NDIS



Attachment A: Stakeholder mapping 2016 compared to 2019

The RSP partnership has grown from six partners in 2016 to 20+ partners in 2019. Merri Health has remained as the backbone organisation, with the stakeholders placed closer to the centre having a stronger relationship.





Attachment B: Sooner or Later research summary

The following two pages provide an overview of the Sooner or Later research process and its findings. There were 20+ recommendations developed from this work.

Sooner or Later: School starting age in Fawkner

A research project: Extent and implications of early school starting age in Fawkner

Objectives:

- 1 Determine the extent of early starting age in Fawkner
- 2 Recognise community and stakeholder perspectives on school starting age

Key findings

- Students start school at a statistically significant earlier age in Fawkner than the Victorian and Moreland average
- Early school starting age is associated with:
 - Language Other Than English (LOTE) background
 - Additional needs

Merri Health
Health care that moves with you.

Ready, Set, Prep!
Supporting your child to be school ready.

Data analysis **Consultation**

Enrolment data
4/5 schools
(n=182)

Informal service
consultation
(n=20+)

1 x fathers
(n=4)

4 x not
specified
(n=11)

1 x newly
arrived
parents (n=5)

8 community
focus groups
(n=36)

2 x children
additional
needs (n=16)

Influential factors

- Parents are motivated to make the best decisions about school readiness based on their existing understanding of education and child development, which may be influenced by their country of origin, with different social norms and systems to Australia
- Kindergartens and maternal and child health services are important sources of understanding about school readiness
- Parents desire additional support in understanding school readiness and school systems in the Victorian context
- Concern about child development prompts some families to consider an earlier, rather than later, start to school
- Many carers of children with additional needs do not access carer support services

Areas of recommendations

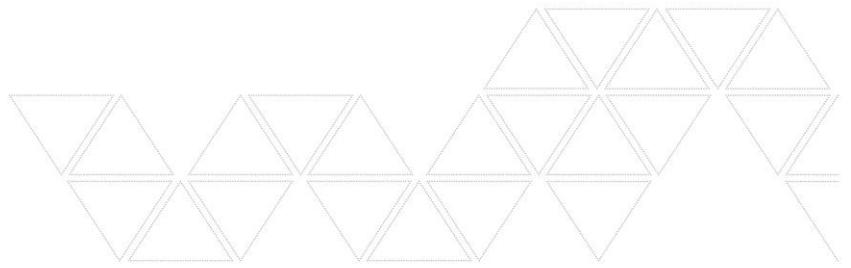
Community
programs and
activities

Service
development

Further
research and
needs
assessment

Utilise
community
leaders to
influence
social norms

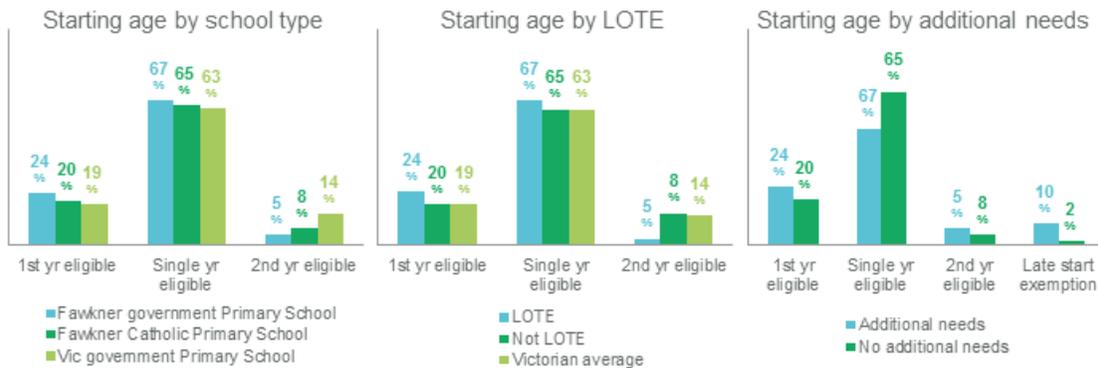
Carer
services



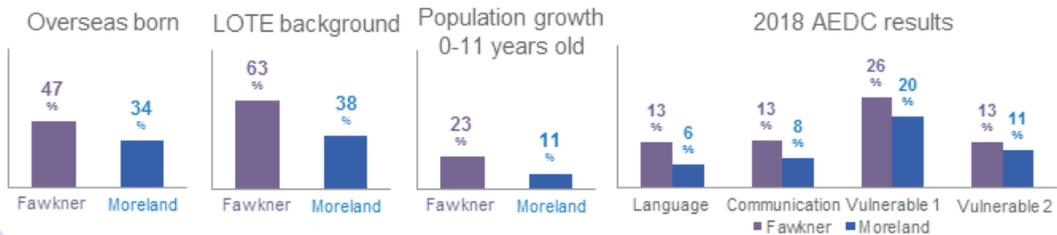
Sooner or Later: School starting age in Fawkner



Findings



Context



Definitions:

Early school starting age: The Victorian Government mandates a compulsory school starting age. To start primary school children need to turn five years old by 30 April in the year that they start school. Children must also be at school in the year that they turn six years of age. Therefore, this means that children can start school as young as 4 years and 9 months, up to age 6. For children born between January and April, parents make the choice for their child to start school the year they turn 5 or the year they turn 6.

First year eligible: start age 4 or 5, birthday 1 Jan –30 April (year they turn 5)

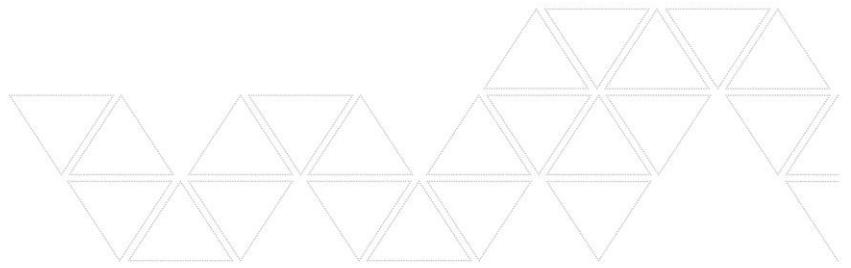
Single year eligible: start age 5, birthday 1 May –30 Dec (year they turn 6)

Second year eligible: start age 5 or 6, birthday 1 Jan – 30 April (year they turn 6)

Late start exemption: start age 6, birthday after 1 May (year they turn 7)

Language Other Than English (LOTE) background: language spoken at home other than English, or English spoken at home by child with at least one parent speaking a language other than English at home.

Additional needs: a disability, additional need or developmental delay such as social and emotional, cognitive, speech impairment, physical impairment.



Attachment C: Ready, Set, Prep Version 2.0

The below infographic provides a skeleton for the expansion of Ready, Set, Prep! across northern Moreland, allowing for co-design with community and stakeholders.



Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

Ready, Set, Prep!

Phase 2: A vision for scaling up

✉ readyssetprep@merrihealth.org.au
☎ 1300 637 744

2017-2020



Fawkner

- ✓ cross sector collaboration
- ✓ 20+ partners
- ✓ tailored key messages
- ✓ improved transitions
- ✓ improved AEDC results (2018)

2021-2025



Northern Moreland:
Glenroy, Hadfield, Fawkner

- ⊕ a new vision & action plan, co-designed with community & partners
- ⊕ 30 kindergartens & school partners
- ⊕ 1,600+ Foundation children & families engaged over 4 years + benefits for future families
- ⊕ broader focus on children 0-6 years

**more families
more partners
more impact**

Approach


scale-up


place-based


proportionate
universalism


targeted
interventions


proving / improving
with data, evaluation &
research


systems
change

Core elements

backbone support from Merri Health

collaborative community governance

community leadership

tailored communications

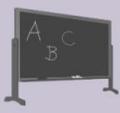
local practice networks

small grants

capacity building

Indicators of success


increased maternal & child health visits (2 & 3.5 years)


increased engagement early childhood education


increased average school starting age


inclusive policies, practices & culture in education


new indicators, identified by the partnership in 2020

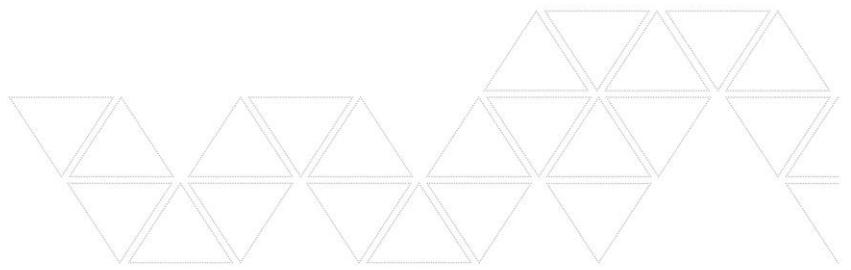
Goal

Ready, Set, Prep! is made possible with funding from:

THE
**WILLIAM
BUCKLAND**
FOUNDATION
— WBF —



VICTORIA
State Government



Hello, Fawkner!

