
Independent Evaluation of the National Community Hubs Program

Produced for the
Migration Council Australia

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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY HUBS PROGRAM

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Finally, we are grateful to the Migration Council Australia for providing the opportunity to research the work of this important program.

RESEARCH TEAM

The *Independent Evaluation of the National Community Hubs Program* was conducted by a team of researchers from Charles Sturt University (CSU), Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Monash University. The researchers are all members of the Australian Government-funded [Excellence in Research in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network \(EYE CRN\)](#)

The team comprised:

- Associate Professor Frances Press (CSU) (Project Lead)
- Dr Melinda Miller (QUT)
- Dr Sandie Wong (CSU)
- Associate Professor Annette Woods (QUT)
- Dr Corinne Rivalland (Monash)
- Professor Jennifer Sumsion (CSU)

with Research Assistants:

- Dr Joy Goodfellow (CSU)
- Lisa Jackson (CSU)
- Katrina MacDonald (Monash)
- Dr Shelley MacDonald (QUT)
- Anna Schinella (CSU)

CSU's [Spatial Data Analysis Network](#) (SPAN) provided expertise in mapping.

BACKGROUND

The National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) is funded by the Federal Government in partnership with the Scanlon Foundation, the Migration Council Australia and the Refuge of Hope.

The purpose of the NCHP is to enhance social inclusion and social cohesion, especially for migrant families. The Hubs are funded to provide a *citizen-centric access point* (Bridge, 2012) for the coordinated delivery of appropriate services, using a *place-based* approach (Centre for Community Child Health [CCCH], 2011). The Hubs aim to:

- *connect* migrant families and individuals to existing support services provided by the Federal, State and Local Government;
- *improve access and engagement* with existing services;
- *enhance the capacity of community organisations and service providers* to reach out to migrant communities;
- *break down silos between services*; and
- provide a *coordinated and tailored package of services* for local migrant families and their children in a *safe, family-friendly environment*.

Over time, it is anticipated that the work of the Hubs will:

- *improve settlement outcomes* for multicultural communities as a result of more effective access to existing services;
- *improve the pathway to employment* for migrants through educational and social programs;
- *improve language, literacy and learning outcomes* for migrants, including for isolated migrant mothers and provide early learning activities for their children; and
- *increase learning outcomes* for children.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The *Independent Evaluation of the National Community Hubs Program* was commissioned in the context of the establishment of a network of an anticipated 100 Community Hubs under the Program. This was a *process evaluation* of the first stage of the Hub roll-out (30 Hubs nationally: 15 in New South Wales, 10 in Victoria and 5 in Queensland). Its purpose was to address the question of whether the program is being *delivered as intended*. This involved determining:

- What is being delivered;
- How it is being delivered; and
- The process of service delivery, including:
 - the level of service provided; and
 - the manner in which the services are being provided.

The outcomes of this evaluation are intended to inform the future directions and roll-out of the program.

RESEARCH APPROACH

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for the evaluation was based on an understanding of citizen-centric and placed-based approaches. Thus the evaluation sought to determine:

- the unique expression and nature of the Hubs in response to each community environment;
- the responsiveness of the Hubs to the physical, cultural, social and economic characteristics of the community in which they are located;
- the avenues available for the community to inform and shape the work of the Hubs;
- whether existing service delivery approaches have been reviewed/changed because of the work of the Hub; and
- the strength and flexibility of the ties between the different components of the service system. (By service system we mean relevant services and programs within and available to the community served by the Hub).

METHODS

Data for the evaluation was gathered the following methods:

- Scoping and mapping the service system;
- Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders (Support Agency staff, Hub Leaders, families, school staff, service providers);
- Site visits to three Hub sites in each Local Government Area (LGA);
- A Social Network Analysis of Hub Connections; and
- Document Review of Hub Leader Quarterly Progress Reports;

STAGE 1

Ethics Approval to Conduct Research

In order to conduct the research, the research team had to obtain two levels of ethics clearance: firstly, from their universities (CSU, QUT and Monash); and secondly, from state departments of education and other education systems as most Hubs are located on school grounds.

- Ethics Approval obtained from Charles Sturt University (CSU), Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Monash University (MU).
- Approval to conduct research obtained from departments of education in Queensland (DETE), New South Wales (DECS) and Victoria (DEECD) and other education systems or individual schools as required, for example Brisbane Catholic Education.

Contact with Support Agencies

Early in the project, the research team made contact with the Hub Support Agencies within each state: Access Community Services (Queensland); Connect Child and Family Services (NSW); Greater Dandenong Council (Dandenong, Victoria) and the Smith Family (Brimbank, Victoria).

During these initial contacts, team members introduced themselves, outlined the purpose of the Evaluation, and gathered background documents on the Hubs and the role of the Support Agency in relation to the Hubs. The research team's connections with Support Agency staff supported strong and collaborative research partnerships throughout the project.

Criteria for the Selection of Site Visits

Once background information was gathered, the team developed criteria for inviting Hubs to participate in site visits. These criteria were developed so that site visits would capture diversity in the following areas:

- Length of establishment;
- Auspice (public school, independent school; community centre); and
- Qualification and experience of Hub Leader.

STAGE 2

Attendance at Hubs Club, 21 July 2014

Members of the research team (Frances Press, Sandie Wong, Corine Rivalland and Annette Woods) attended the July Hubs Club meeting in Melbourne to present the proposed approach to the Evaluation and to conduct a focus group with support agency staff and other attendees. This meeting enabled the research team to refine aspects of the evaluation approach and to conduct an initial focus group.

Scoping the Service System

Originally the research team envisaged producing a map of the service system within each LGA in relation to each Hub site. It was anticipated that the maps would help identify physical enablers and facilitators of service use (e.g., distance from public transport routes, distance between services); highlight the geographic relationship between existing services and the Hub locations; and indicate parts of the service system utilised by Hubs and those aspects of the service system shared between Hubs.

However, this became more complex than originally anticipated. Many Hub sites had not produced their own data banks of local services, with some actively choosing not to prioritise this as an activity. In addition, although it was straightforward to map rail routes, bus routes were more difficult given the reliance upon private bus providers in a number of LGAs. Initial site visits indicated that many Hubs were in a very early establishment stage. Thus mapping their relationship with the service system in each LGA would not be as fruitful as originally anticipated.

Rather than pursue the mapping of each LGA, CSU's SPAN unit generated a visual map for the NSW LGAs in which the Hubs are located. Maps were only generated for NSW Hubs because the NSW Support Agency, Connect Child and Family Services, generated a comprehensive database for these LGAs (Attachment A). Additional data from the Social Network Analysis, was used to supplement the map of one LGA (Bankstown) to provide an indication of how the service system was actually used at a point in time (Attachment B).

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with support agency staff and Hub Leaders. These focus groups took advantage of existing forums. The first focus group was held with Hubs Club members at their July meeting. Subsequently, focus groups were held with Hubs Leaders in each LGA: Parramatta, Blacktown, Bankstown, Logan, Dandenong, and Brimbank as part of their regular LGA Hubs Network meetings. In a number of cases, researchers had the opportunity to make regular visits to LGA Hub Leader meetings. This provided a sense of how the Hubs were developing over time. During these meetings a Social Network Analysis (SNA) questionnaire was administered with Hub Leaders in each Local Government Area.

Site Visits

Site visits were held at 17 Hub sites:

- All Saints of Africa, Community Centre, NSW
- Bert Oldfield Public School, NSW
- Chester Hill, NSW
- Georges Hall, NSW
- Granville Multicultural Community Centre, NSW
- Information and Cultural Exchange, NSW
- Mt Druitt Public School, NSW
- Rydalmere Public School, NSW
- Dandenong Primary School, Vic
- Dandenong South Primary School, Vic
- Deer Park North Primary School, Vic
- Holy Eucharist, Vic
- Springvale Rise Primary School, Vic
- Stevensville Primary School, Vic
- Mabel Park State Primary School, Qld
- St Francis College, Qld
- Woodridge North State School, Qld

At each site, researchers observed Hub activities, spoke with Hub Leaders and a range of Hub stakeholders. Stakeholders included families using the Hubs, service providers connected to the Hub, school personnel (for school-based Hubs) including principals, deputy principals, school counsellors, teachers and representatives of parent bodies. Researchers also took advantage of meetings organised by Hub Leaders and Support Agencies where appropriate to gain additional information and feedback. For example, researchers in the Logan and Brimbank LGAs attended Hub Principals' meetings.

STAGE 3

Feedback on Interim Report

In October 2014, an Interim Report was circulated to the Project Governance Committee, Support Agency staff, Hub Leaders and key stakeholders for discussion and comment. Interim findings were presented to a meeting of the Project Governance Committee, and to a Hubs Club meeting in November 2014. Feedback was sought at these meetings and also via email and

telephone. Feedback and discussion on the Interim Report with this range of stakeholders enabled the team to refine data analysis.

Meta-analysis and recommendations

Following feedback and discussion, a two-day meta-analysis meeting was conducted in late November 2014. This meeting reviewed data in the light of feedback provided by key stakeholders and identified key areas and content for recommendations for the future direction of the program. At this meeting, areas for recommendation were refined in consultation with a key stakeholder group, including Anna Schinella and Katrina MacDonald (research assistants), Tony Fry (Scanlon Foundation), Renate Gerbhart-Jones (Connect Child and Family Services), Cemile Yuksel (National Community Hubs Program) and Lina Mourad (Hub Leader).

In December, draft recommendations were circulated to key stakeholders, including Support Agencies and Hub Leaders. These were refined in the light of the feedback provided.

FINDINGS

The Findings commence with an overview of the context of the Hubs and the philosophical foundations assumed to underpin the work of the Hubs. This is followed by an overview of the extent to which the Hubs are on track to achieve the aims of the program. As the Evaluation is on the program as whole, and not on individual Hubs, we address this issue by drawing on all the data obtained from the Evaluation across all the Hub sites visited. We then specifically report on the findings from the Network Analysis (SNA). Finally, we examine the challenges that have faced the Hubs in the first year of implementation, and the factors that have supported success.

CONTEXT OF HUBS AND HUB ROLL-OUT

The Hubs program is based on a successful model of program delivery, [*Supporting Parents – Developing Children*](#), established in the City of Hume, Victoria.

The model utilises a number of core elements:

- School-based (or close relationships with schools);
- Networking with existing services to maximise their reach and impact; and
- Resourcing through Support Agencies and the Community Hubs website.

Targeted to areas with indices of high disadvantage, Hubs work with populations that are marginalised or at risk of marginalisation, especially migrant families and new arrivals. The work of the Hubs is highly complex and requires work across multiple levels, including:

- increasing the inclusion and engagement of families from diverse cultural backgrounds (especially those that are newly arrived) into the life of the school and community;
- responding (either directly, or through a facilitation role) to many immediate problems facing such families;
- increasing the responsiveness of the service system (including schools and the Hubs themselves) to the needs and aspirations of migrant families; and
- increasing social cohesion.

A core element of the NCHP is the adoption of citizen-centric and place-based approaches. According to the Program Charter (Attachment C):

The Community Hubs must follow a place-based model, leveraging community familiarity with existing community facilities, such as schools, as sites for the delivery of a coordinated and tailored package of services for local migrant families and individuals.

Further:

The Program model must enable a citizen-centric access point to programs, where services become social. Community Hubs must work within their community and leverage existing local services, including settlement, children, family and employment and training services and organisations.

