



The Go Goldfields Approach:

An opportunity for government to enable
sustainable community led change

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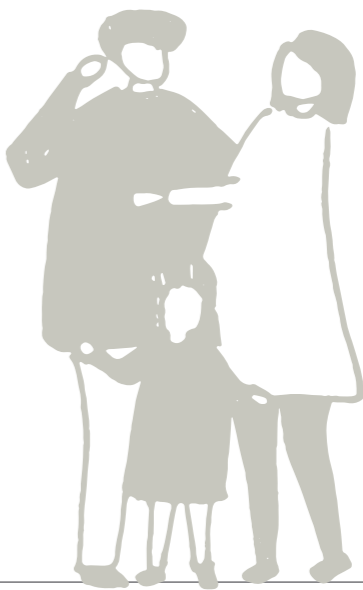
Acknowledgement of Country

Go Goldfields proudly acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung community and their rich culture, paying respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia’s first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the country and the strong family views of kinship that have been passed down for generations.

We believe the work of the Partnership is enriched by the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge and practices, and we commit to working respectfully with them and other visiting Aboriginal people. We would also like to recognise the strength, self-determination, and capacity of Aboriginal families and children in this land.

Evidence-base for this paper

Go Goldfields also recognises and thanks Allen & Clarke Consulting who researched and authored Collaboration and Change: An Evidence Based Report. This paper utilises the evidence-based findings and references from this research. These can be sourced from the main report housed on our webpage at www.gogoldfields.org/publications



‘Go Goldfields’ is a place-based initiative in the Central Goldfields region demonstrating that investment in place-based initiatives to improve systems and services can significantly improve outcomes for children and their families in highly disadvantaged areas. This paper identifies how the Victorian Government can enhance the effectiveness of social reform and investment for those who most need it, through further embedding place-based practice for social reforms and long term investment in local backbones such as Go Goldfields.

Go Goldfields operates in an area where significant entrenched and intergenerational socio-economic disadvantage is compounded by;

- geographical isolation,
- a lack of public transport connection
- service decline (leaving people with a high number of visiting or distant services)
- limited economic opportunities
- the impacts of catastrophic events (such as floods and institutional abuse)
- a history of decisions made for the community from outside the community.

The Victorian Government has demonstrated a whole-of-government commitment to improving social outcomes through its significant investment in family services, family safety, mental health, and early education reforms.

To support the significant investment in social spending, *The Victorian Framework for place-based approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes* was developed. The Framework recognises the need for the public sector to move past listening to the community (place-focused), towards relinquishing some control and collaborating with local partners to achieve locally led outcomes.



In the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget, short-term financial support was provided to several established place-based initiatives in low socio-economic communities across Victoria, including Go Goldfields' *Every Child, Every Chance* initiative. Every Child, Every Chance focuses on the important elements needed to support children in Central Goldfields region to grow up healthy, safe, and confident.

The cycle of intergenerational disadvantage has significant costs to children, families, communities, and governments. Changing this is resource intensive, particularly in communities where there are compounding challenges of skill shortages and transport. It requires effective communication, coordination, and a local anchor to provide ongoing stability for the community.

This paper illustrates what funding our Backbone has generated for our area, capitalising on the social reforms and funding opportunities to benefit the community. However, it also highlights the need for the Victorian Government to commit to long term funding for our backbone and others like it. Moreover, that it continues to embed the recommendations of the Victorian Framework for place-based initiatives in its practice, policy, and program design. Only through this meaningful support will communities with significant disadvantage like Central Goldfields be able to regenerate rather than falling further behind.

Go Goldfields and its recently formed Leadership Table is well placed to take up further opportunities to create better outcomes in our community. Our work over the past 18 months demonstrates we understand community need and how to best respond. It is important we maintain this momentum.

“Children and their families in Central Goldfields need better, more connected services and support on the ground if the challenges of trauma, isolation and disadvantage are to be overcome.”