The Great Idea Program: Supporting community-led initiatives in Fawkner

Introduction

The Great Idea Program is part of Hello, Fawkner!; a three year project that builds community cohesion, connection and respect for diversity in Fawkner.

With a strong focus on building community leadership, The Great Idea Program fits within Merri Health's Integrated Health Promotion Plan, under the priority of 'social inclusion'.

This case study provides an overview of The Great Idea Program to date, over two rounds. It provides an overview of how the program been implemented, the five participating teams and their community-led projects, as well as key highlights and outcomes.

Project overview

The Great Idea Program aims to build and increase community leadership, social connection and local communication in Fawkner through supporting community-led projects.

The program supports multiple teams of Fawkner residents to undertake community-led projects, and in doing so intends to increase participants' agency, connection, capability, mobility and support within the Fawkner community.

Since 2018, the program has supported five teams across two rounds to undertake a range of community initiatives, from running cultural cooking classes, to dance classes for new mums, dads and babies, to science programs for Fawkner children.

Quick Facts

Timeline

October 2018 – ongoing

Overview

- A community leadership program supporting community-led projects in Fawkner
- Teams are provided with one year of support and funding to undertake their project (timeline extended due to COVID)
- Projects are chosen by a selection panel of community members

Participants

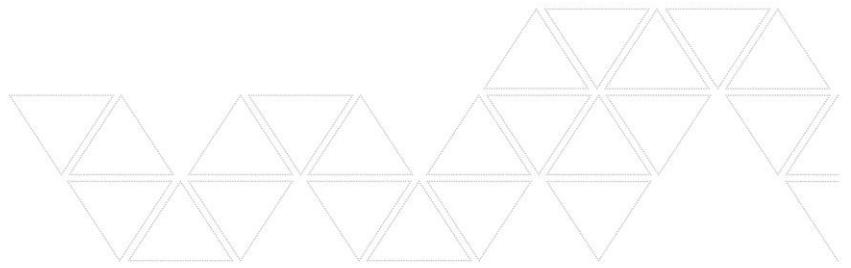
- 10 participants (five teams of two, across two rounds)
- Team 1. Cook Dine & Shine
- Team 2. Fawkner Wholefoods Collective
- Team 3. Of Fawkner
- Team 4. Mumz Dadz & Bubz
- Team 5. Discovering Nature's Secrets

Key achievements

- Five projects ideas taken from initial concept stage to being established projects in the Fawkner community
- \$35,000 in total provided directly to residents to support their projects
- Many new connections established between project teams, and with other Fawkner residents
- A selection panel of diverse Fawkner residents to choose participants

Challenges

- COVID-19 has impacted the capacity of all teams to undertake their projects
- The discontinuation of partnership to deliver the program has meant it was designed and delivered in-house
- Reaching diverse community members
- Internal Merri Health administration in relation to the purchasing of pre-loaded credit cards



Round 1

Project activities & timeline

November 2018 – February 2019

Promotion & Community Engagement

- A local graphic designer was engaged to develop promotional materials
- Promotional material was circulated to the Fawkner community via; social media (Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp), The Fawkner Times community e-newsletter and at community events such as the Fawkner Festa and the Be Merri festival.
- Hello, Fawkner! team attended community groups and directly invited people to apply

February 2019

Selection of participants

- 12 applications were received.
- A selection panel consisting of Fawkner residents and Merri Health staff was formed to review the applications, provide comments and rank them based on the projects they thought would most benefit the Fawkner community.
- The Hello, Fawkner! team reviewed all the information provided by the panel and selected three projects.
- Shortlisting phone-calls were undertaken to determine whether they were suitable candidates for the program.
- Three teams were offered a place in the program.

“What we want to achieve from it is to bring people together, learn about each other’s’ cultures and make a beautiful Fawkner”

- Participant

April 2019 - ongoing

Support & funding

- Each team was allocated a ‘support person’ from the Hello, Fawkner! team.
- Teams were assisted in project planning, budgeting, engaging members of the community in their project (by supporting them to develop surveys and attend community festivals) and supporting with promotion through The Fawkner Times e-newsletter and printed newspaper.

- Across the year the teams met collectively three times to socialise, troubleshoot, and share progress of their projects.
- Each project team was assisted to develop a budget of \$5000. An additional \$10,000 was generously provided by Moreland City Council, which was evenly spread across the three teams.
- Each team was allocated a training budget to support them to undertake their project. Some of the trainings undertaken by the teams included smartphone photography, book-keeping, food handling certificate, memberships to ‘Masterclass’ and ‘The Social Difference’, and ‘Business Bootcamp’.

(Note: Originally project team support was to be designed and provided by external partner, however due to a discontinuation of the partnership the program was provided in-house. This is discussed further in the ‘Unexpected Outcomes’ section of this case study.)

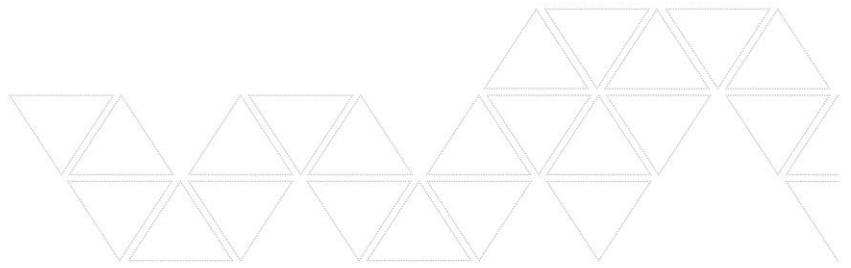


A group meeting of The Great Idea Program round 1 teams and Merri Health staff at Fawkner Neighbourhood House in July 2019.

Meet the teams

Team 1: Cook Dine & Shine

Cook Dine & Shine aimed to bring women and girls from Fawkner together through food and cooking masterclasses. The project believed that by bringing together a group of culturally diverse people where they could cook, eat and socialise, they would have greater opportunities to appreciate different lifestyles, traditions and a variety of food. It was hoped that these experiences would help to reduce cultural differences.



Sana and Zavi from Cook Dine and Shine at initial planning session of The Great Idea Program in April 2019.

- Sessions have included representatives from organisations such as Moreland City Council, Melbourne City Mission, Merri Health, Fawkner Neighbourhood House, Fawkner Food Bowls and Fawkner Bowling Club
- Recipes from the sessions have been shared in a number of ways including in The Fawkner Times newsletter and newspaper.
- The team have WhatsApp group with approximately 85 members

Cook Dine and Shine was featured in a video to promote future rounds of The Great Idea Program, which you can be viewed at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbiyHB0I7DU.



Over 50 delicious dishes cooked by local women who attended their launch at The Fawkner Bowling Club in August 2019.

“Our Christmas meal was as another great highlight because the majority of our attendees are from Islamic backgrounds. It was a huge step towards religious acceptance and cultural harmony when they came and had a Christmas meal cooked by our great Chef Jen Rae from Fair Share Fare.”