[Place-based](#) approaches in these contexts aim to strengthen connections between individuals, communities, services and agencies. They focus on tackling the problems and difficulties facing individuals and families at the community level, through community engagement and better integration of service delivery (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011).

An emphasis on *citizenship* reinforces the right of families to respectful and responsive interactions with the service system. Place-based approaches emphasise the responsiveness of programs to context. Therefore, it is expected that the context in which each Hub is located will result in each developing a distinct character, while collectively the Hubs share core understandings and objectives.

A key premise of the Hubs model is that the Hubs are a catalyst for the delivery of services and programs tailored to the specific needs of the communities they serve. This entails community input and influence upon programs, including a direct decision-making role. A key objective of the Hubs Program is to *break down silos between services funded by different departments or different levels of government* (Evaluation Brief, 2014, p. 1) so that services and programs are more easily navigated and provide responsive and cohesive supports to families.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE HUBS SUCCEEDING IN ACHIEVING THE NCHP AIMS?

Reaching communities

The Hubs are located in areas with significant cultural diversity. Brimbank, Victoria, for example, has just over 43% of its population born overseas, with over 150 languages spoken in the municipality (Brimbank City Council, n.d.). The City of Greater Dandenong is Victoria's most culturally diverse community and the second most diverse community in Australia, with 60% of the population born overseas (City of Greater Dandenong, 2014). Logan, in Queensland, has 26.1% of its population born overseas, compared with 20.5% in Queensland generally. 11.6% of Logan's population are from a non-English speaking background and of the 7,766 people settled in Logan from July 2006 to June 2012, 2,538 (32.7 %) were from the humanitarian migration stream (Logan City Council 2015). In Bankstown, NSW, 43% of the population were born overseas. The highest proportion of overseas born, were those from from North Africa and the Middle East (9.9%), South East Asia (8.6%) and Southern and Eastern Europe (5.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2015). Parramatta has a highly culturally diverse population, with over 50% of residents speaking a language other than English at home. The 2011 Census recorded that 28% of Parramatta's migrant population arrived in the five years preceding the Census compared to 20% across Sydney (City of Parramatta, 2012). In Blacktown, just over 42% of the population were overseas born. The highest proportion of this population are people from Southern and Central Asia (8.3%) and South-east Asia (8.2%), followed by Europe (7.2%). People from North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and Oceania also contribute to Blacktown's cultural diversity (ABS, 2015).

Site visits, focus groups and Hub progress reports confirmed that Hubs are reaching newly arrived and migrant families and being highly responsive to families' needs. Site visits made apparent to researchers the responsiveness of Hubs to families in crisis and their ability to assist families to negotiate and access support. Through the sites visits alone, the research team was made aware of the many critical issues facing families that are drawing on the support of the Hubs. These have included domestic violence, homelessness and unexpected deaths. As well as responding to such

crises, the Hubs have worked with families to break down social isolation, connect families with appropriate services, and build connections between more established communities and new arrivals. In many cases the proactive work undertaken by Hubs is resulting in building and recognising the strengths in the communities around the Hubs.

Interviews with school personnel indicated that the Hubs brought new or “a different group” of parents into the life of the school and that existing parents felt more confident about being involved with the school. The bridge that the Hub could create between the school, refugee families and other new arrivals was especially appreciated. The following comments from school leaders provide evidence of these trends.

Parents are engaged with the Hub. There are conversations and activities. Foundations have been laid. Parents feel welcome to go and join in.

We are already seeing a group of parents we wouldn't have tapped into because of the Hub.

A different group of parents access the school.

Families were also willing to offer stories about the impact of the Hub on their lives. The father of a family who had recently migrated to Australia regularly attended playgroup with his son. He explained that the playgroup allowed his son to socialise and understand what was required in Australian schools. One very isolated mother felt the Hub activities gave her a focus and support. A grandmother used Hub activities to spend time with her grandson and strengthen their relationship. Other parents spoke of how the Hub enabled them to become more familiar with the school, including the principal and teachers. This made them feel more comfortable when it came to more formal interactions with the school.

Community building

The community building aspect of Hub work was evident through the observations of researchers during site visits, and the comments of those interviewed.

We have groups of people linked that wouldn't have been linked in without the Hub.

An Anglo-Australian parent with intense caring responsibilities commented in regard to her involvement in a Hub:

The Hub has been a life-saver. It's really transformed everything because now there is a real community at the school. Before, I didn't have anything to do with [the migrant parents] ... it was sort of them and us [Anglo parents]. Through the Hub, I've realised that we are all parents and that we all are concerned about the same things.

During one site visit, a recently arrived migrant father made a trip to the Hub to express his appreciation for the work done with his family. He explained that his wife was no longer feeling isolated and had made friends through her attendance at the playgroup. This had a positive impact on this family's wellbeing and their awareness of and relationship to services available to them.

Connecting families, schools and communities

At all Hubs based in schools, families reported that their engagement with the Hub activities had improved their understanding of the school and school culture. Many felt more at ease with the school. When very young children attended activities at the Hub, they too were becoming more familiar with the school in ways that should support a smoother transition upon school entry.

Building stronger links between the school and the families, but also between the kids and the wider community. As a result of Hub activities, younger kids are feeling connected to the school.

Some Hubs had succeeded in facilitating significant changes to the profiles of parent bodies attached to the school, with increasing numbers of families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds on such committees. Hubs also facilitated activities that were specifically targeted to helping schools engage with families in more culturally appropriate ways. For example, one Hub partnered with a community organisation to run a series of advisory meetings aimed at empowering women to make suggestions to the school in relation to current school practices. As a result, women engaged with different school activities and brought back their assessments to school leadership and the Hub Leader. A discussion would then follow on how to tailor school activities to make them more culturally appropriate to families.

There is evidence that many Hubs located in school sites are well received and becoming embedded into the fabric of school systems. In one Hub based at a large State primary school, the Hub Leader had become a member of several school committees. At this same school the Hub Leader used school social media networks to advertise programs and send reminders, she was featured on the school website, and utilised the school newsletter to provide updates and Hub information. Many of the Hub Leaders used school newsletters to advertise the Hub program of events.

However, there was a marked variation in the extent to which each Hub was embedded into the life of the school and broader community at this stage of the roll-out of the program. This appeared to be affected by a number of factors, such as:

- the length of time the Hub Leader has been employed;
- the hosting body's (school or community agency) clarity about program aims; and
- the level and nature of support of the school or hosting agency for the aims of the Hub.

In community-based Hubs, especially when not in close proximity to a school and where school principals were not involved in the Hub, connections to local schools required more sustained effort. However, a positive for these settings was that such Hubs tended to have ready access to other community organisations.

While the location of the Hub did seem to result in differences in how the Hubs were working, this Evaluation does not provide evidence that locating a Hub in either a school or community centre was more efficient or more advantageous.

Programs, activities and services

Hubs aim to achieve their goals by providing or facilitating access to a variety of services, classes and activities for families. Hubs act as a catalyst or conduit for the provision of activities/services by other agencies, and directly provide activities/services by the Hub Leader.

It was common to target some activities primarily to children, and others upon adult family members (parents, grandparents, carers). Programs, activities and services take a variety of forms. For example, events, classes and clubs provide the opportunity for people to learn new skills, and create an inviting space for families to get to know one another; information sessions on specific issues respond to an identified need; and employment-related training (such as the delivery of Certificate III training courses) and language classes support families to achieve long-term goals.

Criteria for selecting Hub activities varied. Some programs were selected because they met identified targets for the community. For example, in one area the KinderKick AFL Program met one LGA's AEDI identified area for 3- to 6-year-olds in relation to gross motor and social skills. Other activities and programs were based on parental input/interest, or were offered in response to emerging needs.

Typical activities offered through the Hubs included:

- Supported playgroups;
- Cooking classes;
- English classes;
- IT classes;
- Physical activity classes for both adults and children (including sport, dance and yoga);
- Craft classes (some targeted to parents; some targeted to children);
- Music education;
- Breakfast Club;
- Children's/Library Story-time;
- Homework Club;
- Social clubs (e.g., Coffee Club, Tea and Talk);
- Parenting classes;
- Book exchanges;
- Harmony day;
- Grandparents Day;
- Information sessions on specific issues, for example, how to reduce electricity bills, the assistance available through Centrelink.

Building partnerships with existing agencies and leveraging existing programs to make the local service system more accessible and responsive to the needs of Hub families has worked well in many instances. Data from the interviews, site visits and the SNA have highlighted Hub connections with a diverse range of organisations, agencies and services. These include welfare agencies such as the Smith Family, The Benevolent Society, Uniting Care Burnside and Mission Australia; community development agencies such as Neighbourhood Centres; culturally specific organisations such as the Arab Council of Australia, the Lebanese Muslim Association, the

Australian Muslim Women's Association, and Indigenous Community Centres; health providers, including dental health, maternal and child health nurses, women's health centres, multicultural health centres, men's health programs, and KidsMatter; adult education providers such as TAFE; employment services; local libraries; local government; government agencies such as Centrelink; and local businesses such as those offering music or motor programs.

As well as being the conduit for the provision of existing programs and services to Hub families, some Hubs have successfully instigated new responses to community need. For instance, one Hub founded an Afghan Advisory Group as part of the Relationships to Enhance Accessible Learning (REAL) project in partnership with Foundation House. That same Hub partnered with Wellsprings for Women Inc. to provide a Learning to Live in Australia program for newly arrived mothers.

During site visits, the role Hubs play in quickly responding to critical incidents within their communities became apparent. At one Hub site, the Hub Leader, school welfare officer and maternal and child health nurse worked together to respond to a family and community in crisis after the accidental death of a child. They organised the provision of grief counselling and water safety education for families, after a child tragically died in a waterway. This was hoped to help support newly arrived families who might be unfamiliar with the risks posed by waterways.

Community input into the work of the Hub

In working to foster community input, Hubs must strike a balance between being responsive to the needs of highly vulnerable families whose capacity to engage may be compromised; and actively seeking community input. Not surprisingly, having (or taking) the time to build trusting relationships is an important factor in achieving effective community input. Families appeared more likely to be active in shaping the work of the Hub when they felt at ease within the Hub; and this was facilitated when reciprocal and respectful relationships were established between Hub Leaders and families.

For those settings with well-developed programs and community engagement, it was easier for Hub Leaders to engage with participants on their views and needs for the development of additional programs or change of structure to running programs. For those Hubs situated in areas with weaker links to communities, important objectives were to build trust and to get families to use the Hub and feel comfortable.

Some Hubs drew on volunteers from their community to help run programs. These volunteers provided expertise in a number of ways, for example, running craft or sewing classes. This provided greatly needed support for the Hub, but also provided opportunities for volunteers to utilise and develop skills and adopt a leadership roles. In other contexts, Hub Leaders were expressly setting up programs which required the Hub community to take on roles of responsibility. For example, at one Hub the weekly drop-in session became a space for participants of different cultural backgrounds to demonstrate different cooking techniques, before all participants enjoyed the food produced as a result of the demonstration in a friendly morning tea environment.

The extent to which families and communities influenced the work of a Hub seemed related to the length of time the Hub had been established, whether Hub Leaders were able to build on pre-existing relationships, and the enthusiasm and support for the Hub by the school/community agency in which it was located. By and large, Hub Leaders were facilitative and welcoming of community consultation about their Hub's program goals, structures and facilities. However, it takes time for Hub Leaders to develop a sound understanding of the services available in their areas, and to develop relationships with families, external service providers and program deliverers.