ECEC Practitioner

To do this we need Government to:

- 1

Acknowledge the additional challenges disadvantaged rural communities face which have an ongoing and profound impact on equity if not addressed
- 2

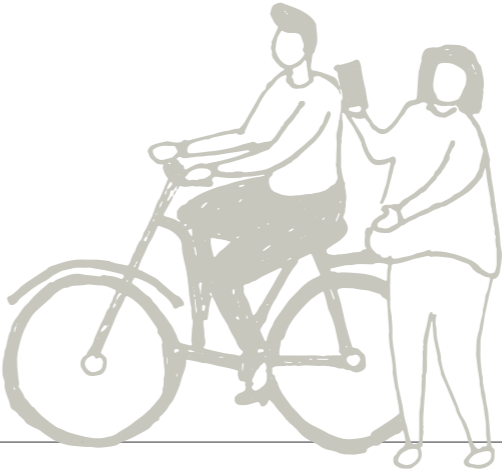
Commit to long term funding support (minimum 5 years) for a locally based backbone to continue the work of Every Child, Every Chance initiative
- 3

Support a local area governance approach to inform provision, policy, and planning of social services and investment in infrastructure to support children and families
- 4






Embed flexibility in funding models and contracts to enable local areas' governance to be more responsive to local needs and context
- 5

Create meaningful Incentives and opportunities for Departments and contracted services to collaborate to achieve shared outcomes
- 6

Support area governance outcomes-based measurement to embed stronger accountability to local communities



High levels of disadvantage

LEVELS OF DISADVANTAGE		CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS	VICTORIA
	Household Income		
	Households in the most disadvantaged quartile of the Index of Household Advantage and Disadvantage (IHAD) (ABS, 2022)	39%	25%
	Labour Force Participation	44%	65%
	Vulnerable Children		
	Intellectual disability, developmental delay or learning disability	13%	8.2%
	Children are vulnerable on two or more domains (AEDC 2021)	20.8%	10.2%
	Families experiencing stress		
	Alcohol or drug related problem in family (SEHQ 2021)	9.3%	3.6%
	History of abuse to parent	19.6%	5.4%
	History of abuse to child	6.5%	1.9%
	Child witness to violence	14%	3.5%
	History of mental illness of parent	17%	9%
	Housing		
	More likely live in a caravan, cabin, or improvised home (such as a tent or shed)	1.7%	0.4%

Central Goldfields is the most disadvantaged Local Government Area in Victoria (SEIFA). Family/ household disadvantage is compounded by living in a low resource area with a history of traumatic events, such as floods and institutional abuse.

The double disadvantage of living in low resource areas

Our Local Government Area has:

- A small population (13,000): low revenue base for Council and non-viable services.
- Limited social capital to draw upon.
- Allied health, disability, specialist service and childcare gaps,
- High number of visiting services run from elsewhere
- Distance to the major service centres cities of Bendigo and Ballarat.
- Inconsistent administrative boundaries, levels of government and departments.
- Poor public transport connections.

“Without strong local coordination and relational context, the provision of programs and services will not adequately address significant challenges and at worst even contribute to the ongoing entrenched disadvantage of families in the area.”

Local partner

A history of traumatic events

The community has faced a series of localised events over the past 40 years ranging from significant natural disasters, substantial economic restructuring, and institutional dysfunction and abuse. These have impacted the collective psyche of the community where trust of institutions is low and provide a complex context in which to operate.

The impact of rurality

Rural Councils Victoria has long advocated that their members are under increasing financial pressure to deliver more with fewer resources. This has been exacerbated over the years by decreasing revenue streams and increasing responsibilities. This pressure is particularly apparent in Central Goldfields due to the complexity and vulnerability of families requiring additional support.

While Central Goldfields Shire Council is steadily building capability and capacity after a period in State imposed administration Inspectorate, significant constraints still exist in Council's ability to support the increasing complexity and needs of the children and families in the area.

Early years education and services for children and families are fragmented across multiple providers. In Central Goldfields, this is compounded with many services delivered through outreach models. Without strong local coordination and relational context, the provision of programs and providers will not adequately address significant challenges and at worst even contribute to the ongoing entrenched disadvantage of families in the area.

The geographical isolation of Central Goldfields adds an additional challenge for a better connection between services and supports. While on paper services are available, the reality is that many children and families go without due to a lack of transport and internet access compounded by poverty.