– The Cook Dine & Shine team

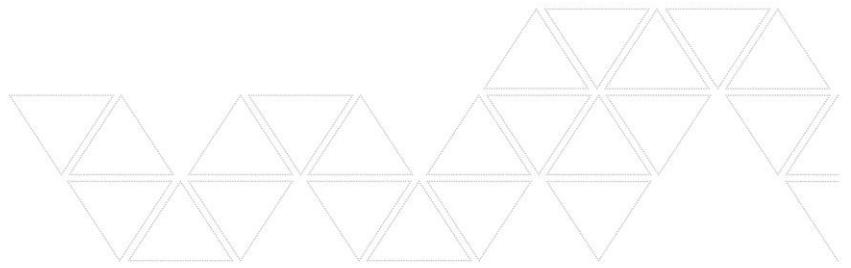
Team 2: The Fawkner Wholefoods Collective

The Fawkner Wholefoods Collective aimed to establish a business which would sell local, ethically produced, pesticide-free products, with little to no packaging. The Collective aimed to purchase produce in bulk to reduce waste. Their philosophy was that customers could buy as little or as much as they want, using their own containers to avoid unnecessary packaging. The aim was to provide Fawkner with affordable food that is kind to their health and the planet.



Achievements so far:

- Five events, including launch, a mother/daughter cooking demonstration and a Christmas lunch
- Approximately 350 people have attended
- Those attending have been from at least 8-9 different cultural backgrounds, including women Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Spain, Afghanistan, Italy and Iraq
- Approximately 10 volunteers assisting Zavi and Sana at the sessions
- 12 dishes have been taught so far by ten community ‘chefs’
- Over 70 women attended the launch with over 52 dishes cooked



Katherine and Sam from Fawkner Wholefoods Collective at initial planning meeting in April 2019.



Fawkner Wholefoods Collective displayed their new logo at the Fawkner Festa in November 2019.

"The program has been such a great opportunity and such a positive experience"
- Participant



Ben and Domenica from Of Fawkner at first planning meeting in April 2019.



Of Fawkner's display at The Fawkner Festa in November 2019.

Achievements so far:

- 40 members signed up
- 20-25 people shopping each order cycle
- Formed a six person committee to run the project
- Approximately 80 people subscribed to their mailing list
- Facebook group with 225 members
- Most people have found out about them through social media or word of mouth
- Future plans are to continue to reach more communities in Fawkner

During COVID-19, this team has connected with other community-led food distribution projects in Fawkner and continues to grow.

Team 3: Of Fawkner

Of Fawkner aimed to create a social media campaign for people in Fawkner to share stories and recipes from different cultures.

Achievements so far:

- Over 60 people signed up and provided recipes at the Fawkner Festa in November 2019
- Instagram account @OfFawkner with 124 followers and 51 posts

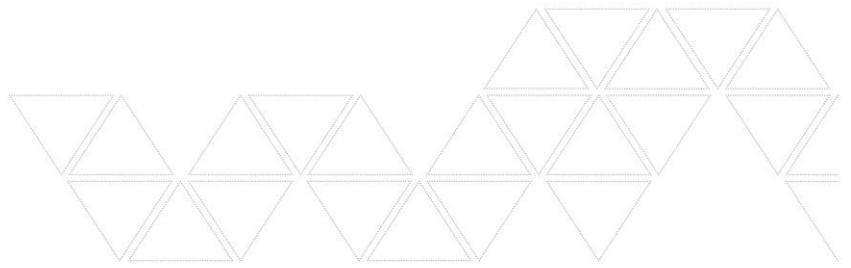
Round 2

Project activities & timeline

October 2019 – February 2020

Promotion & Community Engagement

- In order to allow more time for community members to submit their applications, promotion of The Great Idea Program started earlier than the previous year.
- A Fawkner-based designer (who was also a Round 1 participant) was re-engaged to develop flyers and a logo for The Great Idea Program,



which were distributed via social media and at The Fawkner Festa.

- A Fawkner-based film-maker was engaged to develop a film to use on social media and in The Fawkner Times newsletter. The film highlighted Zavi and Sana from Round 1 team 'Cook Dine and Shine'.



Click the picture above to view a promotional clip for The Great Idea Program starring Zavi and Sana from Cook Dine & Shine. Or visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbiyHB017DU

March 2020

Selection of Participants

In order to increase the community-led aspects of the program, round 2 projects were chosen solely by a panel of Fawkner residents, rather than including any Merri Health staff on the panel (as per the previous round's selection process).

A key change based on the experience from round 1 was that projects did not need to have an explicit focus on promoting cross-cultural connections. To encourage projects that engaged culturally diverse communities, the team ensured the selection panel was culturally diverse. 6 Fawkner residents (including four Round 1 participants) made up the panel.

The panel read through all applications and voted on their favourite projects.

Following a shortlisting phone-call two teams were invited to participate in the program.

May 2020 – ongoing

Support & Funding

Each project team was supported to develop a project plan to guide their project for the year and a budget of \$5,000.

Following feedback from Round 1 participants, a core difference in this round was to have more frequent one-on-one meetings with the Hello, Fawkner! team to focus specifically on their project. This has been timely in light of COVID-19 as the meetings with teams have been held online which has leant itself to specific support.

In addition to their project budget, \$1000 was provided to each team member to support them to undertake external training of their choice. So far one participant has undertaken an IT course.

Meet the teams

Team 4: Mumz, Dadz & Bubz

This project idea is to run a fun, affordable exercise and dance class for new parents and babies of Fawkner. With a strong focus on simply getting the body moving, this class aims to give parents the chance to grab a work out whilst incorporating their little one.



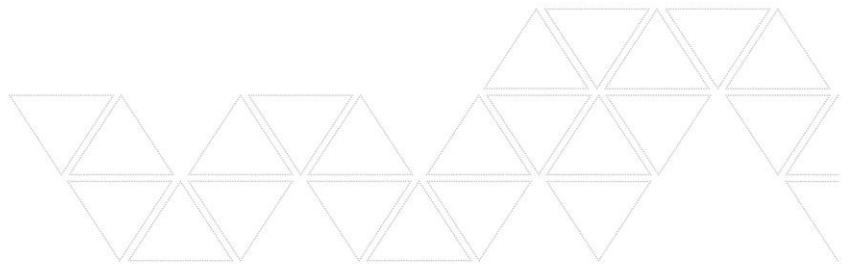
Pictured above is Claire from 'Mumz, Dadz and Bubz' project, which she is organising with teammate Alex.

Achievements so far:

- Have completed their budget and project plan
- Have determined that due to COVID-19 they will start in an online capacity

Team 5: Discovering Nature's Secrets

This project aims to provide opportunities to families to learn and explore the wonders of science together in fun, creative and exciting ways. Sessions will be



suitable for people of all ages to come together and enjoy hands-on, fun-filled activities that will range from whacky science craft with scientific items.



Pictured above are the promotional graphics for Faiza and Thasleem's science project 'Discovering Nature's Secrets'

Achievements so far:

- Have completed their budget and project plan
- Have determined that due to COVID-19 they will start in an online capacity

Challenges

COVID-19 (March 2019 – ongoing)

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many of the teams in both Round 1 and Round 2. The Hello, Fawkner! team has adapted in order to support the implementation of these projects. This has included:

- Extending finishing dates for Round 1 participants
- Providing online support and meetings instead of in person. For Round 2 teams, this has helped increase the focus on individual projects, but has also limited the team's ability to meet, both within their own teams and with other teams. As both of the projects are 'event/class' focused, there has been a delay in their ability to launch.

The most significant challenge for almost all teams has been the uncertainty of when they will be able to launch or continue their projects.

Many of the teams are currently exploring opportunities to continue their projects in an online format.

Pre-loaded credit cards

Participants of The Great Idea Program are community members, and are not required to be attached to a larger organisation. For this reason, it was determined that pre-loaded credit cards would be the best way to get money to recipients for their project expenses. Although this has been largely positive, it also has presented challenges, such as:

- Ensuring that card numbers are recorded in case they are lost or misplaced
- Issues with credit card providers (such as ensuring cards are activated)
- Internal purchasing processes within Merri Health

Reaching wide range of people

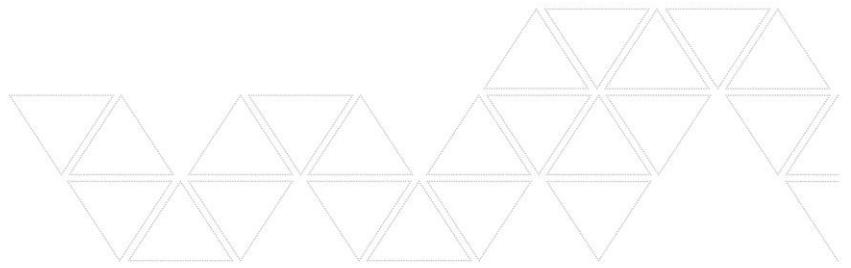
Ensuring that The Great Idea Program reaches a wide number of Fawkner's diverse community is a challenge. Many older people in Fawkner do not have computers, and the team has found it challenging to reach this group in the current climate.

