

Evaluation Report

Yarra Communities that Care[®]:
A collaborative approach to
strengthening family
relationships in the City of Yarra

July 2024



The positive outcomes of a collaborative and coordinated approach for delivering evidence-based programs and messaging, with families and communities in the City of Yarra.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways of Australia.

We support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services. We are committed to encouraging a culturally safe and supportive environment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who access our services or engage with our organisation.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma. We recognise those who had children taken away from them.



We are committed to inclusivity and providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.

We welcome members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) communities to our organisation.



We acknowledge the funding we receive from the Australian and Victorian governments. We use some stock photos in this report and advise that they are for illustrative purposes only. No association between the person/s pictured and the subject matter of the report is intended.

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Acknowledgements

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the Yarra Communities That Care® (Yarra CTC) initiative was delivered. The project was conducted primarily in the area now known as the City of Yarra, which stands on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people. We would like to pay our respects to Wurundjeri Elders past and present.

We acknowledge the founding partners of the Yarra CTC initiative: Yarra City Council and Neighbourhood Justice Centre; and the Yarra CTC team, including Bella Laidlaw and Naomi Gilbert.

We thank the members of the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network, and partner organisations that contributed to the success of this collaboration.

We would also like to thank the Mindful Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health for supporting our delivery of the Tuning in to Teens® (TINT) program.

Partner agencies

The high quality of the program delivery and the program benefits outlined in this report can be attributed in no small part to the incredible facilitators involved.

We would like to thank everyone in the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network and their organisations: Beginner's Mind, Brotherhood of St Laurence, cohealth, Drummond Street Services, headspace Collingwood, North Richmond Community Health, Reach Foundation, Relationships Australia Victoria, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Uniting Vic Tas, Victoria Police, Victorian Government Department of Education and Yarra City Council. We also acknowledge Mindful – Centre For Training & Research In Development Health, The University of Melbourne, for the ongoing implementation support of the Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs.

In addition to this, thanks to the many schools and community centres that have partnered with the project to host programs and encourage their communities to participate.

Acronyms

CTC	Communities that Care®
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
RAV	Relationships Australia Victoria
TIK	Tuning in to Kids®
TINT	Tuning in to Teens®
YCC	Yarra City Council

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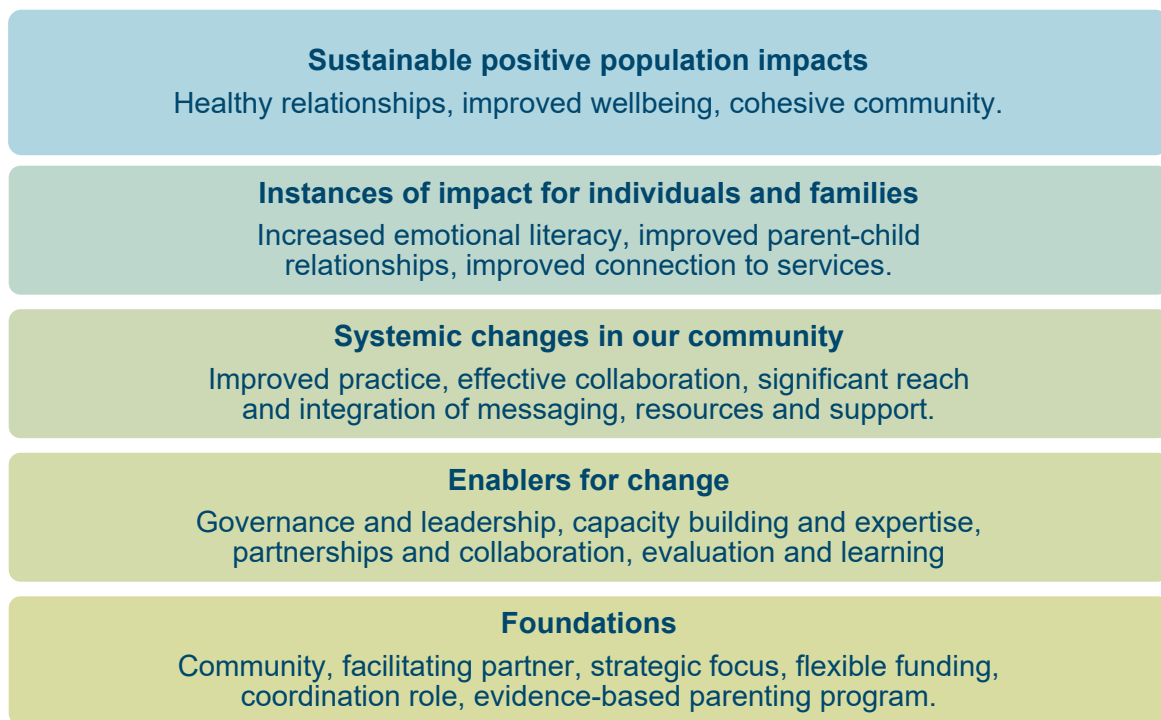
Introduction

The Yarra Communities that Care® (CTC) and Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) partnership was a collaborative place-based approach to strengthening family relationships. It involved the collaborative delivery of evidence-based social and emotional literacy messaging to families in the City of Yarra by a centrally coordinated facilitator network involving multiple partner agencies.

Yarra CTC was a network of 24 local partner agencies who shared a commitment to support the healthy development of children and young people aged 8 to 14 in the City of Yarra (see <https://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/ctc>). Since 2017, RAV's Melbourne Family Relationship Centre (FRC) Community Liaison Officer in partnership with the Yarra CTC Program Leader led the 'strengthening family relationships' priority area for the initiative. The role of RAV's Community Liaison Officer involved coordinating the collaborative delivery of the Tuning in to Teens® (TINT) program, information webinars for parents and a facilitator network.