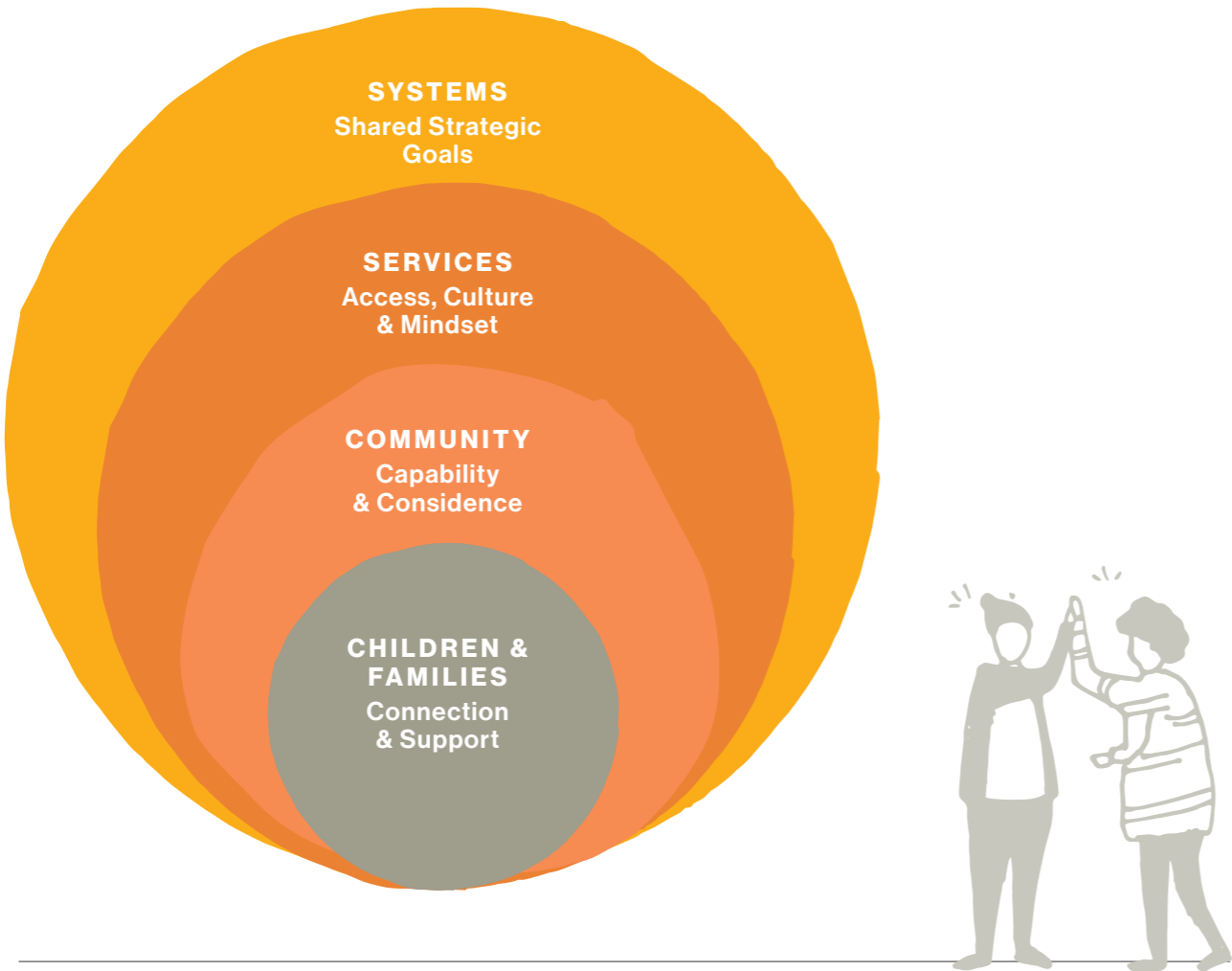
Go Goldfields is a place-based partnership between State and local government, service providers and the Central Goldfields community committed to achieving better societal outcomes. Go Goldfields has adopted a social ecological model and facilitates work at four levels simultaneously. The work places significant emphasis on forming relationships at all levels of the socio-ecological model (image below). It is the relationships that make way for the constructive conversations, collaboration, shared trust and impact.