Strategies that Hub Leaders used to actively encourage and enable participants to influence the nature of the program included:

- building families' confidence and skills through opportunities to volunteer in the Hub or within the school;
- directly canvassing families' views on the types of programs they wanted/needed (one site used a visual survey to engage families who would struggle with literacy in English);
- working with families on grant proposals for programs; and
- listening to families' needs and having the knowledge of local resources to follow up with referrals and support in a timely manner.

NETWORK ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY HUBS

BACKGROUND

Social Network Analysis (SNA) allows the investigation of connections or relationships (ties) between people or things (nodes). In the context of this evaluation, it enables the investigation of connections made between, and by, the key players in a Local Government Area (LGA)—the Hub Leaders and Support Agency Hub Coordinator—as they go about their work in communities.

The social network survey was administered to Hub Leaders and, in some cases, Hub Coordinators. Community Hub clients and other community based organisations were not surveyed as part of this Evaluation. The survey invited the Hub Leaders and Hub Coordinators to list those people or organisations that they had connected with or talked to in the past week in their work in the Community Hubs Project. They were also asked to provide some details of what the communication was about and to indicate how many times they had connected in the past week.

The data collected was used to construct a social network of who the Hub Leaders were connecting with, in a typical week. As the survey asked for a non-directional reply (Who have you talked to/connected with...?) the data has been analysed as non-directional. What this means is that an assumption has been made that 'talking to' involves a dialogue and is not one-way communication. For this reason the connections are represented in the network diagrams

without direction indicators such as arrows—a connection is considered to go both ways and not just from the survey respondent to another individual.

We know from the case studies that context and Hub location has had implications for how quickly Hubs have been able to become established in communities. For this reason, the goal of this analysis is not to compare Hubs or LGAs, but rather to provide a visual and descriptive understanding of the ways that Hubs are connecting with their local communities as they provide support to the individuals and organisations that they are working with and for. *It is important when considering this analysis to remember that the network diagrams represent a point in time.* That is, respondents were asked to provide information about who they had connected to during the past week. Consequently the networks of communication represent examples of how Hub Leaders were working at specific times during the year, but do not represent the only connections made during the Community Hub Program implementation period.

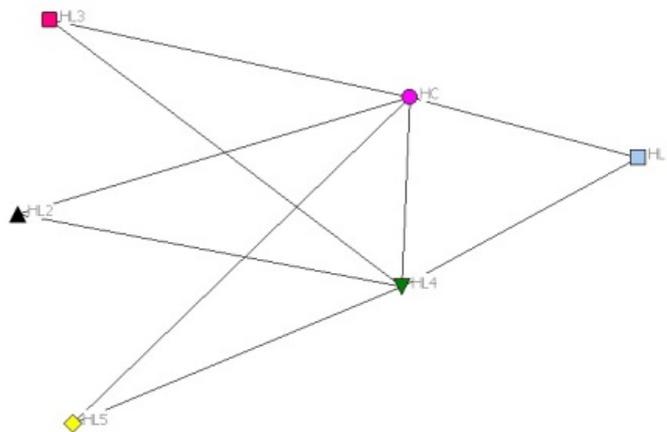
NETWORK ANALYSIS¹

The most complete data set for the SNA was collected in one LGA (hereafter LGA1). As such this LGA is a focus of this analysis and details from the other LGAs have been used to support this focus analysis. LGA1 contains five Community Hubs, all of which are located in primary school settings. The Support Agency managing this LGA is a local organisation that has many years of experience in the particular community, including a long history of providing settlement services. The Hub Leaders in this LGA are variously qualified and have different levels of experience within the local community. All have been in the role of Hub Leader for 2014 although, as a result of differences in recruitment processes, they started at varying times across the first three months of the year. All Hub Leaders and the Hub Coordinator responded to the survey, making a total of six respondents.

Before providing a representation of the whole network, it is worth considering the network of connections between just the key players in the LGA—that is, the Hub Leaders and the Hub Coordinator. LGA1 is a network where all Hub Leaders are connected and the Hub Coordinator is also included in this strong network. Figure 1 below provides a representation of the connectedness of the people working in the LGA.

¹ The Network Analysis was undertaken using the software package UCINET 6 and the network mapping using Netdraw. Both of these programs can be attributed to Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman, 2002.

Figure 1: Representation of the communication ties between five Hub Leaders and the Hub Coordinator in LGA1



It is possible to see that the Hub Coordinator (HC (circle)) is connected to all Hub Leaders. This provides evidence of the important role of the Hub Coordinator within the LGA. The Hub Coordinator provides a way for information to circulate around the complete LGA network, even if not all Hub Leaders communicate with each other during a particular time period. However in this case and other LGAs, Hub Leaders have also indicated connections directly with other Hub Leaders. This demonstrates that while the Hub Coordinator is very important in the network, not all communication is left to be facilitated through and by her. The implication of this is that communication within the network, while being ably supported by the Hub Coordinator, is not entirely reliant on this one person. This is a positive sign for how the Hubs and LGA networks are developing.

Taking a wider lens, the complete network of communications in the LGA is represented in Figure 2. Hub Leaders are represented by red circles and the Hub Coordinator by a blue square. People within the school communities around each Hub (e.g., principals and teachers) are represented using a grey square with a cross, Support Agency staff with a black triangle; providers (e.g., playgroups, sporting services) with a pink triangle, businesses (e.g., a shop or bank) with a green diamond, and finally, individuals (e.g., a community volunteer) are represented with a black square with a green circle.

This representative LGA network has a total of 82 people (nodes) that feature in the network, and 110 connections (ties) between these people. As the network representation is constructed using the responses of only 6 of the 82 people featured in the network (because only Hub Leaders and the Hub Coordinator were asked to complete the survey), it isn't valid to calculate a measure of 'density' (the average number of connections made by all individuals in the network) as would usually be the case in SNA. Instead in Table 1 below, the node level analysis of 'degree' is provided. The calculation of degree for each of the survey respondents provides the number of connections that they reported making (or that others reported making with

The network of communications for the LGA consists of a core of connections between Hub Leaders and the Support Service, including the Hub Coordinator, and then a series of connections made by Hub Leaders to people in their schools, to service providers, and to other community members and businesses. This closely follows the expected patterns set up in the Community Hubs model and demonstrates that in general the NCHP is being implemented as expected. This same pattern is represented in all of the LGA networks across the project, although only the network representations of LGA1 are provided here as an example.

The complexity of the Hub Leader's role is very evident in this representation. They are working closely with their colleagues in the LGA, as well as with staff in their schools. This provides a visual representation of why our later recommendation about the importance of clarifying lines of management is so crucial to the future of the NCHP. This representation (Figure 2) demonstrates the different ways in which Hub Leaders are working even though the pattern is similar in many ways. For example, HL1 and HL4 are connecting to a large number of Service Providers and staff within their school. In each case, even though the Community Hub has been implemented in its current form for the same duration as the other Hubs, the school communities where the Hub 1 and 4 are located have a long history of providing support to their parents and families through liaison staff and support groups. The success of these two Hubs bodes well for the Community Hubs program more generally as it provides some insight into the potential once Hubs have more time to become established and integrated into their contexts.

In contrast, HL5 has many less connections made than the other Hubs in this LGA, and those connections that are made are generally shared with other Hub Leaders as well. This might be used to indicate that HL5 is connecting less with Service Providers and this is obviously the case, however case study data collected within in Hub 5 demonstrates that the patterns of communication in this context have been very focused on connections with parents and increasing connections between families and the school. These differences are representative of the different ways of working being undertaken by Hub Leaders and the importance of there being some flexibility in the reporting processes of the NCHP. Only in this way will it be possible to capture the important work being achieved in all Community Hubs.

This bird's-eye view of the communication patterns in this LGA does provide the opportunity to view several key features of the LGA Hub networks. To begin with it is worth further considering the role being played by the Hub Coordinator in the network. Note how the Hub Coordinator is connected to all Hub Leaders, and also to other staff within their schools. This suggests that the Hub Coordinator is involved in facilitating the relationship between the school and the Hub. However, the Hub Coordinator is also connecting to a number of Service Providers. Field notes taken during Hub meetings in this particular LGA suggest that the Hub Coordinator made initial contact with a variety of Service Providers and then passed information gained onto Hub Leaders. This is one important way in which the Hub Coordinator facilitated connections for the Hub Leaders with relevant organisations and individuals in the communities around Hubs, and would seem to be a key component of the Hub Coordinator role. However note also that both the Hub Coordinator and the Hub Leaders are also connecting with other staff members working within the Support Agency (indicated in the network diagram by a black triangle). This suggests that the role of the Support Agency is about much more than the

provision of a Hub Coordinator to work with Hub Leaders. The established community connections of the Support Agency, and their capacity to provide access to other staff and facilitators who can provide support to Hub Leaders in their work would also seem to have become an important feature of the success of this LGA.

The network diagram also demonstrates that each Hub Leader is connecting to an array of different people in their schools (indicated in the network diagram by a grey square with cross). These include school leaders, teachers and other adjunct staff members such as counsellors or therapists, but in several Hubs it also includes parent groups or other support groups working in the school. This suggests that it is possible for Hubs to become integrated within the contexts in which they are set up, and that this has occurred in what has been a relatively short time. In many cases the Hubs are accessing, and no doubt providing, support and services from the school communities or community centre contexts where they are located.

It is also interesting to note that the Hub Leaders are accessing support from individuals and community members (indicated in the network diagram by a square with a green circle). These individuals include, as examples, individual volunteers acting as teachers of English, computing and a variety of crafts, through to students gaining experience through field placements. The network diagram represents the importance of volunteers and community members for the successful implementation of a program such as the Community Hubs project.

The other important group that Hub Leaders are connecting with are Service Providers. Again making these connections is a key component of the remit of Community Hubs so it is not surprising to note that Hub Leaders are connecting with a variety of Service Providers including government agencies such as Housing and Health agencies; and Government-funded programs such as parent training programs and playgroups; community organisations relevant to the communities in which they work; and local service businesses who offer programs such as music or perceptual motor programs for young children and babies. Some Hub Leaders were also calling on local shops and businesses for both information, donations and support. As mentioned, what is interesting here is not that Hub Leaders are connecting to Service Providers of course, but rather that in many cases Hub Leaders are beginning to connect with the same Service Providers. Table 2 below provides information about the number of Service Providers who are connected to more than one Hub within this LGA. These are calculated using the node level analysis 'degree'.