Building on the positive feedback and program achievements from 2017-2022, RAV conducted an evaluation of the collaborative and place-based approach of the Yarra Facilitator Network to better understand its contribution to systemic change. The evaluation adopted a Place-Based Evaluation Framework (Dart, 2018) and was informed by a comprehensive Theory of Change that was co-designed with the evaluation project team and reviewed by the Yarra CTC Community Board (see a brief version in Figure 1 or the full version in Figure 6).

Figure 1: Simplified Theory of Change (Yarra CTC: Strengthening family relationships)



There is an increased focus on collaborative place-based approaches at national, state and local levels as an effective strategy for addressing complex social problems (Geatches et al, 2023). Previous evaluations and literature identify a ‘backbone organisation’ and strong collaboration as key enabling factors that make place-based approaches successful (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2022).

The collaborative place-based approach to strengthening family relationships in the City of Yarra provided a local example of this as demonstrated by the evaluation results.

The evaluation results will inform future implementation of place-based prevention and early intervention approaches to strengthening family relationships and improving wellbeing.

Due to its focus on collaboration and fostering a sense of community, the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network serves as a valuable template for implementing best practices for place-based coalition.

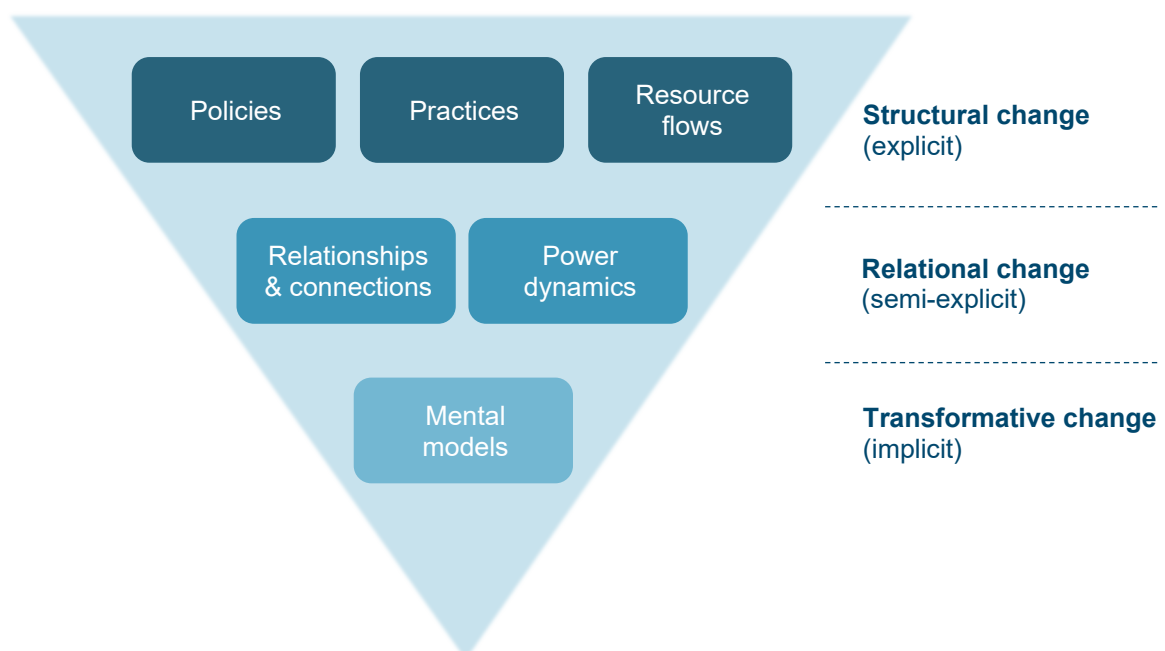
Improving community-level outcomes necessitates successful collaboration. This process not only highlights the diversity of views and ideas but also harnesses the collective ability of groups to achieve what an individual alone may not be able to accomplish.

Consistent with systems change frameworks (see Figure 2) this evaluation provides evidence of structural changes, in the form of improved practices and dedicated resources and supports. These changes lead to collaborative relationships and connections, ultimately contributing to transformative change (Kania et al, 2018). However, for structural changes to achieve large-scale, enduring social change, they need to be reinforced by relational and transformative shifts. These changes, which involve the collaboration of diverse stakeholders, are harder to detect and measure, but represent the cumulative effective of multiple emergent changes.

'If all [stakeholders] collaborate toward the shared vision, and are guided by a sufficiently equipped facilitating partner, then enabling conditions for systemic changes can be created and realised. Over time, community and systems-level changes occur, and this will ultimately lead to sustainable and positive changes for people living in the area of the [place-based approach].'