Evaluation

Participant surveys

The six round 1 participants were surveyed in April 2019, and again in June 2020. These surveys intended to determine if there was any change in their knowledge, skills and confidence around implementing a project in their community.

Question	Pre	Post
	Strongly Agree	
There are ways I can contribute to community issues that are important to me.	50%	100%
I feel confident I can start a project in my community.	67%	100%
I feel community leadership is important for Fawkner.	100%	100%
I know a lot of people in Fawkner.	17%	60%
I find it easy to meet people in Fawkner who are from a different social or cultural group to mine.	17%	20%
I know of people / organisations / groups in my area that can help me deliver a project in Fawkner.	0%	40%
I have the skills I need to do a project in my community.	50%	80%
I have all the resources I need to do a project in my community.	17%	40%
I know how to get people involved in community projects.	17%	60%



I am often involved in community projects.	17%	20%
I know people at council I can talk to about implementing a project in my community.	17%	20%

This table shows the percentage of Great Idea Participants who strongly agreed with the statements between the pre and post survey.

The findings show an increase across all statements indicating that participants felt more confident and had improved skills following their participation. 40% of participants indicated they now know people / organisations / groups who could help them deliver a project in Fawkner, up from none who strongly agreed before the program started.

Round 2 participants have undertaken a pre-survey, and will be surveyed again in May 2021.

"I have started believing in myself - that I am capable of doing something, and that whatever I put my head into I can do it."
- Participant

Feedback interviews

In November 2019, phone interviews were undertaken with all six Round 1 participants, where they were asked to provide feedback on their experience of all aspects of the program. This included promotion, support, communication, program structure etc. Participants were provided with \$50 Coles/Myer vouchers for their time.

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants providing valuable insights into how the program could be improved for the next round.

Examples of changes that were made to the program in round 2 based on these interviews included:

- Increased one-on-one meetings with individual teams
- Increased structure and accountability for teams, such as 'due dates' for budget and project plans
- Tailored communication methods for participants (e.g. phone/email/zoom) based on preference of participants
- Matching support staff based on availability / days of work
- Inviting round 1 participants to share their experience with round 2 participants

- Changing 'loaded credit card' supplier
- Making sure teams understand how they can 'take a break' when they need to for personal reasons
- Give participants a set amount for their training budget

"For our lives, this is huge, and we are very happy to be a part of The Great Idea Program"
- Participant

Unexpected outcomes

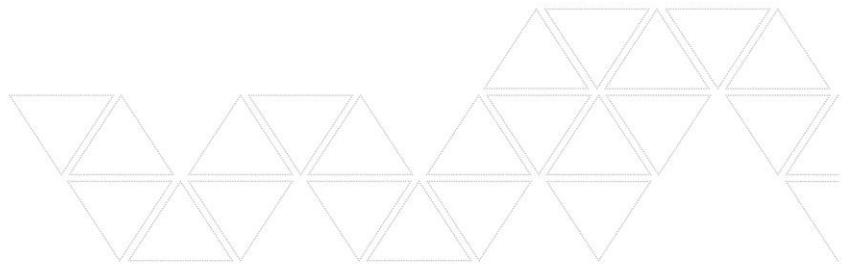
There have been many discoveries and learnings as the program unfolded. Some of these have are discussed below.

As mentioned earlier in this case study, The Great Idea Program was to be designed and delivered by a partner organisation. Early in the program this partnership was unexpectedly discontinued, and the program was quickly designed in-house. This was a huge learning experience for the Hello, Fawkner! team but has ultimately led to a program that is tailored specifically to the needs of the Fawkner community and owned by the Hello, Fawkner! team.

Originally, group sessions were quite structured and heavily facilitated. Through feedback from participants indicated that what they valued most about the sessions was chatting, collaborating, sharing a meal and talking about their projects.

In undertaking the selection panel process for Round 1 of the program, it became evident that community members were extremely competent in choosing projects that were right for their community, and for the program. Therefore in selecting participants for Round 2, the selection panel was made solely of Fawkner residents, rather than any Merri Health staff.

In round 2 we had planned to only accept applications that reflected an explicit focus on bringing diverse community members together. However in observing members of the community selection panel during round 1, it became clear that we could not make assumptions about which projects would appeal to members of the diverse panel. For this reason it was determined a better way to support projects which engaged culturally diverse communities was to



accept a broad range of ideas, and see which appealed to a culturally diverse selection panel.

Many of the community members who originally contacted us in one capacity for Hello, Fawkner! went on to participate in a number of different ways. For example:

- One resident who contacted us as a volunteer logo designer became a participant in Round 1
- Another resident who contacted us as a volunteer for The Fawkner Times newspaper ended up filming for promotional videos for Round 2

We watched as valuable connections formed in between residents as the program unfolded. For example:

- One resident (mentioned above) who undertook filming for The Great Idea Program enjoyed meeting participants of the program, and participating in their events
- Another resident who is heavily involved with the Fawkner community garden told us how much it meant to her for her partner to have been asked to do a cooking demonstration at one of the team's events

Our participants told us how valuable they found it to be profiled in other components of Hello, Fawkner!, such as The Fawkner Times e-newsletter and newspaper. One participant said when she walked down the street people stopped her and asked about her project! Another team was also approached to partner with another local organisation to run workshops.

Although connecting diverse communities and celebrating diversity is a key objective of The Great Idea Program, we have reflected that in many ways this is a very long term goal. A year in, round 1 teams are at very different stages of their projects - some having spent much of the year planning, while others have engaged many diverse community members already. It will be interesting to see in the longer term how these projects continue to grow and engage with the Fawkner community.

Future activities

The Hello, Fawkner! team will continue to support two teams, while also planning for Round 3.

Due to the uncertain nature of COVID-19, Round 1 teams will also receive support to finish their projects.

Key supporters

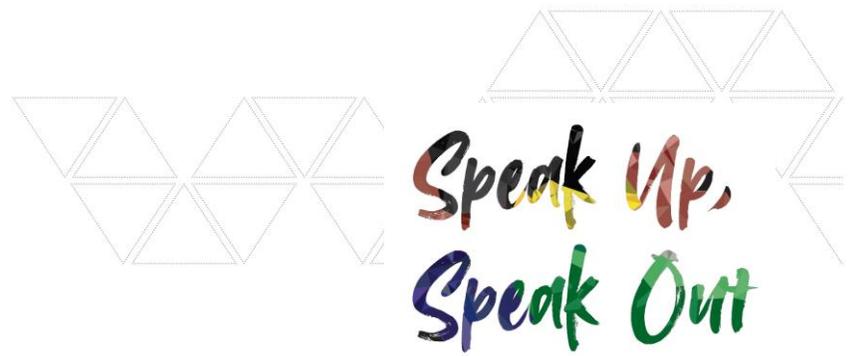
There have been many key supporters of The Great Idea Program. So far these have included:

- Moreland City Council – provided an additional \$10,000 to support Round 1 projects
- Round 1 participants - contributed their time for filming projects and providing valuable feedback
- Community volunteers – contributed their time in reviewing round 1 and Round 2 applications
- Merri Health staff – contributed time to review applications for Round 1 participants.

Condoning Violence

- * Starting Violence
- * Accepting Violence
- * Pretending that
- * Threat of

Youth settings



Speak Up, Speak Out

A pilot initiative engaging Aboriginal young people as active bystanders to prevent violence

Introduction

Speak Up, Speak Out (SUSO) was a pilot initiative funded by the Victorian State Government through the *Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Fund* in 2019.

The pilot included two programs, engaging a total of 26 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people aged 9-12 years. All participants attended schools in the Moreland and Hume local government areas.

Held at the Essendon Football Club (SUSO #1) and then the Greenvale Football Club (SUSO #2), the programs utilised fun, engaging activities, role play and group discussion to teach equal and respectful relationships education, gender equity and upstander actions.

The programs were also heavily focused on connecting the young people to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community.

The evaluation data collected from the two programs indicates improvements in knowledge, confidence and understanding in relation to the program objectives.



SUSO participant learning about respectful relationships

Quick Facts

Years implemented

Pilot initiative delivered in 2019

What is it?