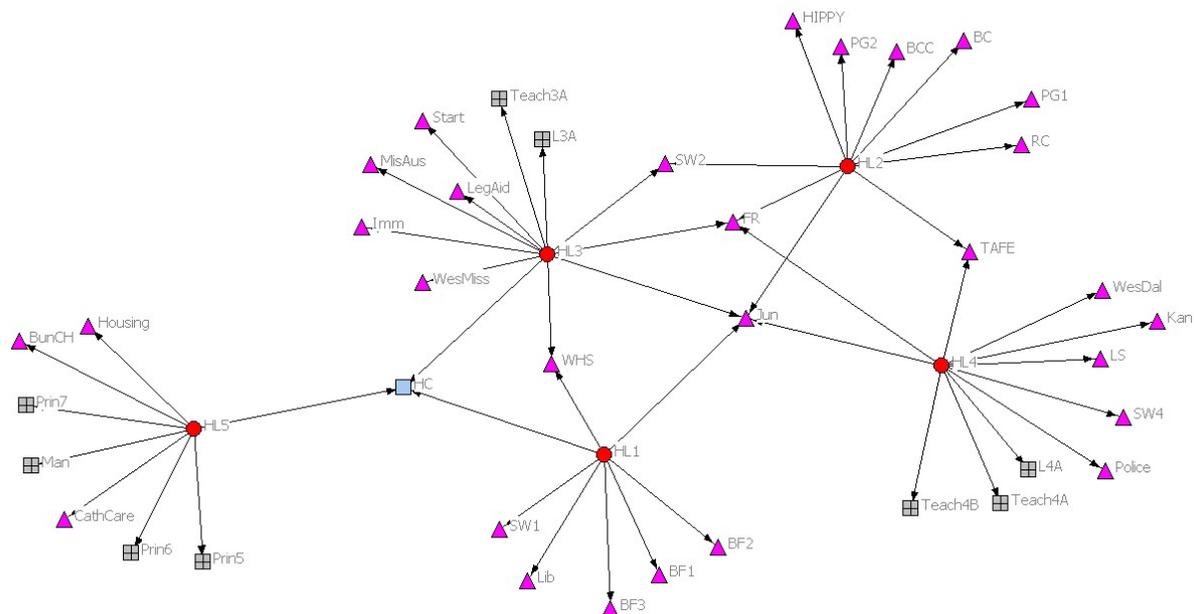
Table 2: Number of Service Providers connected to more than one Community Hub in LGA1

Connected to	Total Number of Service Providers
2 Hubs	4
4 Hubs	1
5 Hubs	1

This suggests that Hub Leaders may be discussing with their colleagues the Service Providers that they connect to and as such is a reminder of the importance of the LGA network in this Community Hub model. It may also suggest that there are key services that are relevant to the work of Hubs generally. In the case of LGA1 represented in Figure 2, those Service Providers connected to the most Hubs include an organisation that provides music-based playgroup sessions for young children and babies, and a community organisation that received government funding to provide services to families in the local area. In several LGAs, Hub Coordinators are compiling Service Provider lists and the analysis presented here supports this practice as one that may help to support Hub Leaders in their work.

This phenomenon of different Hubs connecting to the same Service Providers can be seen to be occurring in other LGAs as well. Figure 3 below is a representation of another LGA. While the data set for this LGA is incomplete, as not all relevant personnel responded², the network diagram does provide support for the claims being made about access to Service Providers.

Figure 3: Network of communications for Hub Leaders within LGA2 (Note: no responses were available for the Hub Coordinator in this case)



Even without an indication of the Hub Coordinator’s position in the network, this LGA network is connected through connections from Hub Leaders to Service Providers. Also interesting in this network diagram is the fact that HL5 who is located outside of a school context is still connecting with school staff (Prin5, 6, & 7) in surrounding schools. This is a reminder of the importance of schools in providing access to settlement services.

² In this LGA the Hub Coordinator was not asked to respond to the survey. Consequently the network diagram does not indicate a complete picture of the LGA network.

Conclusions

This analysis is initial and emerging, limited by the length of time of the Evaluation, and constraints related to collection of quality data from respondents at times when their workloads were incredibly high and researchers were attempting to add as little to their loads as possible. However, it does provide access to a visual and descriptive analysis of how the Community Hub Program is being implemented. The analysis offers the following tentative findings.

Findings

1. The Social Network Analysis provides evidence that the Community Hubs are working in ways consistent with the original plans for the Community Hub Program.
2. Hub Leaders are connecting with a variety of organisations and individuals as they work to provide support for families in the communities in which they work. Hub Leaders within the same LGA are accessing some of the same Service Providers.
3. The Support Agency Hub Coordinator plays an integral role in the LGAs. This includes connecting to Hub Leaders, to other staff in the Hubs' immediate contexts (e.g., principals in schools where Hubs are located), and by making initial connections with Service Providers before facilitating Hub Leaders to connect with those same Service Providers.
4. The Hub Coordinator's positioning within a Support Agency is crucial, with evidence that Hub Coordinators and Hub Leaders access support from other staff in the Support Agency as well as connecting with each other.
5. The Hubs are drawing on support from the schools and community centres within which they are located, and there is evidence that it is possible for Hubs to become an integral part of these contexts over time. Schools seem to feature as important organisations in settlement services for families.
6. The Hub Leaders are accessing support from community volunteers and other context specific individuals and organisations such as universities, religious and charity groups and local businesses.

CHALLENGES AND THE FACTORS THAT SUPPORT SUCCESS

An early stage process evaluation, such as this, provides the opportunity for the 'teething problems' of the NCHP to be identified and addressed, thus consolidating and strengthening the work of existing Hubs, and providing a firm foundation for future Hubs. While the overall view from the data is that the NCHP in general is on track to succeed in obtaining its overall aims, the Evaluation has also identified a number of challenges to the intended delivery of the program.

Many of these challenges relate to the 'newness' of the program and its roll-out over a diverse range of contexts in a relatively short period of time. Hub Leaders have commenced work in sites of varying levels of preparedness; a shared understanding of the philosophy underpinning the work of the Hubs has not had time to be embedded across the program—in the work of the Hubs themselves, their schools/community centres and Support Agencies; and the exact nature of the work of the Hub in each area is still evolving. However at this point it is possible to comment on some of the emerging challenges of the NCHP and we provide this discussion in the section that follows.

Resources and facilities

The resources available to Hub Leaders effects on the type of work they can engage in. Despite the fact that a stated aim of the Hub program is to “provide a *coordinated and tailored package of services* for local migrant families and their children in a *safe, family-friendly environment*” some Hubs have not had access to a dedicated Hub space. The capacity of the Hubs to access dedicated spaces and infrastructure (e.g., telephone, email, printing) has an impact on the effectiveness of Hub work.

A number of Hub Leaders commenced work without basic resources (a desk, a phone, a computer and access to email and printing facilities). The physical spaces available for the Hubs program in different areas has been varied, and in some instances quite makeshift.

A welcoming environment that provides a comfortable area for informal conversations (e.g., couches), private discussion, and dedicated spaces that invite participation in organised activities (e.g., tables for cooking activities, craft tables, computer Hubs), that are child friendly and child safe, are ideal.

We are already seeing a group of parents we wouldn't have tapped into because of the Hub. This is because we made a dedicated space. Space dedicated to the Hub is very important.

We have a friendly pre-school space.

A dedicated Hub space broadens the scope of what Hubs can provide to the community, and provides the physical space for families to ‘drop-in’. It also enables community organisations with no venue, but established programs and participant bases, to utilise a Hub for program delivery. This has a number of positive impacts, including:

- promoting broad community awareness of the Hub;
- supporting families using the Hub to access the programs delivered; and
- broadening the networks of Hub-based families with others in the community.

A dedicated office space enables Hub Leaders to complete administration away from the busyness of the Hub environment and provides a private space to meet with families one-on-one which helps to ensure confidentiality when this is required. Hub Leaders report that parents are more likely to drop-in or seek assistance at crisis points when they can speak with Hub Leaders privately.

A number of Hubs rely on shared spaces and these can be quite restrictive, especially in environments where the Hubs are regarded as peripheral, rather than integral, to the work of the school or community organisation. When only shared spaces are available, they limit parents’ capacity to ‘drop-in’; and they restrict the delivery of programs because resources and activity areas have to be packed away frequently. This limits when programs are offered, and their duration. Unfortunately, limited resources are a reality for many communities. When shared spaces work well, there is a tangible commitment to the Hub from the school or community organisation, and Hub activities receive some priority, rather than being expected to always work around the demands of others.

In one school, the Hub Leader was provided access to a large room previously only used for the other programs. In collaboration with other support staff, the room was converted from a sparse environment to a welcoming shared space that now supports both Hub and other activities. To support both initiatives, the school provided funds for the purchase of a fridge, two microwaves and cooking equipment. This has enabled the Hub Leader to establish a dedicated cooking area that is used to provide refreshments for families and for external programs offered in the Hub such as cooking classes.

The complexity of the work

The Hub Leaders' role is complex. Many Hubs are working to support families facing structural barriers to their participation in Australia society. The current context of detention, protection and visa applications has implications for many families who are left economically and socially marginalised through government policies which actively restrict their capacities to obtain social, health and education services, engage in further education, seek paid employment and so forth. Such families live in precarious situations necessitating sensitive and informed responses by Hub Leaders.

The work of the Hub Leader entails developing understandings about, and responding to, a diverse range of child, family and community needs. It requires skills in communicating, connecting with, and negotiating a range of services (including education, family and health and services) to support children, families and communities. Hub Leaders must be sensitive and culturally competent, as well as knowledgeable in a range of areas (e.g., child development/family engagement/community building), and/or skilled in accessing the expertise of others. Although Hub Leaders have reported that the work is highly rewarding and that they were receiving sufficient support, in some cases, Hub Leaders did report feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

An integral component of the Hubs is the Hub Leaders' role in relationship building with families. Hub Leaders interviewed regarded the development of relationships—both between the families, and between the Hub Leader and families—as a crucial element of their work, and an essential stepping-stone to working with families respectfully. Some Hub Leaders have suggested that this type of work—which one Hub Leader described as looking like “just having a cup of tea and talking with a parent”—was not always perceived as ‘legitimate’ or ‘real’ work by others. For instance, some Hub Leaders felt that there was little opportunity to record time spent in the important work of relationship building in current NCHP accountability regimes. Other Hub Leaders commented that this type of engagement with families was not always valued by colleagues in the school community. Such perceived attitudes point to a need within the larger project to endorse and legitimate relationship-building activities. One way that this might be achieved would be to include it within documentation requirements or to recognise such activities in position descriptions, goals and objectives for Hubs and Hub Leaders.

Facilitating high levels of family engagement and input into the Hub, and ensuring access to relevant and culturally responsive services and programs, takes time as well as skill. Ideally, Hub Leaders should develop a deep understanding about their community, its strengths and needs, before implementing a broad suite of activities and programs. However, Hub Leaders sometimes felt under pressure to implement activities/undertake tasks suggested by Support Agencies, other Hubs, or school personnel, before they had properly assessed or consulted

about community needs. Relatedly, a number of Hub Leaders reported they felt pressured to provide tangible evidence (e.g., numbers of families engaging in specific Hub activities) that they were being successful in their work. This may, in part, be an unintended consequence of current accountability requirements.

A reality for the Hub Leaders is that they face competing demands upon their time. Hub Leaders need support to establish priorities and one way to do this would be to use the core goals of being citizen-centric and place-based as a reference point for decision-making. However, data gathered during focus groups and interviews indicated that understandings of citizen-centric and place-based philosophy varied across those involved. Although a number of participants expressed confidence in their understanding of these terms, others were less confident. Often understandings were implied rather than made explicit, and were assumed to be covered by terms such as ‘relationship building’ or as ‘community development’. The lack of specificity about these terms and their implications for practice is potentially problematic as it means that Hubs and Support Agencies are *assuming*, rather than *creating* or *testing* shared understandings and approaches. Explicit resourcing, training and dialogue about what it means to work in citizen-centric and place-based ways could be of great benefit to Support Agencies and Hubs, providing a reference point for practice, especially when Hubs need to prioritise the type of work to be undertaken, or face pressure to work in ways that accord with the auspicing agency’s dominant ways of working.

Programs, activities and services

The anticipated outcomes of the Hubs are only likely to be achieved when a range of professionals, organisations and community members work together. So an important element of the NCHP is that Hub Leaders are able to draw on existing available supports within the community to provide services for children, families and communities, whilst being supported in this role by the Community Hubs structure—including the School Principal or Community Organisation Coordinator, and the Support Agency.