We operate through:

- A Backbone**
to facilitate all work and build relationships
- A Leadership Table**
to enable high level collaboration

“Brokering relationships takes time, but trust has been earned. This trust has built because our stakeholders have seen we have done what we said we would do, through hard work, integrity, and with the best interests of the community at heart.”

Backbone Manager



The Backbone

The Go Goldfields Backbone plays a critical role in working with relevant portfolio areas in government and local service organisations to ensure responses and actions are integrated and highly responsive to community need. Through an auspice arrangement with the Central Goldfields Shire Council, Go Goldfields can also draw upon Council resources, such as infrastructure, communications, and service access to support the limited staff and resources to fortify collaborative work.

The core functions of the Go Goldfields Backbone are to:

- **Engage** and understand the context and needs within the Shire, and the barriers and enablers to addressing these.
- **Elevate** issues to the people/organisations who have the levers to act.
- **Facilitate** collaboration of key partners and providers to amplify impact of initiatives and activities.
- **Advocate** for context responsive decision-making design and implementation.
- **Demonstrate** innovative approaches to develop and model new ways of working.
- **Monitor** progress against shared outcomes to increase accountability.

The Backbone provides partners with a 'collaborative platform' and offers a framework for adaptive and sustained collaborations over multiple programs and interventions (Ansell & Gash, 2018).

The Leadership Table

The Leadership Table is headed by an independent local Chair. It includes three additional community members with lived experience and strong links into the community. These members sit alongside executives from significant service providers to Central Goldfields including Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative, Anglicare and Centre for Non-Violence, the Central Goldfields Shire Council, and Victorian Government departments of Families Fairness and Housing, Health, and Education and Training.

The Leadership Table was formed to:

- **Make space for government**, service provider executives, and community leaders collaborative place-based decision making.
- **Ensure investment and programs are context appropriate**, allow for flexible implementation and align locally to maximise value to the Central Goldfields' children and their families.
- **Purposefully consider the community experiences** to inform and influence future decision making and service provision.
- **Draw on executive capabilities** and organisational influence to respond quickly to opportunities and issues.
- **Share early intelligence** to inform strategic alignments and local benefit.

The Leadership Table supports cross-agency work and innovation, collaborative solutions which break down bureaucratic barriers restricting place-based approaches. There are further opportunities to explore ways of blending teams and creating an enabling environment for collaborative cross-portfolio work.

In 2020, Go Goldfields was armed with research conducted by Murdoch Children’s Research Institute (MCRI) *Restacking The Odds* (RSTO) that stated ‘stacking’ evidence based interventions known to improve children’s outcomes will provide a cumulative impact to better enable change for children and their families experiencing disadvantage.

Equally compelling was the overwhelming evidence underpinning the importance of the first 1000 days of life where experience and supports in early years shapes health, development and wellbeing across a lifetime. This includes exposure to chronic stress and cumulative adverse experiences impacting on children’s neurological and biological development. Worse still is the discrepancies in health and social outcomes between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds which emerge early and widen steadily without positive intervention.

This evidence, combined with the opportunity to complement State Government reforms led to a more directive approach by the Backbone. A narrowed focus on early childhood and altered governance structure to a more decision focussed Leadership Table would lay the foundation for our work to ensure Every Child in Central Goldfields has Every Chance to grow up healthy, safe, and confident.

Like other places across the State, the early years in Central Goldfields are serviced by a complex range of departments and services well suited to the Go Goldfields collective impact approach.

Priority areas have been identified to address the research and data.

Developed five priority areas that aligned with Go Goldfields Theory of Change.

Each priority area is based in evidence of improving life outcomes for children and their families, current available data, existing investment where value could be added, and our community’s energy.



The Five Every Child, Every Chance Priority Areas and our future visions for these are:



Healthy & Supported Pregnancies

The future of our community starts with every pregnancy being supported to maximise choice, opportunity, and the health and well-being of parent and child.