Dart, 2018

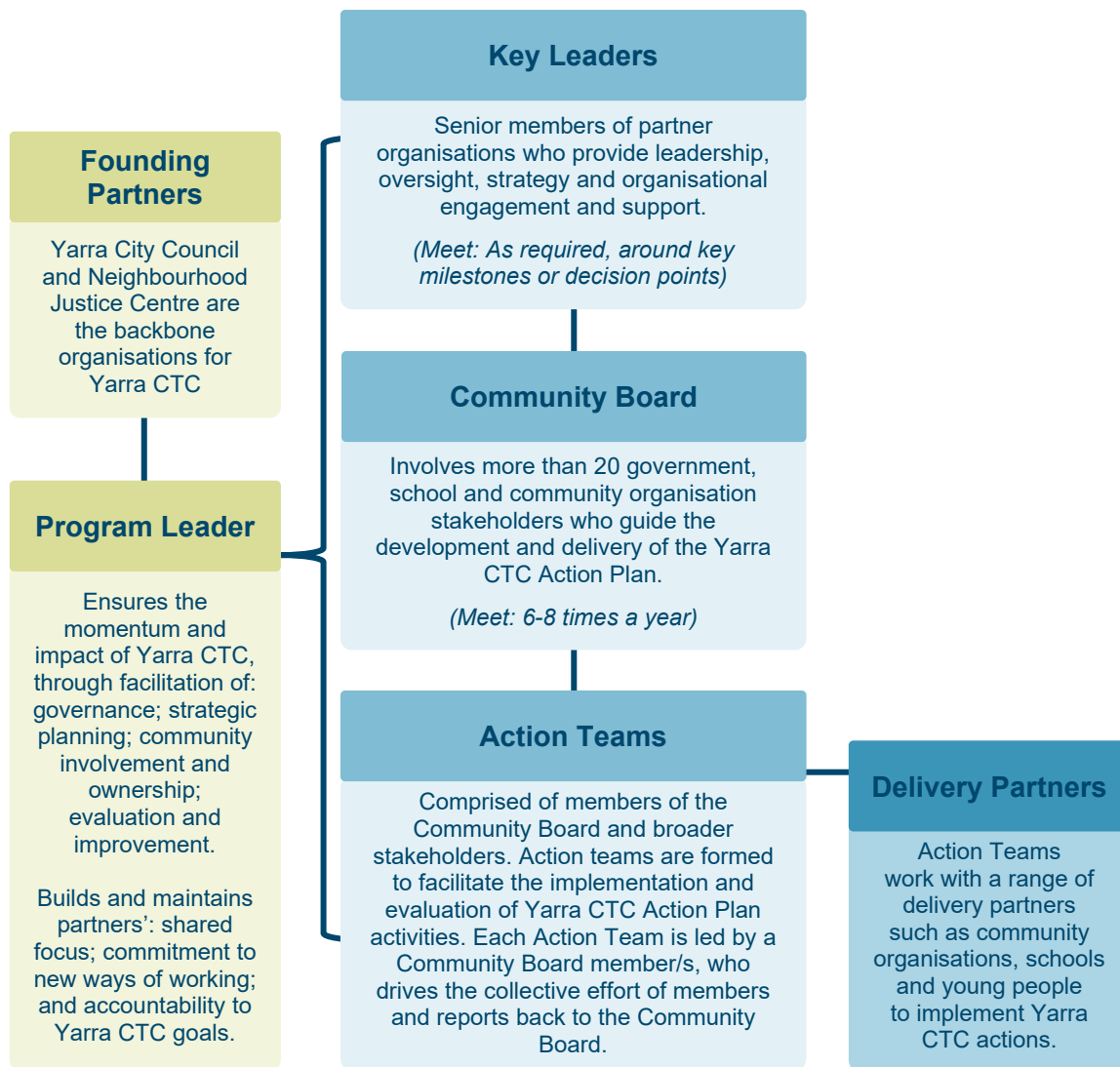
Figure 2: Six conditions of systems change (from Kania et al, 2018)



Yarra CTC overview

In 2014, a group of local champions came together to enable organisations, schools and community partners to effectively work together to support the healthy development of young people in the City of Yarra. The City of Yarra includes the suburbs of Abbotsford, Alphington (part), Burnley, Carlton North (part), Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Cremorne, Fairfield (part), Fitzroy, Fitzroy North (part), Princes Hill and Richmond. After careful consideration, the CTC model was chosen to help guide the process for achieving their vision. Founding partners, Yarra City Council and Neighbourhood Justice Centre, established the Yarra CTC initiative and funded the role of Yarra CTC Program Leader.

Figure 3: Yarra CTC governance structure



The following strategic priority areas for the Yarra CTC initiative were informed by community consultation with young people directly (see Yarra CTC Youth Survey on page 11).

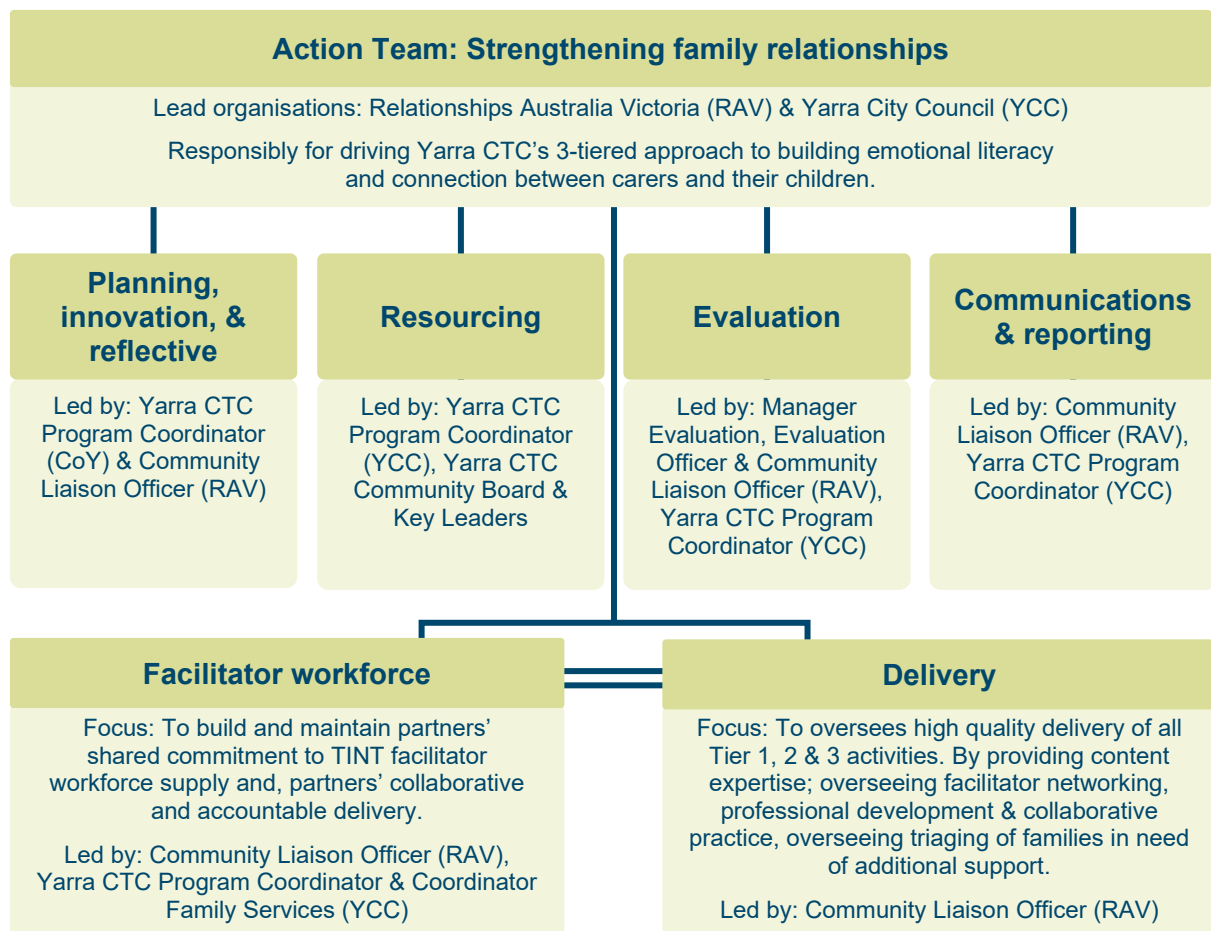
- Strengthening family relationships.
- Enhancing emotional wellbeing.
- Increasing school engagement.