Unsurprisingly, Hub Leaders bring their own experience, expertise, knowledge, dispositions and capacities to their work. They too are a diverse group, having a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as different professional backgrounds. For some, having the same language background as families in the local community facilitated family engagement. For example, in one Hub, the Hub Leader draws on her capacity to speak a community language to provide English language courses. In another, the Hub Leader translates important school information to newly arrived families who share her language background. Having a sound knowledge of the local community and cultural nuances assist Hub Leaders to negotiate local/community politics.

A number of Hubs with a longer establishment time, or that were able to take advantage of a school or community centre track record of similar support, offered their communities a suite of programs that were well attended and displayed a high degree of community ownership. Hub Leaders acted as ‘facilitators’ and/or ‘coordinators’, rather than deliverers of services. Indeed, access to external agencies with appropriate expertise, tended to result in services that were more effectively delivered than when they were delivered by the Hubs Leaders. However, there is a caveat. Sometimes Hub Leaders must directly deliver activities because appropriate supports are unavailable in the community, or such activities are embarked upon to generate knowledge about the Hub. In some cases Hub Leaders themselves provide services, often taking

aspects of external programs and offering them internally. At times this may be appropriate, but at other times, this may not be the best use of the Hub Leaders' expertise, nor result in the best delivery of that particular program. Again, it is vital to take account of the local context when making judgments about Hub Leader decision-making and practice.

The successful delivery of external programs within the Hubs can be affected by a lack of child care. If Hub Leaders are offering child-minding to support parent participation, they are not available to support parent engagement during program delivery. Some Hub Leaders have successfully addressed this by obtaining support for running 'playgroups' while parent activities are being conducted (for example, by TAFE or university early childhood students). However, not all Hubs physical spaces conducive to running concurrent activities with children.

Highly successful Hub programs displayed some of the following characteristics:

- They facilitated families' access to supports, such as English language classes, that had flow-on effects to the families' capacities to engage more fully with the service system, school community, and Australian society more broadly;
- They provided soft entry points (non-obtrusive, non-stigmatising) for families to access specialist advice and services;
- They facilitated families' access to community networks more broadly, through formal (e.g., organised activities) and informal (e.g., drop-in) means;
- They facilitated, or had access to, strong volunteer networks. These could be used in two ways: to bring in volunteers to support the work of the Hubs; or to provide Hub families volunteering opportunities to build confidence and skills. Some Hubs successfully engaged TAFE and university students, from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, to support their work;
- Families displayed a high degree of 'ease' with their use of the Hub and felt able to influence the work of the Hub; and
- Reciprocal and respectful relationships between families, Hubs and Schools supported greater family engagement in decision making of activities at the school level.

Funding constraints

Ninety percent (90%) of Hub funding is allocated to Hub Leaders' salary costs. The availability of funds for activities and programs was highly variable from Hub to Hub. The lack of access to funds was the source of stress for a number of Hub Leaders. Money to provide refreshments (e.g., tea, coffee), activities for children (such as craft materials), and so forth is required to create the welcoming space that is desired by the program. Some Hub Leaders reported using their own money to buy such supplies. This is unreasonable given the relatively low salaries of most Hub Leaders. In some cases Hub Leaders reported that the school or centre financing processes made it difficult for them to access credit or petty cash, or to order materials. This situation left them with no option but to pay for resources and then ask to be reimbursed. In a small number of Hubs, Hub Leaders reported that the process of reimbursement was so difficult that they had given up on that as well, thus paying for their own resources. As our site visits also provided evidence of sites where the auspicing body had managed to find simple and efficient ways for Hub Leaders to access the resources that they needed, we would consider this to be a priority for existing and new Hubs.

Although Hub Leaders have a role in facilitating access to existing supports and programs, there is also a need to source funding for new programs in response to identified community need. This tended to work best in environments where the auspicing body (school or community organisation) had a shared understanding of their aims and goals for their community and saw funding as a joint enterprise rather than the sole responsibility of the Hub Leader. For example:

Some Hub Leaders have adopted creative approaches to obtain resources and meet the cost of program delivery. For example, one Hub Leader approached the teaching staff from the Preparatory classrooms about sharing the cost of a Sea Life program that was delivered at the Hub for parents/community members and the children from the Prep classrooms. The cost of the program was halved for the Hub Leader and she chose the activity based on discussions with the Prep teachers about curriculum foci. In another example, a Hub Leader attended a staff meeting to ask for furniture/resources that were not being used currently within the school. This resulted in chairs, tables, a microwave and craft resources for use in the Hub.

While it is recognised that there will necessarily be differences in financing processes, there is an urgent need to clarify with Principals and other managers the need for Hub Leaders to have access to resources and of their responsibility in ensuring efficient and viable ways for this access to be provided.

Lines of support and accountability

In school-based Hubs, School Principals seem to play a significant role in the success or otherwise of the Hubs. Hubs were most successful when Principals were ‘on-board’ with, and committed to, the Community Hubs’ program and supported the implementation of strategies to embed the Hub into the life of the school. For instance, supportive Principals variously met regularly with Hub Leaders and worked with them to set goals for the term. They provided appropriate, visible and accessible spaces; communicated the work of the Hubs in school communiqués; participated informally in Hub activities (e.g., morning tea) and introduced the Hub Leaders during orientation meetings and made them an integral part of the institutional life of the school. In some cases, management of the Hub was a shared responsibility of the leadership team and as such did not rest with just the Principal. Where this worked well it provided the opportunity for greater support for the Hub Leader and their work, and ensured a shared understanding across a broad range of staff in the school. For example in one Hub, the Hub Leader met weekly with the Special Needs Leadership Team. This provided the Hub Leader with support from the Principal, Deputy Principals, Head of Special Education, ESL Coordinator, and School Counsellor on a regular basis. However it also provided shared understandings and the opportunity to share information about families and children, and school and community issues.

In some instances, however, the work of the Hub appeared poorly understood by the broader school community. For example, a citizen-centric approach necessitates that the Hub Leaders’ prioritise the needs of the family. In one instance where school personnel had troubled relationships with a family with whom the Hub Leader was working, this created some tensions. The Hub Leader felt there was a perception of ‘siding’ with the family against the school. Over

time, open communication and opportunities for long term benefits to the school to become evident (such as improved family relationships) should help such tensions to subside.

The Support Agencies were widely praised for the support, resourcing and direction they offered Hub Leaders, and their responsiveness to problems and challenges that have emerged in this establishment phase. Support Agencies provided a range of support such as: recruitment and orientation; training; mentoring; professional advice and supervision; and management. In some cases, however, there was some confusion in regards to lines of accountability—with questions raised over to whom Hubs Leaders should report (e.g., Principal or Support Agency). Some clarity and communication over the different lines of accountability appears warranted.

Discussions with some Hub Leaders and within the Hubs Club, revealed some confusion regarding whether school-based Hubs ‘belonged’ to the schools in which they based or the school and the surrounding community. Some Hub Leaders had observed that families with children enrolled in other schools in the same local area were unsure whether they could use the Hub. While this has been an issue for some Hubs, it has not been the experience of all families or all Hubs.

Communities of Practice

Throughout the establishment phase of the project, the facilitation of communities of practice through Hub Leader meetings, Principals meetings, and the Hubs Club, have been invaluable. These forums can be important reference points for training, exchanging information including successful strategies, the identification of issues, and challenges and problem solving. However, some Hub Leaders noted that LGA based Hub Leader meetings had, up to this point, focused primarily on training. They expressed a desire for the allocation of free discussion time at Hub Leaders meetings, so that they could share their experience and expertise with one another, as well as debrief about challenges they face. In other LGAs there had been discussion about the use of the Hub Leader meetings for visiting speakers to deliver information about what they could offer the Hub. While Hub Leaders in one LGA discussed the importance of hearing from agencies and local businesses about what they could offer the Hub, they too wanted to ensure time for open discussion and sharing with their LGA colleagues. Open discussion about current needs is required regularly to ensure that Hub Leaders and the Support Agency are working together to ensure the Hub Leader meetings are useful and content is timely.

The idea of a national conference was raised by a number of Hub Leaders across many LGAs. Such an event would be highly beneficial. It could consolidate the national identity and profile of the program, enable Hub Leaders to learn from one another’s experiences, and provide an opportunity for joint professional development. We would recommend that the program provide opportunities for shared training and professional development, as well as for Hub Leaders to present their work and successes to others.

The Community Hubs website is a valuable learning and networking resource. Yet, not all Hub Leaders are confident in their use of technology, and this, coupled with a sense of being overstretched, has meant that it has thus far been underutilised. However, there is scope for the website to create a strong ‘virtual’ community of practice that could be highly beneficial.

Some strategies that could help increase the volume of traffic on the website would be:

- ensure that the purpose and audience of the website, or sections of the website are clear;
- provide automatic email or social media alerts to Hub Leaders when updates to the website are made available;
- use the website to deliver forms, information, announcements, and other important details so that it becomes an important point of access for all concerned;
- consult Hub Leaders about how the website might be designed to support their work; and
- ensure that appropriate training is provided to Hub Leaders and that this training is pitched at the different levels of skill and familiarity with ICT that are evident amongst the Hub Leaders.

Hub Leaders' degree of comfort with technology was also a significant factor that impacted on their capacity to engage with digital information technology. Whilst some Hub Leaders were very confident and used Facebook and other technologies to communicate their work to their community, others were very reticent to do so. Given the potential for such technologies to facilitate engagement of, and communication with, the local and professional community, training and support in this area may need to be provided for some Hub Leaders.

Over time, a strong relationship between the Hub and the school should enhance the responsiveness of the school to the families and communities targeted by the Hubs. This was evident in the Hubs that had been established for a longer period of time. There appears to be a variety of ways that Hub Leaders can be incorporated and legitimated in the life of the school: invitations to attend staff meetings, parent body meetings, being introduced to the school community through assemblies, being invited to attend enrolment meetings for new students and so forth. Over time, the aim is to develop a relationship whereby there is reciprocal influence between the Hub and the school—where each influences the practices of the other in a positive sense and as a result new practices emerge.

Data collection and evaluation

The Community Hubs' project has a sound 'theory of change' and 'program logic'. The outcomes and goals of the project, and the means by which they aim to be achieved, are clearly identified and documented. This has led to the development of reporting documents to ensure accountability and determine effectiveness. The fact that the NCHP has achieved this strong framework so early in the implementation phase is an achievement. However, negative experiences of the process of reporting featured strongly in responses from key stakeholders.

Reporting, and issues related to reporting, have featured in discussions across Support Agency staff, Hub Leaders, and others involved in the program. While there seems to be a general consensus that reporting back to the funding body is a necessary task, there was concern about the current routines and processes. It seems evident that there remain discrepancies in understandings about procedures and the finer points of how to complete the forms and templates. There continue to be comments made describing the task as onerous and discussion about the amount of time taken to complete the reports.

Comments often relate to:

- the amount of reporting required;
- the format for reporting;
- the level of detail required;
- the time taken to complete current reports;
- overlaps in data reported monthly, quarterly, etc; and
- the difficulty capturing many of the elements of the Hub Leaders' work within the reports as they are based on counts of participants.

In contrast to these ways of thinking, some of those involved in the Evaluation have discussed the usefulness of some elements of the reporting processes for framing their work, and the success of sharing reports with principals or managers so that key service personnel have a more complete view of the work being conducted at the Hub.

Our conversations and data collection with Support Agencies and Leaders across all LGAs would suggest that reporting is often categorised as:

- an administration task that is completed for others, whether the Support Service or Funding Agency; and
- an additional task to their Hub Leader role, or as a task that takes time away from their 'real work'.