Pilot initiative that engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from Hume/Moreland in equal and respectful relationships education, gender equity, upstander training and connection to culture and community

Reach

Direct: 26 participants, aged 9-12 years
Indirect: Staff, students and families from 9 Hume/Moreland primary schools

Key partners

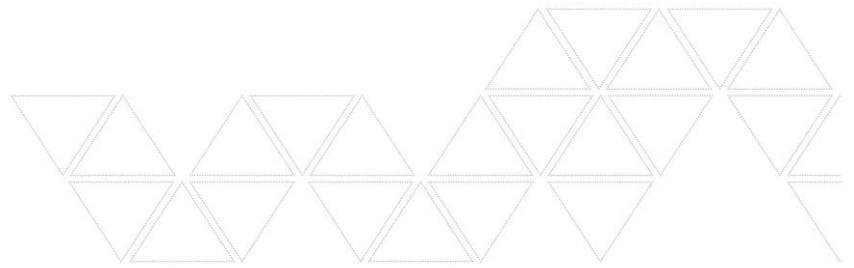
The Long Walk Trust
Merri Health
Primary schools in Hume/Moreland LGAs
Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation

Key achievements

- 2 pilot programs delivered
- Average of 18 hours of learning per program
- Average attendance was 77% and 84% in the two programs respectively
- 80-90% of participants said that they had improved their knowledge and understanding of safe, equal and respectful relationships
- 70-100% participants said that they feel more connected to their culture
- Aboriginal staff reported increased knowledge and confidence to deliver primary prevention initiatives
- 100% of Elders surveyed felt ownership over the project



This project was delivered in partnership with The Long Walk Trust, and made possible with funding from the Victorian Government through the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Fund.



Project activities

Project partners The Long Walk Trust and Merri Health received funding to deliver the first SUSO program in Term 2, 2019 and were subsequently offered some extension funding to run another program in Term 4, 2019.

Between August 2018 and December 2019, the project partners undertook the following project activities:

- Recruitment of an Aboriginal Project Officer
- Staff training for program staff (4 facilitators)
- Curriculum development in consultation with Aboriginal Elders (and subsequent curriculum re-development based on evaluation from the first program)
- EOIs to schools in Hume/Moreland
- Participant recruitment and registration
- Organisation of catering and transport
- Development of risk management frameworks and disclosures protocols
- Engagement of specialist contractors to deliver some program content
- Delivery of 2 x SUSO programs
- Communications (weekly e-news, and creation of SUSO video)
- Evaluation (pre and post) & qualitative



Traditional owner, Kellie Hunter, welcomes participants with a smoking ceremony

Curriculum summary

For both SUSO programs, the curriculum was split into either fortnightly (SUSO #1) or weekly (SUSO #2) yarning circles of 2-2.5 hours each.

The first SUSO program relied much more heavily on utilising external facilitators and contractors to deliver content. This was modified in the second program

and delivered greater success in terms of participant learning and connection to the facilitators.

The final SUSO curriculum was as follows:

Yarning circle #1	Welcome to Country and getting-to-know-you games
Yarning circle #2	Leadership
Yarning circle #3	Gender equality & equal and respectful relationships
Yarning circle #4	Upstander training
Day on Country (First program was an overnight camp)	Welcome and smoking ceremony, possum skin burning and other cultural activities
Yarning Circle #5	Planning for the Family Day
Family Day, celebration and graduation event	Opportunity for families and teachers to come and see the students demonstrate their learning
Yarning circle #6	Evaluation

Evaluation

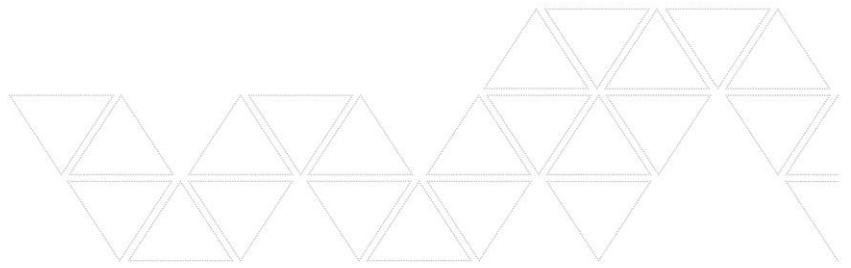
Pre and post evaluation surveys were conducted with all participants and Aboriginal staff involved with SUSO. Post evaluation data was collected from teachers and families, as well as the Wandarra Elders who helped to inform the initiative.

A dedicated evaluation session was conducted with participants at the end of each SUSO program to collect qualitative feedback. A compilation of qualitative responses has been made into a video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_3ea24kNvc&feature=youtu.be

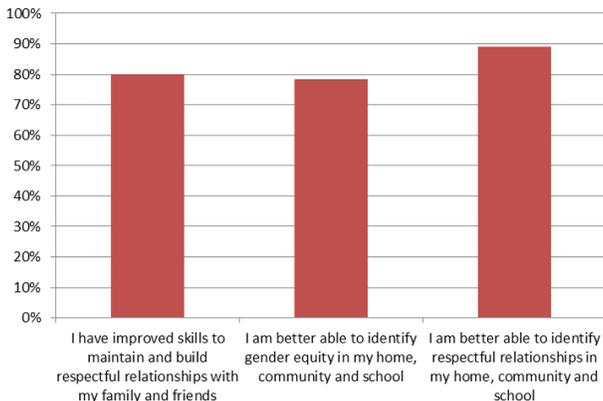
For a range of reasons – including group dynamics, program structure, participant behavioural and learning needs in the first program – the evaluation results for the participants in SUSO #1 and SUSO #2 sometimes varied. When this was the case, results have been presented separately for the two cohorts.

The following provides a summary of results for each objective of the project.



Objective #1: Increase participants' knowledge and understanding of healthy, supportive and safe relationships

In self-reported post evaluation surveys, a high proportion of participants from both SUSO groups reported increases in their knowledge and understanding of safe, equal and respectful relationships.



Graph 1: Percentage of participants from both programs that agreed with these statements

These results are consistent with reports from families and teachers. In a post evaluation survey, 90% of respondents said that they have observed changes in their child or students' knowledge or understanding of what constitutes a safe, respectful and healthy relationship.

"In small ways, they are beginning to communicate respectfully about their feelings and actions they see."
Teacher

Interestingly, the pre and post surveys revealed a decrease in participants' perceived confidence to be able to access support and services if needed (pre-evaluation 87.6% answered yes, compared to only 58.3% post-program).

It is therefore likely that participation in SUSO highlighted the need to seek help when required, but that the curriculum inadequately addressed how and

where to find help. This hypothesis is supported by facilitator reflections and it is therefore a recommendation that future programs seek to redress this oversight in the curriculum.



SUSO participants learning about Country

Objective #2: Increase participants' skills and confidence to take positive action as an upstander to promote healthy, supportive and safe relationships

Post-program quantitative surveys revealed a significant increase in participants' skills and confidence to take upstander action.

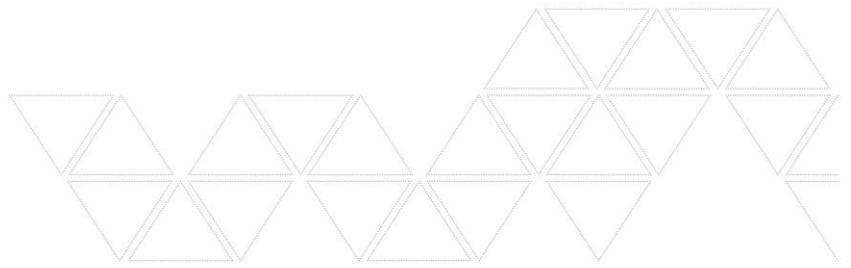
"I liked the focus on the upstander actions... society teaches our kids the opposite"
Parent

84% of participants from both programs said they intend to take upstander action to address sexism and violence-supportive attitudes.