A partnership existed between RAV and Yarra CTC from 2017 to early 2024 to address the strategic priority area of ‘strengthening family relationships’, with an objective to ‘build the emotional literacy of, and connection between, parents/carers and their children’. In June 2022, the Yarra CTC partnership, involving more than 20 agencies, adopted and launched its 2022-25 Yarra CTC Action Plan, which takes a 3-tiered approach to achieving this objective:

- Tier 1: Widespread emotional literacy messaging for parents
- Tier 2: Evidence-based program support for families
- Tier 3: Connected and equipped community of practice.

A key component of this was the delivery of TINT programs to parents, coordinated by RAV’s Melbourne FRC Community Liaison Officer.

Figure 4: Roles and responsibilities for Action Team: Strengthening family relationships



Communities That Care® Model

CTC is an international, community-based prevention approach. It aims to promote the wellbeing and healthy development of young people by reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors associated with various behavioural and emotional problems.

This framework was selected for its:

- community-led, community-wide 'place' and collaboration focus
- prevention and evidence-informed focus
- high quality, validated survey tool with comparative sample.

The key components of the approach typically include the following:

- **Community mobilisation:** Engaging community members, organisations, and stakeholders to collaboratively address youth-related issues.
- **Evidence-based programs:** Choosing evidence-based prevention programs that are well-suited to the community's needs and implementing them effectively.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Continuously assessing the progress of the implemented programs and interventions to determine their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring the long-term continuity of efforts and interventions to maintain positive outcomes and support youth development.

The model emphasises the importance of local context and community involvement in shaping prevention efforts. By addressing the underlying factors that contribute to negative behaviours and promoting protective factors, the approach aims to create a healthier and more supportive environment for young people to thrive.

Yarra CTC Youth Survey

A Yarra CTC Youth Survey (Hall et al, 2015; Osborn et al, 2020) was conducted with school students across the City of Yarra in 2015 and 2019. Workshops were held with community partners to further investigate the survey's findings. The selection of Yarra CTC priority areas and indicators was informed by community partners in 2016, and by community partners and City of Yarra parents' feedback in 2021. The survey addresses the prevalence of 3 protective factors: emotional control, coping with stress and social competencies; among children in years 6, 8 and 10. The outcomes and target indicator selection were informed by parents and community partner feedback. Workshops were held with community partners to unpack survey findings and identify a focus on strengthening family relationships. A comparison of survey results in 2015 and 2019 is shown in Table 1 (refer to definitions on page 12), with further analysis available (Arefadib & Moore, 2021).

Table 1: 2015 and 2019 Yarra CTC Youth Survey results compared to Australian national average

* Youth Survey Indicator	Year 6 2015 (n=354)	Year 6 2019 (n=564)	Year 8 2015 (n=269)	Year 8 2019 (n=306)	Average Year 8 2017 (n=1622)	Year 10 2019 (n=202)	Average Year 10 2017 (n=1122)
Risk factor							
Poor family management	28.0%	27.7%	40.3%	23.7%	15.0%	45.5%	24.8%
Family conflict	25.1%	29.8%	38.1%	33.2%	34.7%	40.4%	34.2%
Protective factor							
Family attachment	85.6%	86.8%	69.1%	76.3%	75.6%	67.1%	70.6%
Family opportunities for prosocial involvement	78.1%	69.7%	46.6%	52.8%	56.7%	42.3%	47.2%
Family rewards for prosocial involvement	74.6%	76.5%	52.3%	59.1%	60.4%	48.7%	48.5%
Emotional control	77.9%	67.0%	59.8%	60.6%	63.8%	52.5%	59.4%

*Youth Survey Indicator definitions

- **Poor family management:** Parents' use of inconsistent and/or unusually harsh or severe punishment with their children places the children at higher risk of substance use and other problem behaviours.
- **Family conflict:** Children raised in families in high conflict are at risk of future use of and exposure to violence, delinquency, school dropout, teen pregnancy, and drug use.
- **Family attachment:** Young people who feel strongly bonded to their family are less likely to engage in substance use and other problem behaviours.
- **Family opportunities for prosocial involvement:** Young people who have more opportunities to participate meaningfully in the responsibilities and activities of the family are more likely to develop strong bonds to the family.
- **Family rewards for prosocial involvements:** When parents, siblings and other family members praise, encourage and recognise things done well by their child, children are more likely to develop strong bonds to the family.
- **Emotional control:** Young people who demonstrate emotional control are less likely to engage in substance misuse and problem behaviours, and experience less depression.