Confident & Connected Parents

All parents and carers are empowered, resourced, and supported to confidently parent. They are well connected and influence the delivery of programs and services that impact their lives and family.

Safe & Thriving Children

All children are raised in psychologically, physically, emotionally, and culturally safe environments that listen and respond to them appropriately, enabling them to thrive and meet their potential.


Valued Early Years Education & Care

Community, services, business and governments invest in early childhood education and care to empower and support families and the workforce to create opportunity and growth for the community.

A Great Start to School for all Kids

Services, schools and kindergartens work collaboratively to support children and their families to ensure everyone is ready to get the most out of their foundation education.


Go Goldfields Backbone has taken a social ecological approach. Using stakeholder workshops, listening to community and partnering with services it has identified service gaps, program and policy advocacy opportunities and used its resources to demonstrate innovative approaches to develop and model new ways of working.



ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITY ON 'RAISING CHILDREN'

Engaged our local community, to identify the local context, barriers, and enablers.

574 voices of parents, carers and children were recorded through interviews, surveys, shopping centre vox pops and teacher facilitated drawing exercises to inform our approach and needs in the early years.



REVIEW AND CONSOLIDATE DATA AND EVIDENCE

Conducted a comprehensive review of current data and research relating to each of the priority areas to inform our stakeholders contributing our logic mapping workshops.



STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

Conducted a comprehensive review of current data and research relating to each of the priority areas to inform our stakeholders contributing our logic mapping workshops.



REVIEW SHARED OUTCOMES

Led the co-development a program logic map for each of the 5 priority areas to identify the problem, our vision, resources, short, medium and long term outcomes we want to achieve and the activities we will use to support this.



IMPLEMENT CHANGE PROCESS

Initiated, supported and aligned activities and demonstration projects to support shared outcomes. Sought feedback and held numerous conversations with stakeholders to refine the current activities and outcomes. Initiated several demonstration projects to model new approaches to fill identified gaps.



MONITOR, EVALUATE AND ADAPT

Co-developed local monitoring and evaluation frameworks for measurement of outputs and outcomes identified through the logic mapping process.

The resulting priority area logic maps have been thoroughly tested with stakeholders and endorsed by the Go Goldfields Leadership Table.

This work provides the solid foundation for a long term collaborative approach to social change using a holistic, outcome focused approach.

Since the launch of Every Child, Every Chance in November 2020, the Go Goldfields Backbone has taken a direct approach to leading and demonstrating collaborative and innovative responses to address some of the most apparent needs in the community. These include:



Creating The Nest.
A parent-informed space located in central Maryborough. The Nest supports families early in their parenting journey to increase confidence, connection, and capacity. A full-time facilitator is employed to welcome parents and carers, increase awareness of services, encourage peer support, and provide warm referrals to services and social support networks. The Nest offers drop-in sessions and programs facilitated by Go Goldfields and partner organisations. Over the first 3 months of operation, the Nest has demonstrated the importance of a warm and relational entry point for families in the Shire to engage with other parents, services, and support.



Implementation of the Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities program.
An evidence-based peer-to-peer parenting program that builds confidence and capacity through a sustainable approach. On completion of the eight-week 'Being a Parent' program, participants are given the opportunity to train as facilitators of the program to increase the reach of the program to build social capital and parenting skills.



A systematised Centralised Kindergarten Registration.
Improving the registration process to increase transparency, access and communication with families and providers for 3 and 4 year old kinder. Go Goldfields introduced a customer relationship management system (CRM) along with new processes and locally agreed priority of access criteria to ensure all children across Central Goldfields were able to access a program to suit their needs.



A local approach to Early Years Transition.
Go Goldfields Backbone leveraged relationships with kindergarten providers, local primary schools, and the Department of Education to drive a joint-funded project. The project brings together early years educators, foundation teachers, Maternal and Child Health, allied health practitioners and family services providers to a consistent Shire-wide approach and network for early years transitions. It supports improved quality and consistency of practice. The project will culminate in a Shire-wide Transition Plan to support children and their families through their early years.