This has implications for the capacity of Hub Leaders to consider the reports as useful to their role. For example, the reports are rarely discussed as being a foundation for program evaluation and future planning at a Hub Level. There remains for some at least, a perception that current reporting processes are a temporary measure, part of trialing the Hubs Program. The logical extrapolation from this perception is that once the trial is over the reports will no longer be required. This idea was articulated by a Hub Leader within a regular discussion on reports in a Hub Leaders meeting:

I can't wait till December when I won't be doing these anymore right. The trial will be over so we won't have to.

(Hub Leader, September 2014)

Reasons for why the reports are being seen as external to the 'real work' of Hub Leaders are likely to be numerous. Significantly, as well as adopting a program wide reporting format for their work, the Hubs have been undergoing the Evaluation of this report, and Support Agencies have had to produce an Appraisal and Review Report on the Hubs with School Principals/Community Centre Heads and Hub Leaders to assess compliance. This attention to evaluation has foregrounded issues of accountability to such an extent that it possibly feels overwhelming, to some at least.

We suggest that the following strategies will help ensure that future reporting processes are seen as useful and integral to the work of Hub Leaders.

- The role description for the Hub Leader should clearly articulate all dimensions of the role;
- A definitive set of simple instructions and routines for the completion of the reports should be prepared and circulated to all Hub Leaders and minimal changes made until further consultation;
- Hub leaders should be consulted in an evaluation process of the current reporting frameworks. This consultation process should be purposefully conducted to enable the reports to become central to the planning and evaluation work of the Hub Leaders; and
- Current Hub Leaders could be supported by 1) training that encourages an approach to evaluation for planning and learning as part of a cyclic consultation, planning, evaluation process; and/or 2) administrative support built into budgets.

Such measures should promote democratic evaluation and reporting as an important foundation for successful conduct of the Community Hub Project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The recommendations are geared to strengthening the supports that enable the effective running of the National Community Hubs Program (NCHP). Overall, the NCHP is making a positive impact on the lives of many families in the communities where the Community Hubs are located. This seems to be the case regardless of how long the Hubs have been active. As is to be expected in the early stages of a national program of this size, the initial roll-out has brought to light ambiguities, tensions and stresses which, if left unaddressed, risk undermining the capacity of the NCHP to fulfill its objectives. The challenges facing the program often relate to the work of the Hubs being subject to competing priorities. Hence many of the following recommendations address the need to ensure clarity about program objectives; expected ways of working; accountabilities and line management. Addressing existing challenges will consolidate the effectiveness of existing Hubs, and ensure a firm foundation for future expansion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM OVERALL

1. Maintain the role of Support Agencies

Rationale: A strength of the current model of the NCHP is its utilisation of Support Agencies at the State or Local Government level to facilitate and resource the work of the Hubs. The Support Agencies play an important role in: ensuring the work of the Hubs is focused on the outcomes of the NCHP; identification of shared problems across the Hub Sites in the LGA and facilitation of collective and site-based problem solving; and professional support and training for Hubs and Hub Leaders.

2. Embed the philosophy of NCHP at each level of Hubs delivery

Rationale: The purpose of the National Community Hubs Program is to *enhance social inclusion and social cohesion*, especially for newly arrived families (including asylum seekers and those with refugee status) and migrant families. The Hubs are funded to provide a *citizen-centric access point* for the coordinated delivery of appropriate services, using a *place-based* approach. However, the research team did not find evidence of a universally shared understanding of these approaches to service delivery. The focus upon social inclusion and social cohesion through citizen-centric and place-based approaches is appropriate to the achievement of the objectives of the program. The research team recommends embedding these as a unifying feature of the philosophy of the NCHP.

Importantly, a focus upon the development and implementation of a shared NCHP philosophy can be used as a reference point for decision-making, strategic planning and the establishment of program and work priorities.

To achieve the overall objective, we further recommend:

- 2.1 That a clear summary statement of the philosophy of the NCHP is developed and made available as appropriate.** This summary statement should be included in, or attached to, key sources of information about the program, for example: the website; calls for expressions of interest for funding; staff recruitment documents and so forth.
- 2.2 That Support Agency staff and Hub Leaders are supported to enact the NCHP philosophy through access to resources and professional development that address place-based and citizen-centric ways of working.**

3. Reinforce core principles, foci and outcomes of the NCHP while enabling flexible responses to State policy contexts.

Rationale: Variation across jurisdictional policy contexts necessitates that NCHP has the capacity to adapt to the policy contexts in which Hubs are located. The ultimate objective of the NCHP is not that each Hub operates the same way regardless of where it is located, but that each Hub works effectively and responsively with its target communities to achieve the stated outcomes. This is of paramount importance. However such adaptation needs to occur in ways that do not risk the integrity of the program. Making core principles, program foci and outcomes explicit in funding agreements and documents guiding the work of Support Agencies and Hub Leaders, can help maintain the integrity of the NCHP while enabling each Hub to respond to its context.

To achieve this overall objective, we recommend:

- 3.1 That descriptions and key messages of the NCHP are consistent across all documents directly related to the NCHP**
- 3.2 That the primary focus of the Hubs is newly arrived and migrant families, however this is not to the exclusion of non-migrant families.**

Rationale: While the efforts of Hub Leaders should be directed to engaging newly arrived and migrant families and appropriately responding to identified needs and aspirations, programs should not, as a rule, actively exclude non-migrant families. Community capacity building and the creation of social cohesion requires that opportunities are created for newly arrived families and their communities, longer established communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to mix, share expertise, learn from one another and jointly engage in programs where appropriate.

- 3.3 That Community Hubs should focus on providing services to the community broadly as well as to families who already attend the school or centre where they are based.**

Rationale: Two important foci of Hubs are: the engagement of families with children who are below school age in early childhood activities; and the facilitation of community cohesion. This necessitates that Hub programs are open to families who may not have children at the school at which the Hub is located.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE EMPLOYMENT AND RETENTION OF HUB LEADERS

4. Recognise the complexity of the work of the Hub through employment requirements and processes, professional development, and professional support.

Rationale: Hub Leaders are pivotal to the success of the Hubs. The work is complex and reliant on building and sustaining trusting relationships with families, school personnel and a sound knowledge of the community. Employing, and then retaining effective Hub Leaders and building on their community knowledge are critical to the success of the NCHP over time.

To ensure that recruitment processes result in the employment of Hub Leaders with skills and expertise appropriate to the requirements of the job, we recommend the following:

- 4.1 **That each stage of the employment process should clearly and accurately describe the work of the Hubs and the expectations of the Hub Leader's role.** We recommend that this commence in the initial stages of recruitment and is carried through to induction. For example, the package of materials sent to those interested in applying for Hub Leader positions should include the program philosophy; the outcomes statement; clear job descriptions; and a link to the Community Hubs Website.
- 4.2 **That key elements of the NCHP philosophy (i.e., attention to newly arrived and migrant families, social cohesion, community capacity building, place-based approaches and citizen-centric service delivery) are referenced throughout employment and induction processes for Hub Leaders.**
- 4.3 **That there is Support Agency representation on employment panels to help ensure the intent of the NCHP is reflected in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of Hub Leaders.**
- 4.4 **That there are clear and agreed lines of accountability for Hub Leaders.**

Rationale: Employment arrangements for Hub Leaders vary between jurisdictions. Regardless of how they are employed, Hub Leaders can be placed in positions where the expectations of the employing body, the auspicing body and the NCHP may be in tension. Therefore it is important that responsibilities for line management, induction, training, support etc. are clearly understood between the key parties. Agreed work priorities for Hub Leaders must be established with reference to the goals sought by the NCHP and the core expectations outlined in 4.8.

4.5 That funding for Hubs is contingent upon the site providing Hub Leaders with appropriate facilities to undertake their work.

Rationale: There has been a high degree of variability in the types of infrastructure available to Hub Leaders. Those Hubs who did not have dedicated access to spaces appropriate to all of their activities were disadvantaged and found many of the key purposes of their work challenged and difficult to achieve. Hub Leaders need their own desk, computer, telephone, and access to email and printing, and should not have to source these themselves. Such facilities should be considered ‘in-kind’ contributions to the Hub program by the school or auspicing body. For schools, the allocation of such space should be supported by their relevant system or department of education.

The Hub model is based on the creation of a warm, welcoming environment for families. Ideally, Hub Leaders should have an office in which they can hold private conversations with families and a space in which to conduct programs, which can be made comfortable and welcoming for families to drop in. If it is necessary for the Hub to utilise shared spaces, it is important that there is predictability about when and how the space can be used and a prioritising of the Hub in these arrangements.

4.6 That the 10% funding allocation for Hub resources is made readily accessible for Hub Leaders.

Rationale: Currently, there is variability in how readily the Hub Leader can access this money. The research team were concerned that a number of Hub Leaders referred to buying resources from their own wages, or having to wait a considerable period before money they had expended was reimbursed. This is an unreasonable expectation on part-time staff on modest wages.

4.7 That core expectations of the Hub Leader’s role are identified and made explicit to relevant stakeholders.

Rationale: The identification of core expectations would provide guidance for Hub Leaders, employers and auspicing bodies. These core expectations should align with the philosophy of the NCHP but not be overly prescriptive.

4.8 That core expectations of the Hub Leader’s work include the following:

- **A capacity to work in culturally sensitive and responsive ways.**
- **Creation of soft entry points for families and their children as conduits for specific supports for families and children.**

- **Facilitation of on-site service/program provision by external agencies.** At times, in the absence of appropriate services, direct service delivery by the Hub Leader (or an appropriately trained Hub volunteer) may be an appropriate option, but it is not the prime function of the Hub Leader.
- **The development of a sound understanding of the services/programs available in their communities (for example, through attending local interagency meetings) and strong working relationships.** A lack of familiarity with the full scope of the local system hinders the capacity of Hubs to work effectively and places an unrealistic expectation on Hub Leaders to be all things to all people. In the case of Inter-agency attendance, it may be possible to share attendance across the Hubs of the LGA, and to bring back information from the Interagency to all Hub Leaders at their regular meetings. Nevertheless, it is important that *all* Hub Leaders become familiar with the local service system.
- **Respectful and responsive relationships with families and service providers in the community as well as families and staff within the school.**

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

To help ensure Hub Leaders are supported to appropriately undertake their work, we recommend:

5. **That professional support is provided to enable Hub Leaders to understand the situations of new arrivals under various visa and settlement arrangements, as well as the communities in which they are working.**
6. **That opportunities are provided for Hub Leaders to share and learn from one another's skills and expertise.**

6.1 That LGA based Hub Leader meetings be retained. These meetings should include time for Hub Leaders to talk with one another and share experiences, knowledge and practices.

Rationale: Collectively, the Hub Leaders bring a diverse range of qualifications and work experience to the program. For example, those with community development backgrounds may have excellent skills in community building and facilitating the delivery of programs by external agencies, but may find it difficult to understand and negotiate the school system. Conversely, those who have worked within schools as teachers or school counsellors may be able to readily negotiate the school system, but find the community development aspects of the work more difficult. A potential

strength of the NCHP is the diversity of skills and expertise that can be shared and transferred between Hub Leaders.

7. That all employing or auspicing bodies (schools and /or community centres) provide Hub Leaders with access to organisational /departmental professional development opportunities.