An evidence-based approach

The TINT program was selected as the evidence-based intervention to address the strategic priority area of 'strengthening family relationships'. RAV is a specialist provider of family and relationship services with experience delivering the Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs. As a result, this was the focus of RAV's involvement in the Yarra CTC partnership.

The socio-ecological model of mental health and wellbeing illustrates the connection between individuals' mental health and wellbeing, interpersonal relationships and the communities they interact with (RAV's organisational Theory of Change is available at socialimpact.rav.org.au). Social and emotional learning, which correlates strongly with improved mental health (Cook et al., 2015) is also linked strongly with these areas. Furthermore, consistent supportive family relationships serve as a known protective factor for the mental and emotional wellbeing of young people (Arefadib & Moore, 2021).

TINT is an evidence-based adaption of the Tuning in to Kids® (TIK) program, and is for parents of adolescents aged 10-18 years. Evaluations and participant feedback consistently show that the program leads to improvements in parenting and parent-teen relationships and reduces family conflict. Randomised control trials have also demonstrated that completion of TINT program leads to significant improvements in parental emotion socialisation and reductions in youth internalising difficulties (Kehoe et al., 2013).

TIK was originally developed based on an understanding of the importance of emotional competence in children, to support their healthy development (Parker, 2014), and in recognition of the lack of parenting programs that focused on building skills in parents that supported their children's emotional competence (Havinghurst et al., 2004). The program uses a strengths-based approach to build on the parents' existing skills of empathy, support and listening. In turn, parents build these strengths in their children via direct emotion coaching and indirect example-setting.

An initial study (Havinghurst et al., 2004) on the effectiveness of the program was conducted in 2004, based on the hypothesis that it would lead to 3 outcomes:

- An improvement in parenting skills that were known to contribute to children's emotional competence.
- An improvement in the child's emotional competence.
- A reduction in child behaviour problems and an improvement in social skills.

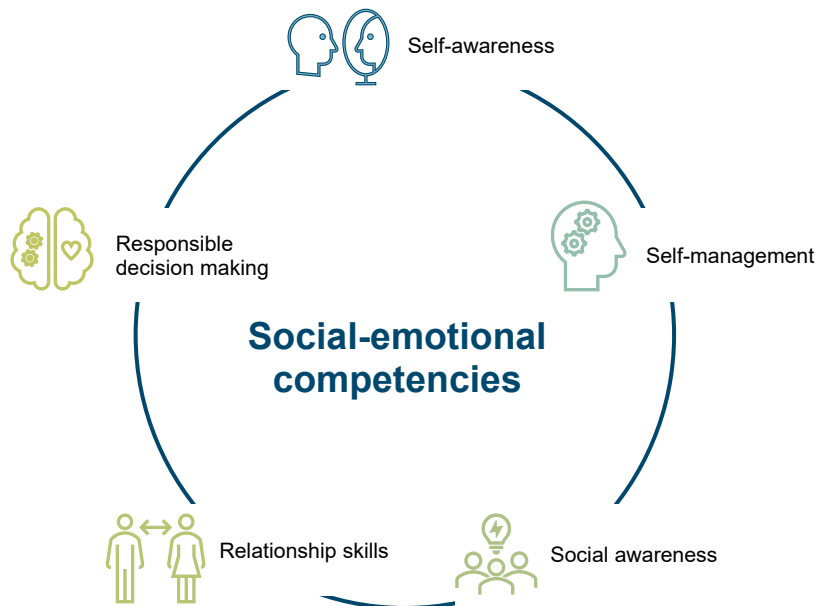
The study showed improvement in all these areas, noting that the improvements were more marked in children who demonstrated more problematic behaviours associated with poor emotional regulation and competence.

In a later summation of evidence-informed programs that support child development and wellbeing, Moore et al., (2016) observed that TIK is supported by randomised control trial-level evidence of effectiveness of multiple child and parent outcomes across multiple studies conducted at various sites. On a 5-point scientific rating, the California Clearinghouse rated TIK at the second-highest level 'Supported by Research Evidence', and in relation to evidence of effectiveness, the program has been rated 4 out of 4 stars by Kids Matter (Moore et al., 2016).

The Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs aims to build positive relationships in families through providing social-emotional learning to parents in the local community. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) outline 5 core social-emotional competencies, which are:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour across contexts.
2. **Self-management:** The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
3. **Social awareness:** The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
4. **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
5. **Responsible decision making:** The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions across diverse situations.

Figure 5: Social-emotional competencies



These are reflected in the Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs. Some examples are:

- emotion coaching (building of parental relationship skills and self-awareness and children's self-management)
- parenting styles (building on parental relationship skills, self-management, and self-awareness)
- emotion tuning (building on parental relationship skills and children's self-awareness)
- discovering what your child feels (building on parental relationship skills and social awareness)
- self-care (building on parental self-awareness and self-management)
- problem solving (building on parental and children's relationship skills and social awareness).

It is important to note that the acquisition of cognitive capacity (knowledge) does not necessarily mean that a person will exercise good practice (skills) (Frydenberg et al., 2017). In order to build skills as well as knowledge, the TIK/TINT programs emphasise practice, both in role-playing activities in programs, and in their focus on empowering parents to build on their children's social and emotional competencies.

The Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs focus on the emotional connection between parents and children. The programs aim to teach parents and carers skills in recognising, understanding and managing their own and their children's emotions.

Place-based evaluation approach

Numerous initiatives share certain characteristics with a structured collaborative place-based approach, although they may not encompass all its elements. Moreover, the term 'place-based' has been broadly used to describe a diverse range of policies, programs, and initiatives (Geatches et al., 2023). While there is no official definition for place-based approaches, there is a common understanding that they involve a collaborative approach to service or program delivery in a geographically bound location. The collaboration will generally involve shared design, stewardship, and accountability for outcomes, with an overall aim at community development. Some place-based approaches, including Yarra CTC, involve multiple sites within the one 'place' (in this case, a local government area), which necessitates the existence of an intermediary (backbone) organisation to provide centralised support to multiple facilitating partners (Dart, 2018).