“(ECEC has) built-on things that [are] already happening. It has catalysed energy in the gaps and built on available resources... That’s where you’ve got to be showing that you are making those incremental changes and that they are making a difference.”

Government department stakeholder



A local service model to increase provision of early intervention services.
Early childhood intervention services in Central Goldfields are subject to extensive waiting lists, often over 12 months long. Go Goldfields initiated a survey to local parents to identify needs and appetite for different models of service to cut waiting times. The results catalysed an agreement with an NDIS provider to conduct weekly group sessions from The Nest focusing on emotional regulation and sensory processing, increasing access and equity to services locally.



Implementation of local program and practitioner to address attendance.
The program is designed to reduce barriers and support a culture of strong attendance in early years education. Go Goldfields has partnered with local primary school principals and Schools Plus to appoint a full-time Education Engagement Practitioner (EEP) within the Go Goldfields Backbone. The EEP will work with students and families across six primary schools and seven local kindergartens, to embed a culture of attendance through the locally driven 'Supportive (and) Helpful Attendance Program (for Everyone)' and contribute to the Central Goldfields Great Start to School Transition Plan.



Delivery of local festival for families.
Partnering with the Committee for Maryborough and Maryborough Rotary Club, Go Goldfields is delivering an inaugural Goldfields Community Festival in October 2022. The festival is a completely free and accessible day of activities targeted at local children and their families. It is designed to improve community engagement and enhance general mental health and well-being – particularly after COVID-19 lockdowns.



Delivery of the Early Years Forum.
Quarterly community of practice forum for early years services and practitioners working within Central Goldfields Shire. The forum provides participants an opportunity to share knowledge and service information, increasing the local workforce capacity and connection.



07

Building on collaborative momentum to address local early years infrastructure and service needs

To complement the change process, the Central Goldfields Shire Council in partnership with Go Goldfields commenced an Early Years Masterplan Project. The Central Goldfields Shire Early Years Infrastructure Masterplan Project, Phase 1 Report compiled by Semann and Slattery draws on qualitative and quantitative data to underscore findings of significant unmet need for early years infrastructure and services in the Central Goldfields region. Phase 1 Early Years Masterplan recommendations call for additional investment in:

- Kinder and day care infrastructure.
- Maternal & Child Health infrastructure.
- Enhanced Maternal Child Health and Supported Playgroup programs.
- Allied health and early detection and intervention of children with additional needs.
- Provision of long day care and flexible occasional care.
- Access and awareness of services for children and families.

Stakeholders for the project identified the following as key considerations for future early years infrastructure and services:

- Collaboration and information sharing across services
- Inter professional learning and cultural awareness
- Improved capacity of local services to better support families
- the creation of a hub in central Maryborough to include services such as Maternal Child Health, early intervention allied health, support for families, peer to peer learning and support opportunities and mental health services.

The Phase 1 report stated that the majority of stakeholders felt that Go Goldfields would be a natural fit to play an important role in the early years' infrastructure space going forward. Moreover, several stakeholders discussed the importance of the work on the five Every Child,Every Chance priority areas and the footings of a strong partnership framework already in place.



07

Go Goldfields stakeholders identified the following impact and strengths of Go Goldfields

Impact

Improved communication between community, service providers and funders.

Stakeholders reported their contribution to, or involvement with, Go Goldfields has improved collaboration with other services, and many reported that they had improved connection with community and other providers.

Creation of a common agenda for the early years.

Every Child, Every Chance and the 5 priority areas has provided a common language and agenda in the Central Goldfields Shire for practitioners, service providers, and decision makers to participate in.

Improved capacity and capability in the community.

Go Goldfields has invested in programs and projects to empower the local community and service system.

“We have a much greater understanding of what the system is in Central Goldfields around supporting and responding to the needs of families with young children within that local government area.”

Leadership Table member

Strengths

Brings a community development lens.

The Backbone offers valuable skills and perspectives to collaborative discussions and decision-making as most partner organisations are primarily clinicians, social workers or educators.

Ability to test and trial.

Go Goldfields is well positioned to take small scale risks and then share learnings and identify opportunities for growth, which has been beneficial to Council and other services.