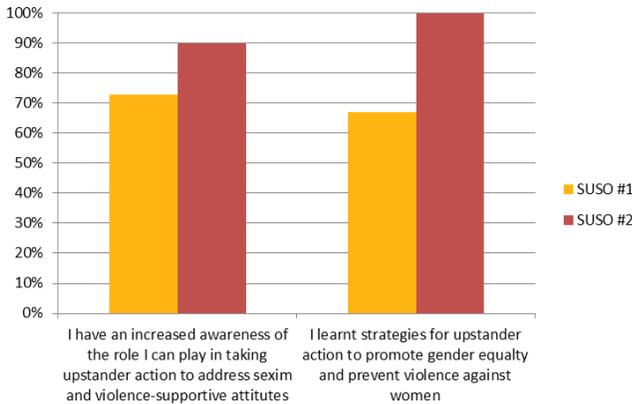
73% of participants from the first program and 100% from the second program reported that they had increased their leadership skills as a result of SUSO.

Interestingly, at the end of the program, only 13% of participants from the first group could correctly identify all four upstander actions. After modifying the curriculum to embed upstander content throughout the program, 70% of participants from the second program could name all four actions.

In self-reported post-evaluation surveys, a moderate proportion of participants from the first program and a



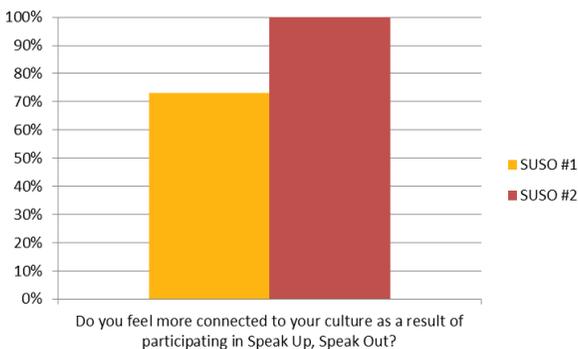
large proportion from the second program either agreed or strongly agreed they had increased their awareness and learnt strategies for upstander action.



Graph 2: Percentage of participants that either agreed or strongly agreed with these statements post-program

Objective #3: Increase participants' sense of connection to culture and community

Evaluation data reveals that participation in SUSO strongly affected participants' sense of connection to their culture and community.



Graph 3: Percentage of participants that answered yes

"They enjoyed the cultural activities, the yarning circles, the day on country the cultural craft and possum skin burning."
Teacher

Additionally, in post program surveys 80% of participants from both programs said that they had

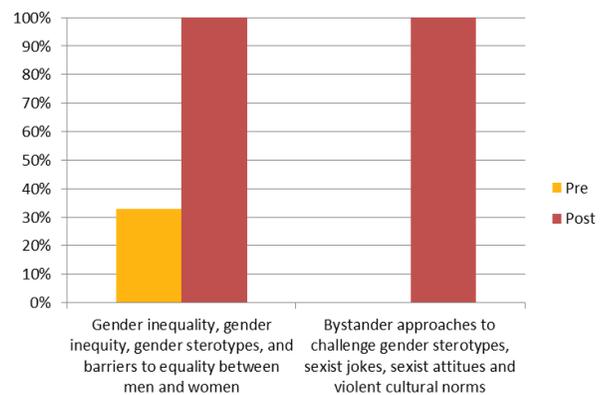
made new friends as a result of their participation in SUSO.



Objective #4: Aboriginal staff involved with the project increase their knowledge, understanding and confidence around utilising primary prevention strategies that address healthy, supportive and safe relationships in Aboriginal communities in Melbourne's north

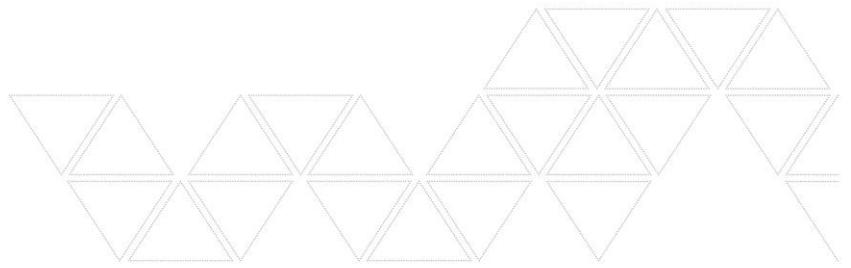
Objective #4 sought to upskill the three Aboriginal project staff involved with SUSO, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the Victorian primary prevention workforce.

Although the three Aboriginal staff members came into the project with different skill and knowledge levels, pre and post surveys showed distinct improvements in self-rated knowledge in all areas including gender equity and upstander approaches.



Graph 4: Percentage of Aboriginal staff pre and post that rated themselves as 'very knowledgeable' in these areas

By the end of the project, all three Aboriginal staff members could accurately identify the drivers of violence against women, as well as accurately report the proportion of violence that is perpetrated by men against women.



Additionally, two out of three Aboriginal staff members reported increased networks with Aboriginal organisations as a result of their involvement with SUSO.

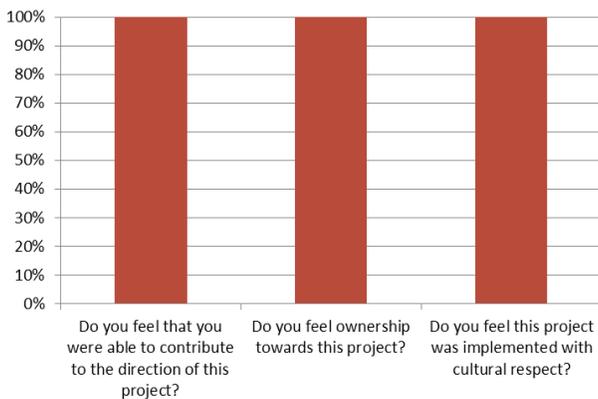
The biggest shift for the Aboriginal staff involved with the project was increased confidence to plan, implement and evaluate primary prevention initiatives to address family violence, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Objective #5: At the conclusion of the project, Aboriginal Elders will report ownership, confidence and pride with respect to the project

Throughout the planning and implementation of both SUSO programs, the SUSO team consulted with the Wandarra Elders group monthly to ensure that the curriculum content was culturally appropriate, and that the program was implemented with integrity.

“Really enjoyed the day on country with the kids. They all really liked the boomerang throwing”
 Uncle Paul Ashton

A post evaluation survey with the Elders revealed a strong connection with the project:



Graph 5: Percentage of Elders surveyed post-program that answered 'yes' to these questions

Other unexpected impacts

1. Confidence and empowerment

While this pilot did aim to increase confidence and leadership skills with respect to taking upstander action, teachers and parents reported a much broader impact on many of their students or children in terms of increased confidence.

Many teachers reported that as a result of their participation in SUSO, their students increased their confidence to speak in front of groups:

“He has more confidence when public speaking.” Teacher

“This really built huge amounts of confidence in my child.” Parent

2. School attendance

Some of the Aboriginal students engaged with SUSO had low school attendance.

For some students, their participation in SUSO also increased their school attendance:

“[SUSO] helped my son attend school on a regular basis and he gained a lot more confidence within himself.” Parent

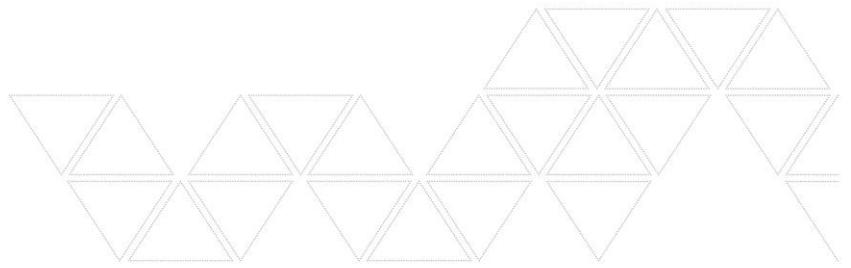
“SUSO is reaching at-risk students and giving them an exciting reason to come to school”
 Teacher

3. Impact on families and communities

After the first SUSO program, the project team removed the objective relating to impacts on families, due to limited ability to contact and connect with families during the program.

Nonetheless, a post program evaluation with teachers and families revealed that 64% of respondents said they also had learnt something about respectful relationships, gender equity, stereotypes or upstander action as a result of their child or student’s participation in SUSO.

Eighty per cent of respondents also believed that their child or student’s participation in SUSO had already had a broader impact on their family or school.



in relation to planning time for facilitators, with most project staff working part-time.