Place-based approaches are defined by common elements, which are mostly reflected within the Yarra CTC Theory of Change. The Yarra CTC approach incorporated place-based approach elements in the following ways (adapted from Dart, 2018).

- Responding to a complex social issue impacting those experiencing, or at risk of, disadvantage (in this case the wellbeing of young people and families in the City of Yarra).
- A strengths-based delivery approach that focuses on prevention (TINT).
- Identifying and working on community priorities, valuing local knowledge, and building on social and cultural relationships (the collaborative design and implementation of the TINT programs).
- A commitment to strategic learning and using data and evidence to collectively adapt in real time (ongoing data collection and evaluation).
- Ongoing building of capacity and capability amongst all stakeholders involved in the work (communities of practice).
- Focus on collective and collaborative action, active engagement, and partnership so that all stakeholders see themselves as active participants (authentic collaborative partnerships between organisations).
- An underpinning value of creating greater equity (improving outcomes for all young people and families through targeted access and cultural consultation).

The complexity and long-term duration of place-based approaches pose challenges for evaluation, making attribution difficult. Evaluation approaches that emphasise reflection and learning can support project implementation in these complex environments. For this evaluation, we adopted the Place-Based Evaluation Framework and Theory of Change template (Dart, 2018). Relying on a Theory of Change and an evidence base has been instrumental for identifying systemic changes and ongoing evaluation design.

Developmental evaluation is also well suited to complex and emerging contexts and was adopted for ongoing formative evaluation (see 'Next Steps' on page 31) (Patton, 2015).

Evaluation and Theory of Change

Over several months in 2022, the evaluation project team collaboratively developed a Theory of Change (see Figure 6) using the Place-Based Evaluation Framework template as a foundation. Our Theory of Change outlines a program rationale informed by available research and practice evidence. The evaluation targets specific elements of the Theory of Change with a particular focus on the collaborative and systemic nature of change.

Key evaluation questions

The evaluation led by RAV covered the scope of Tiers 1 to 3 (see page 9) of the 'strengthening family relationships' action plan outcome in the City of Yarra for families of children.

Summative evaluation questions

- What have we learned about the conditions/approaches needed to create systemic change in the City of Yarra (with a focus on collaboration)?
- What has been the impact of the Yarra CTC project in the City of Yarra (for young people, families, and the community) on this objective?

Aims

Through effective collaborations, the Yarra CTC activities aimed to:

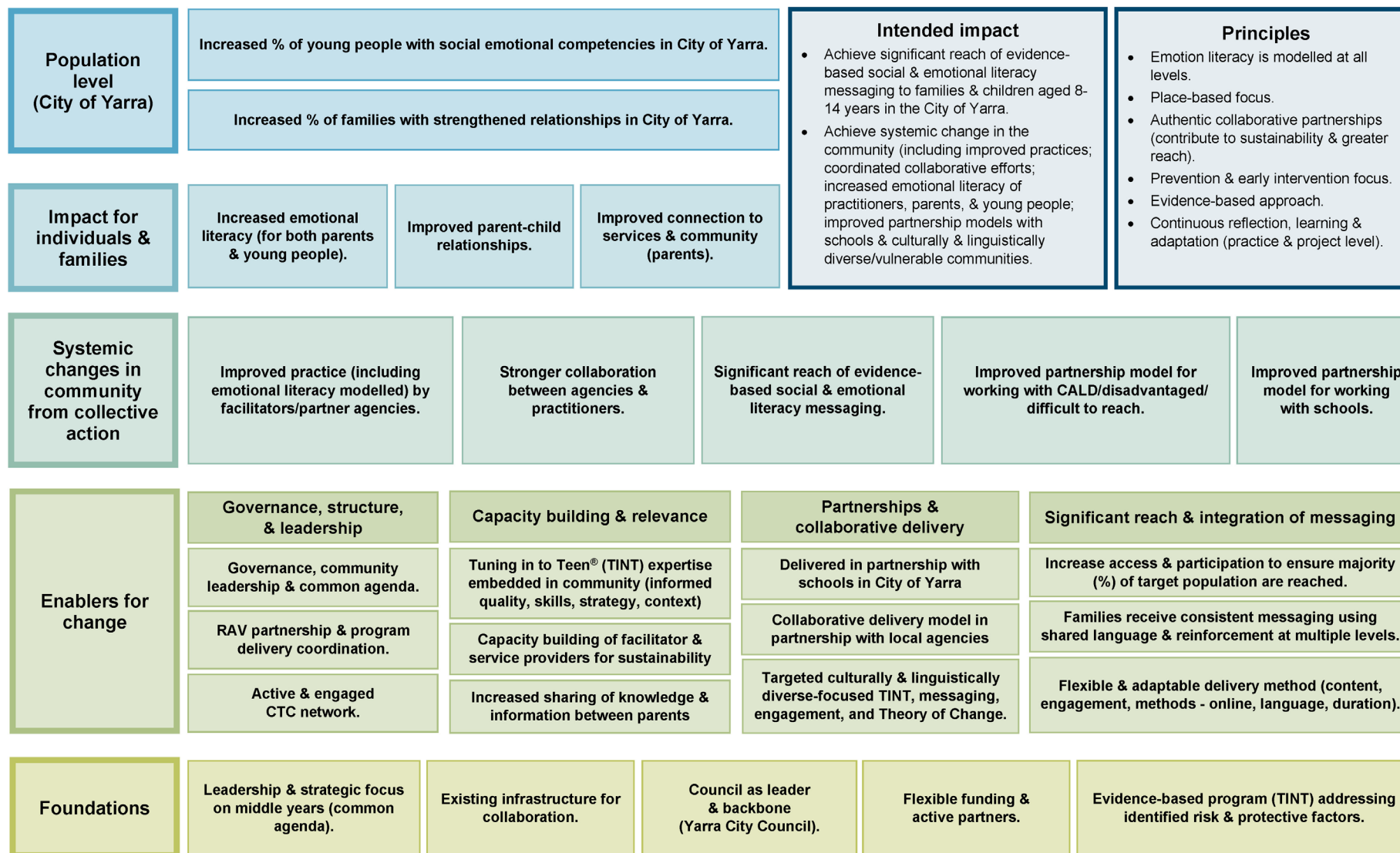
- achieve significant reach of evidence-based social emotional literacy messaging to families of children aged 8-14 years in the City of Yarra
- achieve systemic change in the community (including improved practices; coordinated collaborative efforts; increased emotional literacy of practitioners, parents, and young people; and improved partnership models with schools, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities).