Rationale: Hub Leaders' access to professional development outside the Hub program has been inconsistent. However, where Hub Leaders have access to professional development provided by the system, centre or school in which their Hub is located, this has had the dual impact of direct professional benefit to the Hub Leader, and supporting the Hub to be seen as an integral part of the organisational culture.

8. That Hub Leaders are provided with access to Clinical Supervision.

Rationale: The work of the Hub Leaders is complex and challenging requiring high professional expertise and skills. Further, as Hub Leaders frequently engage with and support families who experience (or have experienced in the past) a range of significant challenges (such as mental health problems, violence and discrimination), the work of the Hub Leader is also potentially traumatising. As is best practice in the field of social work, it is important that Hub Leaders have access to (either through the Support Agency or School system) clinical supervision to maintain, support and develop their professional functioning and psychological well-being.

9. That a national conference of Hub Leaders and Support Agencies is held in 2015.

Rationale: A national conference targeted to existing Hubs is timely. A national conference would: consolidate the national identity of the NCHP; enable Hub Leaders and Support Agencies to learn from one another's successes; facilitate joint problem solving; and provide an excellent opportunity to review, update and refine existing resources that can be shared across all Hub sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO EVALUATION

10. Consult with support agencies and Hub Leaders to review current evaluation requirements so that they are manageable, meaningful and more fully capture the work of the Hubs.

Rationale: Evaluation is an important process for reflecting upon and refining the work of the Hubs so that they can better attain their outcomes. This means capturing qualitative as well as quantitative information in a form that is manageable (given the limited hours that Hub Leaders are employed) and is in a form that can meaningfully inform future planning both at the level of the Hub site, and the program overall. Attention should be paid to minimising duplication in data reporting requirements, and the links between evaluation, reporting, planning and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY HUBS WEBSITE

11. Maximise the usability, relevance and impact of the [Community Hubs website](#)

Rationale: The Community Hubs Website is a potentially powerful resource for the NCHP, as well as being a publicly accessible information site about community Hubs. Currently, the website houses background material and resources relevant to the NCHP, it provides a forum for the Hub Leaders to raise issues and share information, and provides general information about the NCHP and particular Hubs (including case studies). Arguably, it is the national public face of the NCHP. However, there has been some concern that the website is underutilised despite the excellent resources housed on it. Improving utilisation will necessitate improving usability and relevance for end users. To this end, we recommend:

- 11.1 That the website is reviewed in consultation with representatives from existing and potential user audiences to establish clarity about its audiences and purposes.** Currently, the website serves multiple purposes, but it is not always clear which section of the website is serving who and this creates confusion for users. A short and purposeful consultation with groups that the website is targeting would help highlight areas of ambiguity and strengthen usability.
- 11.2 That a website ‘tour’ is conducted with Hub Leaders at the National Conference and time allocated for Hub Leaders to provide input into shaping the website.** An anticipated outcome of the website is that it provides a site for Hub Leaders to access resources, share stories and discuss issues that they are facing in the course of their work. To do this, they need to know how to navigate the site, and further they need to have the opportunity to provide feedback and input.
- 11.3 That Hub Leaders, Support Agency staff and the web developer work together to develop the usability and functionality of the private forum, and that clear, transparent and accurate guidelines about privacy and access are provided.**
- 11.4 That guidelines are established to ensure confidentiality of information shared on the public site.** The website shares ‘real life’ stories from the Hubs, therefore it is important that these are told in ways that do not identify families and others without informed consent.. Note that it might be possible to identify people through the circumstances of the story, without names being revealed.

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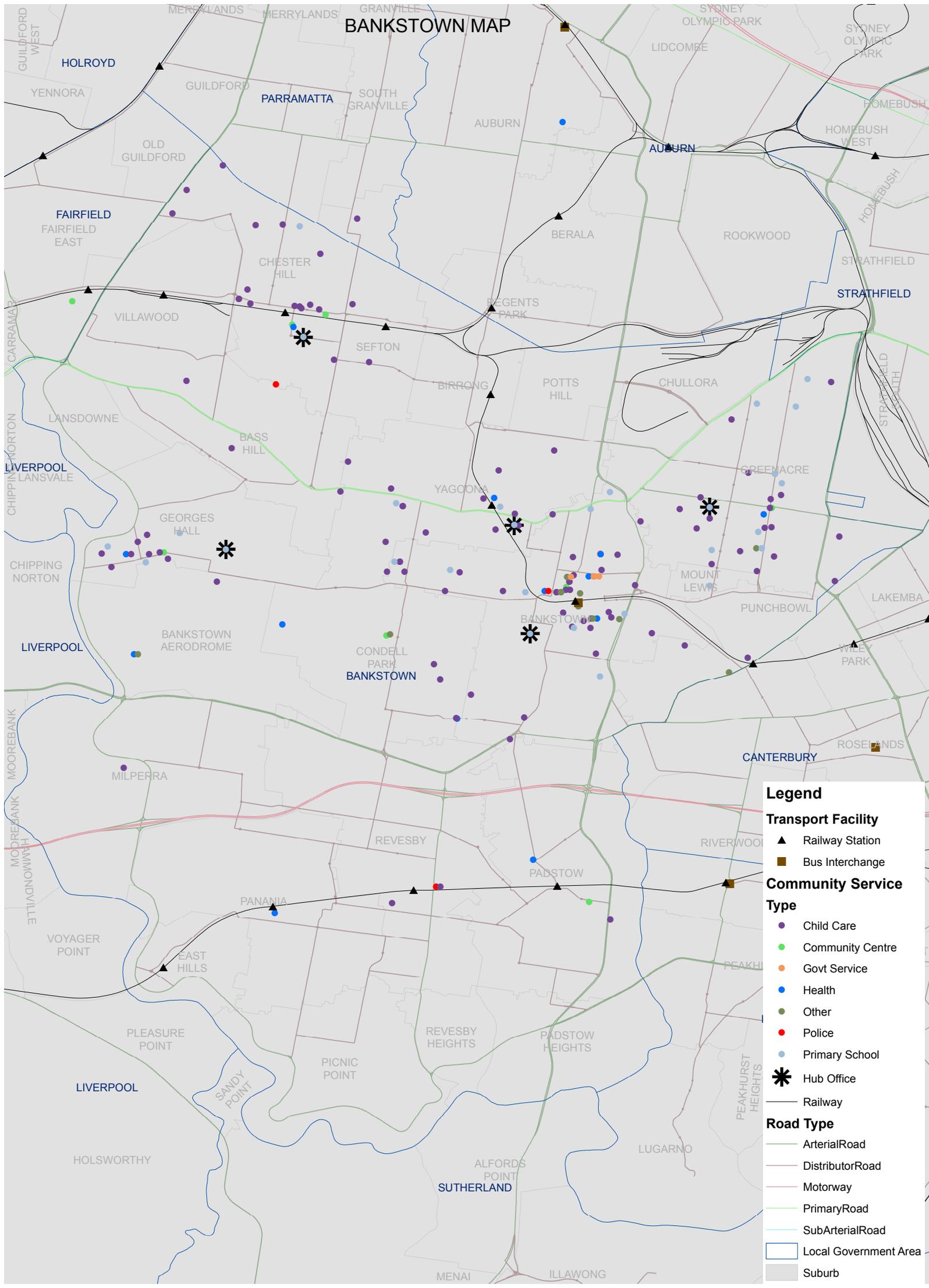
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APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT A: SPAN MAPS

Hub locations are hyperlinked to the Community Hub Program website.

BANKSTOWN MAP



Legend

Transport Facility

- ▲ Railway Station
- Bus Interchange

Community Service Type

- Child Care
- Community Centre
- Govt Service
- Health
- Other
- Police
- Primary School
- ✱ Hub Office

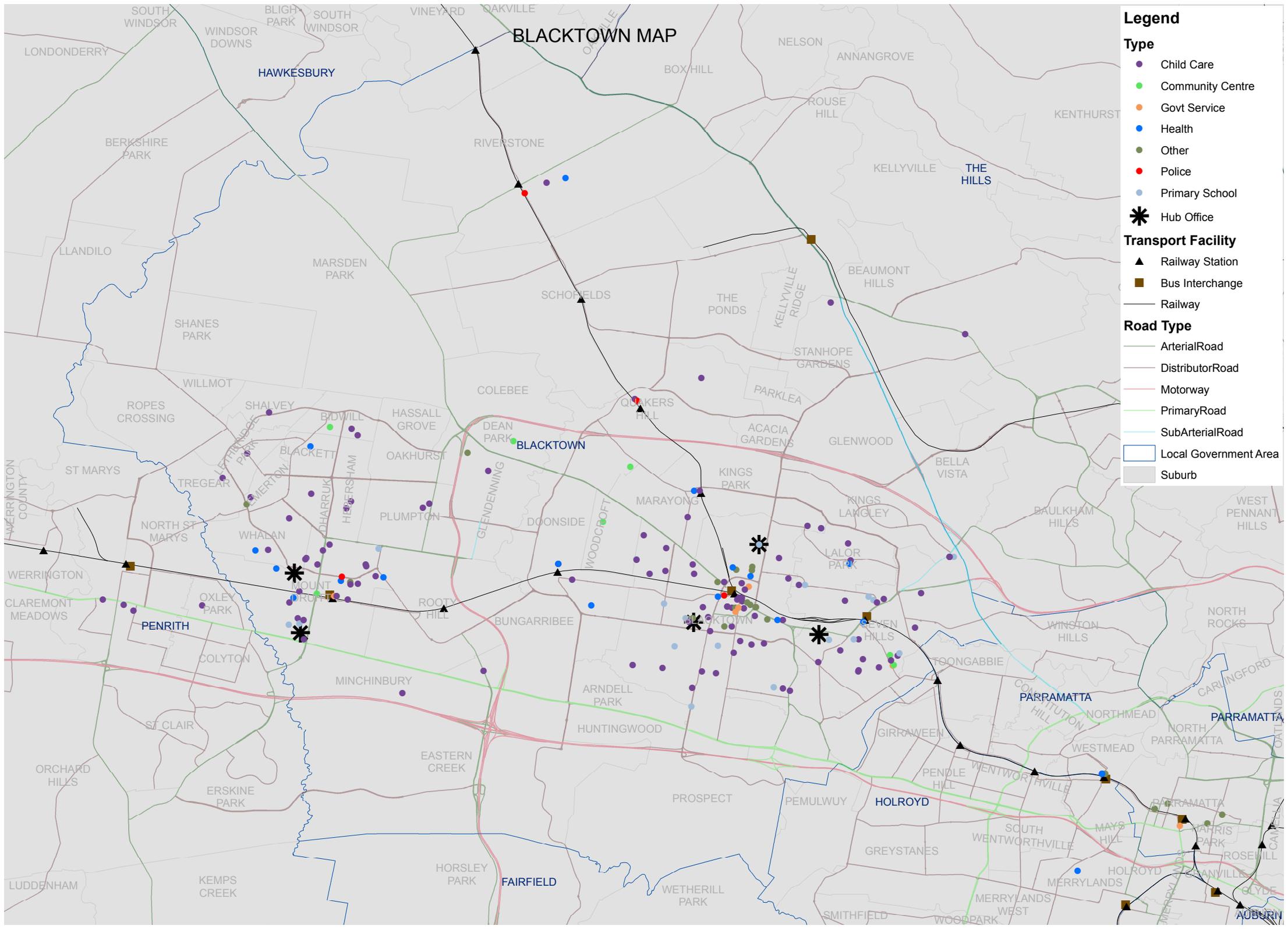
Road Type

- Railway
- Arterial Road
- Distributor Road
- Motorway
- Primary Road
- Sub Arterial Road