Evaluation

Using surveys that aim to measure pre and post knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to respectful relationships is very difficult. SUSO project staff utilised questions from existing surveys, including the Department of Education and Training *Student Survey Year 7–12, Respectful Relationships Evaluation*, version 2, January 2018.

However, pre and post answers from these questions proved very ineffective at accurately measuring change over time in this cohort. Ultimately the project team found post-evaluation self-assessment surveys – triangulated with qualitative evaluation – more telling.

Learning and recommendations

The following summarises the key learnings and recommendations from the SUSO pilot:

- Encouraging the participants to find out and share their family stories was particularly important for the participants, as it connected them to their identity.
- It is vital to have an Aboriginal Project Officer and Aboriginal facilitators.
- Consultation with Aboriginal Elders is important to ensure project quality and culturally appropriate content.
- Continual professional development opportunities for staff is important, including pre-program refresher training for facilitators on upstander training, gender equity, primary prevention approaches and cultural awareness.
- It is important to form relationships with participants' teachers and families to ensure consistent attendance.
- Be prepared to be flexible to ensure attendance (e.g. picking up participants from home if they are not at school).
- Meet with schools, students and families before the program to accurately assess any learning needs, behavioural concerns or other presenting life circumstances that may be relevant. It is also important to have staff that are skilled at working with children who may be experiencing a vast array of social issues.
- Run 4-hourly sessions on a weekly basis, incorporating a food break. Feedback from families and teachers also suggested that the

Challenges

Group dynamics and attendance

Within the first SUSO group in particular, a range of complex personal circumstances, experiences and behaviours affected some participants' engagement with the program, broader group dynamics and the learning outcomes of the group.

A range of challenges presented during the camp, causing significant disruption to the camp schedule and learning outcomes.

Although attendance at SUSO was relatively good – and in some instances much better than school attendance – when participants missed several yarning circles in a row, this negatively affected their learning.

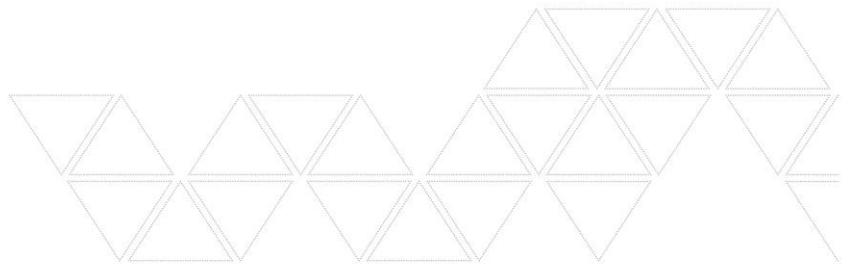
Further, there were times when staff were unaware that students were absent from school until they arrived to pick them up.

Scheduling and transport

SUSO engaged students from across Hume/Moreland and thus, logistics for pickups and drop-offs were challenging, particularly for the first SUSO program where students came from everywhere across the region from Brunswick to Sunbury. Multiple vehicles were required to transport the students to a central location, and sometimes these vehicles were difficult to secure amongst competing demands from other services.

Securing cultural consultants was also sometimes a challenge, due to the need for advanced booking time.

In the first SUSO program, yarning circles were held fortnightly, however, the project staff reflected that the inconsistency of the groups impacted on the continuity of learning for the participants. In the second SUSO program, yarning circles were scheduled weekly, which was much better for participants. However, this created its own challenges



program should be longer in duration, perhaps six months.

- If running a camp, it is suggested that outsourcing to a camp provider would be much less time-consuming for staff. Alternatively, the Day on Country proved to be an effective (and cheaper) alternative to a camp.
- In hindsight, the curriculum neglected to include enough content relating to help-seeking, particularly in relation to services and supports.
- Include sport and active activities to keep participants engaged.
- Utilise participants from previous programs to mentor new participants.
- The weekly e-newsletter with photos from the program was reported to be an excellent and well-utilised tool to keep schools and families engaged with the learning.
- Keep the connection with the school by inviting Elders to visit the school and having students present at assembly.
- Given the promising evaluation results, it is suggested that SUSO be sufficiently funded to be developed into an ongoing state-wide school program.

Some of the highlights from SUSO were made into a mini-documentary that can be viewed here:

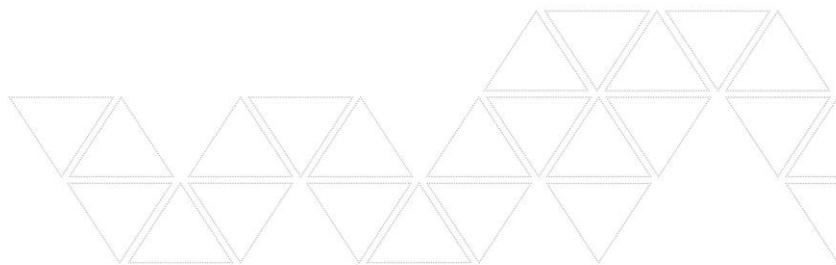
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMzhi6ytiQ8>



Conclusion

The evaluation data shows that programs – like SUSO – that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in targeted interventions that teach equal and respectful relationships and upstander approaches, might be an effective way to address family violence and violence against women in community, utilising a primary prevention framework.

Although longer-term, follow-up evaluation would be required to confirm this, the initial impact data shows promise, not only in relation to the participants involved, but also for the Aboriginal staff who reported increases in confidence, skills and knowledge to deliver primary prevention initiatives.



Self-Care: An Anti-Musical

A Melbourne Fringe show exploring themes of mental health and self-care from a young LGBTQIA+ perspective

Introduction

YGLAM queer youth performing arts ensemble worked together over 12 months to create a performance piece entitled Self Care: An Anti-Musical. The piece was an engaging theatre performance that created an atmosphere demonstrative of what it's like for queer young people living with poor mental health.

Taking inspiration from Dante's Inferno and incorporating horror themes, the stage is set as a hellish landscape through which the audience must navigate. The show utilised audience involvement by inviting them to walk through the performance space in the style of promenade theatre, whilst also offering self-care strategies (such as playing with fidget toys, cuddling soft toys and eating chocolate) for the audience to engage with during and after the show.

These strategies created moments of reprieve from the nightmarish world of the anti-musical, simulating the daily struggles of navigating unsupportive spaces as a queer young person and the importance of engaging in self-care strategies to maintain positive mental health.

Project overview

The project consisted of three phases: skill building, content creation, and rehearsals and performance. The show was developed through stories and experiences collated by YGLAM participants as well as members of Stand Out groups throughout various schools in Moreland. Overall, the project aimed to:

- Build performance skills and confidence in YGLAM participants
- Educate YGLAM participants and wider audiences about managing mental health by using self-care strategies
- Contribute to building a stronger, more connected and educated community for queer young people

Quick Facts

Years implemented

Show developed and performed in 2019

What is it?

- YGLAM production that ran for 6 nights held as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival
- Featuring abstract portrayals of young LGBTQIA+ folks' experiences of living with poor mental health juxtaposed with self-care tips and activities
- An interactive piece in the style of promenade theatre that actively engages audience members in self-care strategies

Reach

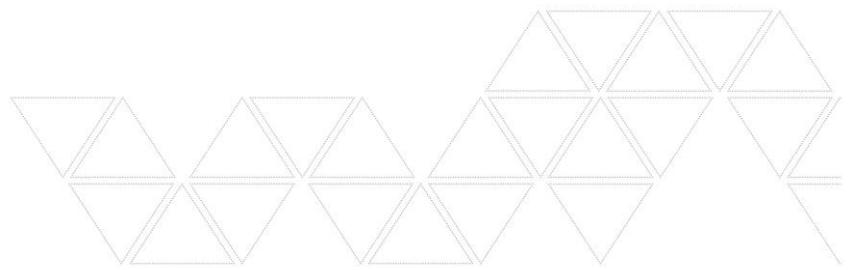
Direct: 12 YGLAM participants, 94 LGBTQIA+ students

Indirect: Family and friends of YGLAM participants, wider audiences – particularly of young LGBTQIA+ people and allies

Key partners

Moreland City Council
Oxygen Youth Space
HEY Grants





Project activities

Skill building

There was a relatively new cohort of YGLAM participants in 2019, many of whom had limited experience with live performance, so the first portion of the year was dedicated to building theatrical knowledge, skills and confidence. This consisted of a series of workshops with a focus on:

- General theatre skills (blocking/staging, working as a team, building dynamic scenes)
- Improvisation skills (quick thinking, accepting offers, building to a climax)
- Vocal coaching (vocal warm ups, projection, safe vocal techniques, experimenting with different pitches/sounds/accents)
- Physical theatre (physical warm ups, awareness of body and physicality, safely engaging with other performers, acrobalance)

Content creation

Once the participants had gained confidence in their performance skills, the focus centred on creating content specific to the show. This mainly took place in the form of impromptu storytelling – throughout multiple sessions, YGLAM participants were given particular prompts and themes to explore through written stories and poetry, as well as improvised short scenes. Participants were also involved in discussions around their experiences managing mental health and engaging in self-care practices.