Population level change

These systemic changes contribute to increased:

- number of young people with social emotional competencies in the City of Yarra
- percentage of families with strengthened relationships in the City of Yarra
- emotional literacy for culturally and linguistically diverse and vulnerable parents in the City of Yarra.

Figure 6: Theory of Change (Yarra CTC: Strengthening family relationships)



Summary outputs and outcomes

Program and session statistics (2017-2024)

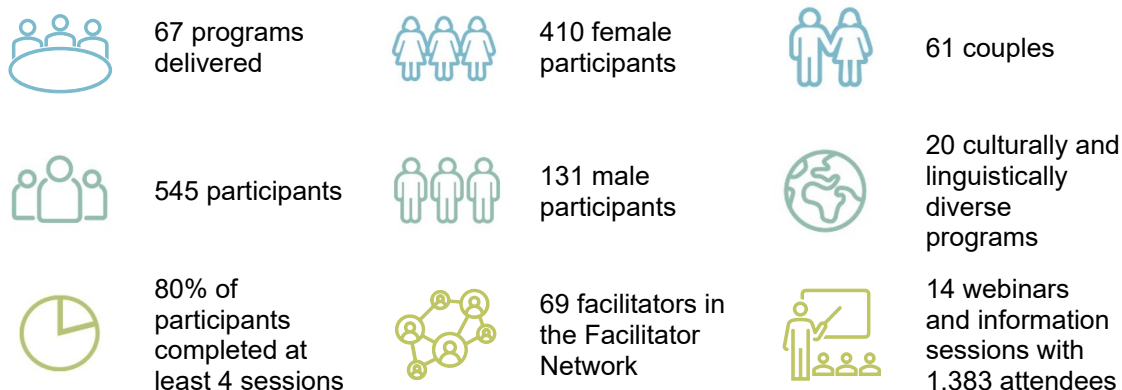


Table 2: Tuning in to Teens[®] post-program survey (2017-2024)

Satisfaction (n=298)	78% very satisfied	21% satisfied	1% neither	
I have a better understanding of my own emotions and behaviour. (n=190)	55% strongly agree	38% agree	6% mixed	1% disagree
I am more confident in regulating my own emotions and behaviour. (n=182)	35% strongly agree	51% agree	13% mixed	1% disagree
I have a better understanding of my child(ren)'s emotions and behaviour. (n=185)	60% strongly agree	38% agree	2% mixed	
I am more confident in responding to my child(ren)'s emotions. (n=182)	39% strongly agree	54% agree	6% mixed	1% disagree
I am more confident in helping my child(ren) with their behaviour. (n=188)	38% strongly agree	55% agree	7% mixed	1% disagree
I have a better understanding of emotion coaching. (n=182)	61% strongly agree	37% agree	2% mixed	
I feel more connected with my child(ren). (n=191)	43% strongly agree	45% agree	9% mixed	3% disagree
Are you doing anything differently as a parent since doing the program? (n=191)	98% yes			2% no
Were there changes you noticed in your family/child(ren) after this program? (n=148)	80% yes			20% no

Partner agencies

- Beginner's Mind
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- cohealth
- Drummond Street Services
- headspace Collingwood
- Mindful - Centre For Training & Research In Development Health, The University of Melbourne
- Neighbourhood Justice Centre
- North Richmond Community Health
- Reach Foundation
- Relationships Australia Victoria
- The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
- Uniting Vic Tas
- Victoria Police
- Victorian Government Department of Education
- Yarra City Council

Partner schools in the City of Yarra

- Abbotsford Primary School
- Alphington Primary School
- Carlton North Primary School
- Clifton Hill Primary School
- Collingwood College
- Deutsche Schule Melbourne
- Fitzroy High School
- Fitzroy North Primary School
- Fitzroy Primary School
- Melbourne Girls' College
- Merri Creek Primary School
- Princes Hill Primary School
- Princes Hill Secondary School
- Richmond High School
- Richmond Primary School
- Richmond West Primary School
- Sacred Heart School Fitzroy
- Simmonds Catholic College
- Spensley St Primary School
- St Joseph's School Collingwood
- Trinity Primary School Richmond
- Yarra Primary School

Figure 7: Map of partner schools in the City of Yarra



Facilitator Network focus groups, interviews and workshop

In April 2023, 4 focus groups and interviews were held with 9 TINT facilitators in the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network. The facilitators came from a variety of partner organisations: cohealth, Victorian Government Department of Education, Drummond Street Services, Victoria Police, RAV and Yarra City Council. The semi-structured focus groups aimed to gather evidence in 3 key areas: the impact of collaboration on practice, the outcomes for families and the enabling conditions that make the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network an effective collaboration.

These sessions provided insight into how the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network had created a working environment for facilitators that helped them to grow a sense of belonging and investment in the program and in the facilitator community.