Ability to translate policy to inform local program design and implementation.

A skilled and experienced Backbone team with links to state government is an asset for place-based work. It means the Backbone functions as a conduit and “translator” between what occurs at a policy level and at a service delivery level.

Flexibility to pursue opportunities and respond to needs as they arise.

This is enabled through a funding model for the backbone staff which does not prescribe how FTE should be used.



Creating the conditions for change

Children and their families in Central Goldfields need better, more connected services and support on the ground if the challenges of trauma, isolation and disadvantage are to be overcome.

The current model of planning, design and implementation of universal and targeted children and families' programs and services has not produced the change sought.

Efforts by place-based initiatives to turn the tide on entrenched disadvantage have marginal impact and become unsustainable without a significant change to the way government supports them.

Instead, genuine collaboration between tiers of government, government departments, funded service providers, and community needs to be catalysed to ensure every effort is focussed in the same direction. *The Victorian Framework for place-based approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes* provides a valuable guide for best practice to enable the public sector to work with local communities to deliver outcomes.

Go Goldfields has applied a social ecological approach to create a solid strategic foundation for improving outcome in the early years through the Every Child, Every Chance change process.

The Go Goldfields Leadership Table and Backbone are ideally placed to continue to drive the connections, collaboration and direct actions so desperately needed.

Government now has an opportunity to fully embrace a holistic place-based approach with the added potential of a purpose built infrastructure project. However, considerable investment and openness to a new way of doing things is required to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this work going forward.

The following recommendations have been developed to illustrate where change is needed to enable sustainable local service and support system.

Recommendations to Government

1

Acknowledge the additional challenges disadvantaged rural communities face which have an ongoing and profound impact on equity if not addressed.

What government can do to support this ground-up process:

- Support new and innovative funding and service models to create change for communities where there is a challenge of double disadvantage.
- Ensure policies, programs, and initiatives address localised social/service issues are co-designed with local area governance to ensure resources are targeted and appropriate for context, meet local needs and avoid duplication.

2

Commit to long term funding support (minimum 5 years) for a locally based Backbone to continue the work of Every Child, Every Chance initiative.

What government can do to maintain momentum in place:

- Provide commitment to long term funding and support for a locally based Backbone to ensure the long-term sustainability of initiatives and certainty for service providers, businesses, and the community.
- Recognise that support for a Backbone needs to be considered separate to program funding to allow flexibility to ensure responsiveness to the community and support activities outside of individual program's remit.

3

Support a local area governance approach to inform provision, policy, and planning of social services and investment in infrastructure to support children and families.

Government can do this by:

- Committing to investing in a purpose built community-based children and families hub to meet the complex needs in Central Goldfields.
- Recognising, authorising and empowering local area governance to be involved in shared decision-making.
- Supporting VPS Executives' participation in place-based initiatives to enable locally led solutions.
- Create more flexibility in procurement, planning and reporting procedures to respond more effectively to needs on the ground.

4

Embed flexibility in funding models and contracts to enable local areas' governance to be more responsive to local needs and context.

To achieve this recommendation government needs to:

- Accelerate development of the conditions required, both at a system level and financially, for effective place-based collaboration as recommended in the Victorian place-based framework.
- Build in greater flexibility around outputs and delivery mechanisms to allow for fit with local context.

5

Create meaningful Incentives and opportunities for Departments and contracted services to collaborate to achieve shared outcomes.

To support this ground-up process government should:

- Ensure service contracts identify opportunities for greater alignment with place-based initiatives.
- Include participation in collaborative decision-making and delivery with area governance as key performance measures for relevant executives.
- Ensure procurement processes are inclusive of place-based initiatives and where appropriate require providers to demonstrate alignment or local partnerships.

6

Support area governance outcomes-based measurement to embed stronger accountability to local communities.

To support this ground up process government should:

- Formally recognise the Every Child, Every Chance priority area logic maps as an area based outcomes framework.
- Enable government departments and service providers (through contracting arrangements) to commit to local outcomes-based measures as core objectives.
- Make relevant data available to the Backbone to support a local area.

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