Throughout this process, external LGBTQIA+ students from Moreland schools were also surveyed on their experiences with mental health and self-care, and these responses were de-identified and integrated into the themes and content used for the performance.

Rehearsals and performance

The final phase consisted of the practical steps involved in putting together the show, including developing the set and costumes, acquiring a performance venue, and advertising the show. There was two weeks of intensive rehearsals including dress rehearsals and tech runs, and then six performances spread over the course of two weeks.

Quick Facts (continued)

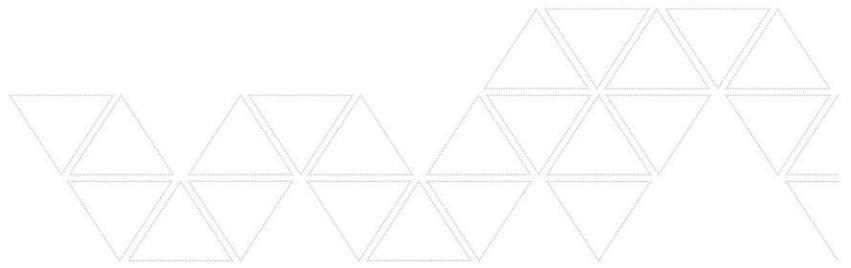
Key achievements

- 94 LGBTQIA+ students consulted on self-care strategies
- 26 Stand Out participants attended the performance
- 12 participants involved in YGLAM sessions for the duration of the project
- Sessions included skill building, content creation and rehearsals
- 100% of participants felt a sense of ownership over Self Care: An Anti-Musical
- 100% of participants agreed that YGLAM had improved their mental health
- Several participants reported a positive impact on their sense of self and identity and/or relationships with family members
- Performance reached an overall audience of around 200 people, raising awareness around issues that young LGBTQIA+ people may face

Challenges

- Varying numbers in attendance could sometimes disrupt content creation and rehearsals
- Stress due to performance anxiety as well as external factors (e.g. school exams)
- Sickness due to a stomach bug that circulated around the group caused one performance to be cancelled





Evaluation

Feedback

Through pre and post evaluation surveys, the mental health impacts on the YGLAM participants were measured. As well as this, external factors such as personal relationships and knowledge of support services were examined. The data showed positive trends in all of these areas upon completion of the project.

The post evaluation data shows that 100% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that participating in YGLAM has: “made my life better, improved my mental health, helped me create and maintain meaningful friendships, made me more comfortable with who I am, helped me deal with negative feelings such as blue mood, despair, anxiety, depression”.

“It just makes everything a little less isolating and a little bit easier to battle...”

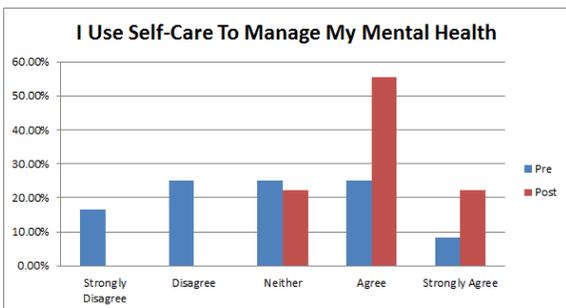
YGLAM participant #1

“... We’ve sort of let them know what it’s like, we’ve educated people and they’ve heard our message, they’ve heard what we were trying to say. I don’t know, that just felt really good.”

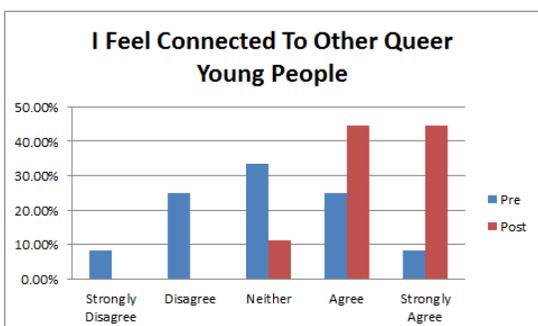
YGLAM participant #2

Several YGLAM participants reported the show had positively impacted their relationships with family members, including one participant who gained the confidence to come out to their family after the show. Participation in the show also reportedly resulted in positive changes to members’ sense of identity, as well as feelings of pride and achievement with 100% of participants feeling a sense of ownership over the show and that their ideas had directly contributed to the show’s development.

As well as this, 85% of participants felt a stronger connection to community and felt that their life had more perceived meaning. Results also showed a 44% increase in participants’ use of self-care to manage their mental health and a 41% increase in confidence to access support and services if needed.



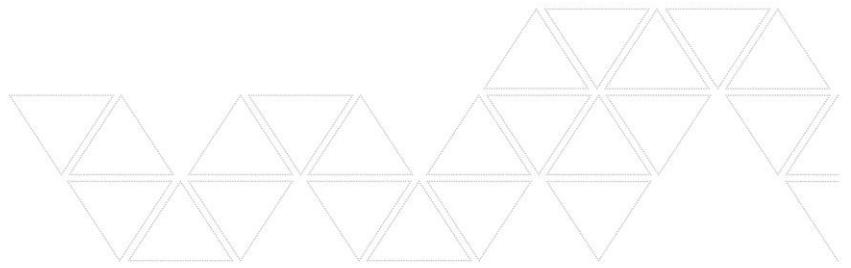
In terms of interpersonal relationships, there was a 55% increase in feelings of connectedness to peers and community.



Challenges

An ongoing challenge throughout the process of developing the show was inconsistent numbers of attendance for YGLAM sessions. As YGLAM is an extra-curricular activity, participants can struggle to balance attending sessions along with work, school, maintaining physical and mental health and other commitments. This became particularly apparent closer to the show opening when trying to schedule extra rehearsals. The opening of the show also coincided with year 11 and 12 exams which added another layer of stress for some of our participants in that age range.

Although participants agreed that YGLAM had improved their overall mental health, there was still clearly a greater need for mental health support leading up to and during performance nights. This was partially due to stress and anxiety around rehearsing and performing, as well as external factors such as school, family and personal relationships. Throughout the year, YGLAM participants were supported with their mental health by having a volunteer social worker attend sessions and being connected in with QHealth counsellors during sessions for ongoing support outside of YGLAM. However, neither the volunteer social worker nor the QHealth counsellors were available during the extra rehearsals or before performances. Resulting feedback from YGLAM participants indicated that they would have benefitted from extra mental health support during these times.



Our aim moving forward is to combat these challenges firstly by anticipating upcoming commitments (such as school exams) and scheduling future shows accordingly, to the best of our ability. Feedback from YGLAM participants also suggests that having a more structured schedule and timeline for rehearsals throughout the year would help to reduce stress and anxiety. As well as this, we aim to look into options for external mental health care during times of high stress (such as leading up to performances) in order to ensure that participants are receiving appropriate support when they need it.



Future activities

YGLAM will continue working on theatre skills and developing content. The aim for the next show will be to allow the participants to lead the development process more now that they have gained valuable experience and confidence in performing; participants have indicated that they are interested in taking an existing piece of work and adapting it to fit a queer perspective.

The desired date for a new performance was originally set for October 2020, however current work on this show has been paused due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, YGLAM is currently focused on the implementation of “e-YGLAM”, hosting online hangouts twice a week to keep YGLAM participants engaged socially and creatively during periods of isolation and lockdown. Examples of work developed in e-YGLAM sessions include character and world creation portfolios (pictured below) as well as development of poetry and short stories.



Key supporters

We would like to acknowledge the following partners for their contribution to the success of this project:

- HEY Grants
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- Sydney Road Community School
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