Local Government Area

- Local Government Area
- Suburb

BLACKTOWN MAP



Legend

Type

- Child Care
- Community Centre
- Govt Service
- Health
- Other
- Police
- Primary School
- Hub Office

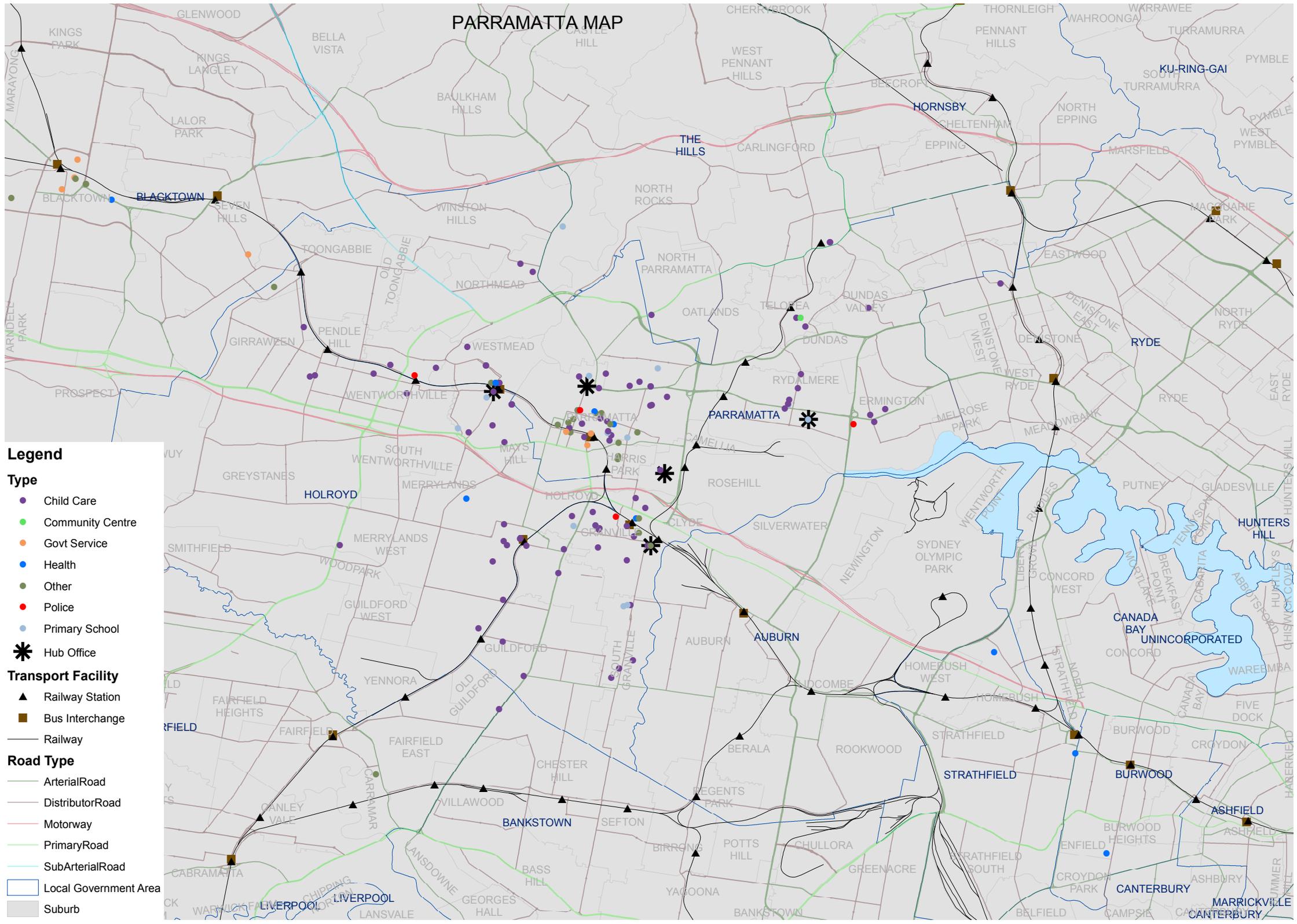
Transport Facility

- Railway Station
- Bus Interchange

Road Type

- ArterialRoad
- DistributorRoad
- Motorway
- PrimaryRoad
- SubArterialRoad
- Local Government Area
- Suburb

PARRAMATTA MAP



Legend

- Type**
- Child Care
 - Community Centre
 - Govt Service
 - Health
 - Other
 - Police
 - Primary School
 - Hub Office

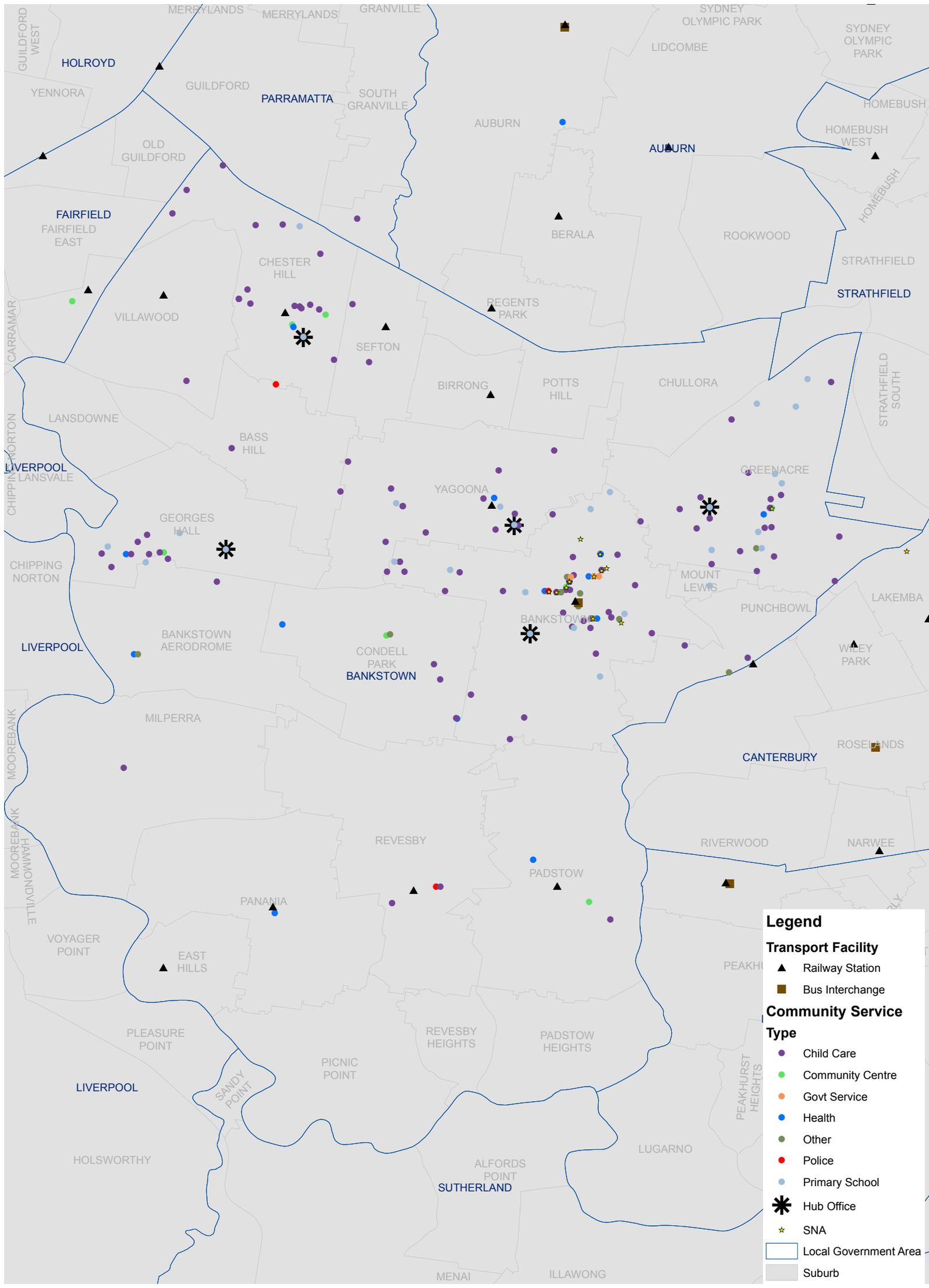
- Transport Facility**
- Railway Station
 - Bus Interchange
 - Railway

- Road Type**
- ArterialRoad
 - DistributorRoad
 - Motorway
 - PrimaryRoad
 - SubArterialRoad
 - Local Government Area
 - Suburb

ATTACHMENT B: SPAN MAP WITH SNA

Hub locations are hyperlinked to the Community Hub Program website.

SNA identified sites can be identified by 'hovering' over the star symbol.



ATTACHMENT C: NATIONAL COMMUNITY HUBS PROGRAM CHARTER

Aims

The aims of the Community Hubs Program are to:

- a) Improve access and engagement with existing services, such as language, employment, skills development and health, for migrant families and individuals;
- b) Increase learning outcomes for children;
- c) Bolster social cohesion by enhancing the capacity of community organisations and service providers to reach out to migrant communities;
- d) Improve language, literacy and learning outcomes for migrants, including for isolated migrant mothers and provide early learning activities for their children;
- e) Improve the pathway to employment for migrants through educational and social programs.

Amongst other things, for the Funded Project to achieve the Programs aims, all Community Hubs will need follow a place-based model and be citizen-centric.

Place-based Model

The Community Hubs must follow a place-based model, leveraging community familiarity with existing community facilities, such as schools, as sites for the delivery of a coordinated and tailored package of services for local migrant families and individuals.

Citizen-centric

The Program model must enable a citizen-centric access point to programs, where services become social. Community Hubs must work within their community and leverage existing local services, including settlement, children, family and employment and training services and organisations.

Objectives

The objectives of the Program are:

- a) Community Hubs break down silos between services funded by different departments or different levels of government, providing a citizen centric access point to programs where services become social;
- b) Migrant families and individuals accessing a Community Hub are engaged with services provided by the Commonwealth, the State or Territory and the Local Government in a safe, family friendly environment;
- c) Settlement outcomes for multicultural communities as a result of effective access to existing services.

The Program will be focused on high migrant communities where there is a high level of disadvantage in a selected number of Local Government Areas (LGA's) in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

ATTACHMENT D: Community Hubs outcomes

(As expressed at the commencement of the Evaluation)

Short Term			
Child outcomes	Family outcomes	School outcomes	Community service and system outcomes
Children participate in a range of early childhood development activities including participation in kindergarten	Families are aware of and are accessing available services and assistance	Schools are well connected to families	Community services are well connected to families
Children's needs and issues are identified and responded to promptly	Parents participate in English language, literacy, learning and parenting activities	Schools are a welcoming and friendly place for families	The required community services are available and accessible
Children have the necessary language and literacy skills upon entering school	There are opportunities for families to participate in community activities	Schools are aware of and connect with early years and community services	
Long Term			
Children enjoy and succeed in school	Families are engaged, skilled and empowered in nurturing their child's learning	Schools are well connected to other community services	Community services respond early and effectively to child and family needs
Children achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing	Parents have proficient English language and literacy skills and gain vocational training leading to workforce participation	Schools respond to the needs and aspirations of children and families	Community services are well connected to schools and other agencies
	Families are engaged in community decision making and have social networks contributing to strong social cohesion across the community		There is a coordinated and effective approach to meeting child and family needs across the community