Focus group findings

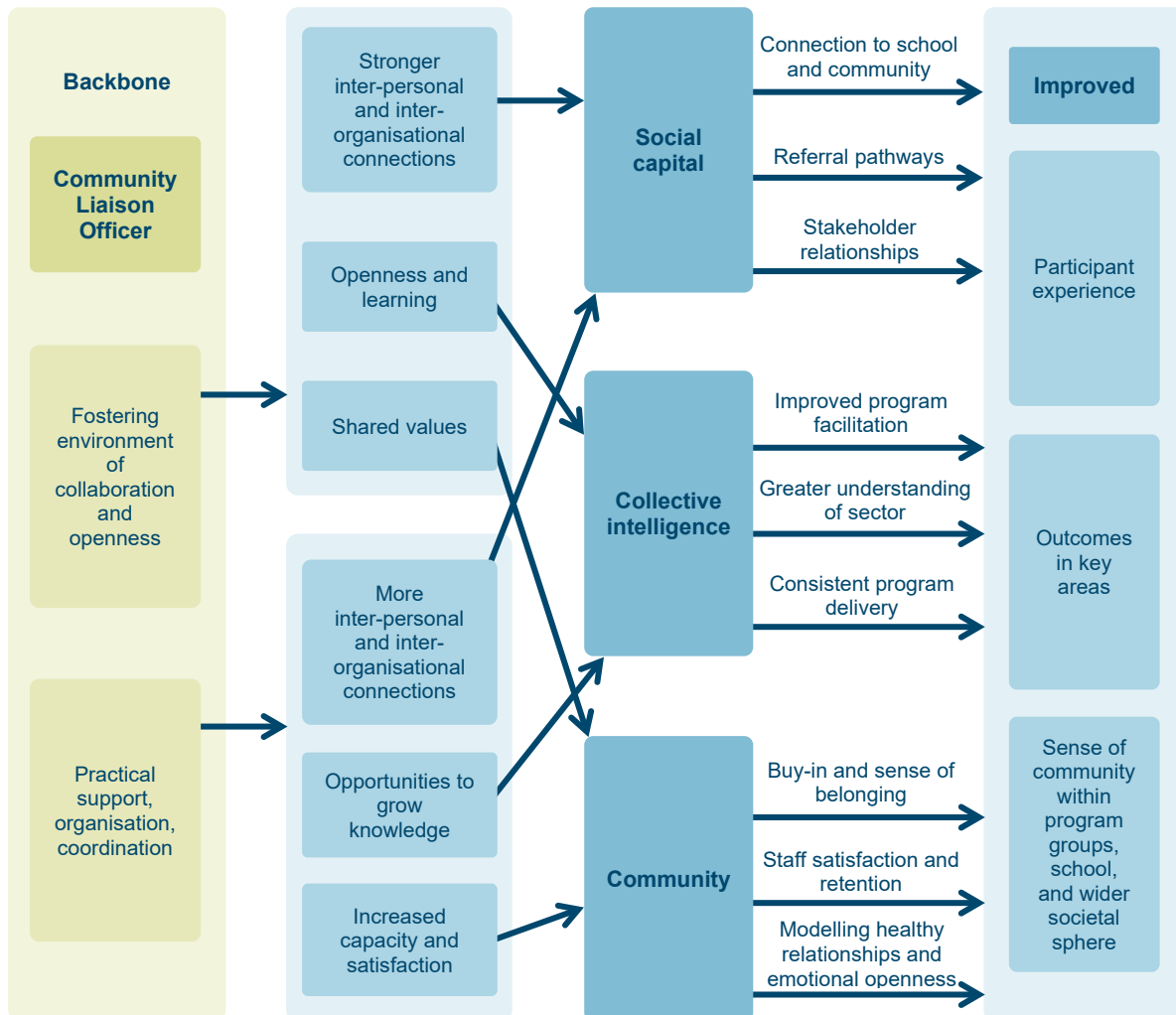
The Yarra CTC Facilitator Network was much more than the provision of programs for the area, it was a community of facilitators and stakeholders who felt a sense of investment, belonging and connection. Rather than just a group of loosely linked individuals operating in tandem but ultimately siloed from each other, they built a coalition whose reach extended beyond the bounds of the Tuning in to Kids® suite of programs.

Moving beyond simply running programs meant that parents and families were more connected to community resources through 'warm referrals' and facilitator knowledge, bridging the gap between the family, the school, and other services. Additionally, by learning from and supporting each other, facilitators were able to build and focus on their skills in program provision.

The importance of the central organiser, in this case RAV's Community Liaison Officer, cannot be overstated. In particular, initially the scaffolding nature of the practical organising and supporting process was essential. In part, this was due to the collaborative, open and respectful culture that the organiser intentionally and purposely created. Additionally, the reduction in additional organisational work tasks, meant that the facilitators had more time and energy to focus on program implementation and forming genuine connections with each other, parents, schools, and other stakeholders.

The interviews with the facilitators provided insight into how successful coalitions are created and maintained. Coalitions work by building on diverse stakeholder knowledge, views, and resources to improve effectiveness, develop creative approaches to solving complex problems, and enable greater participation and control (Kegler et al., 2020). They naturally support a place-based approach, being context and location specific, and founded on a strong sense of community.

Figure 8: Improving outcomes through a collaborative place-based approach



Moore et al. (2014) list a number of requirements for successful place-based approaches, namely:

- a shared agenda and coherent long-term vision
- influential champions and strong leadership
- sufficient time for strong personal relationships and trust to develop between partners
- alignment of interventions and resources toward common goals.

Meeting these requirements leads to improved access to services and a speedier response for service users, enhanced knowledge and skills, better understanding of client needs, greater enjoyment of their work and more opportunities for career development for workers; and greater efficiency, greater involvement of service users, and less duplication for agencies.

The Yarra CTC Facilitator Network exemplified the transformative power of establishing a closely connected coalition of facilitators and stakeholders. They transcended the limitations of traditional program provision. The story of their underscores the importance of the following key principles.

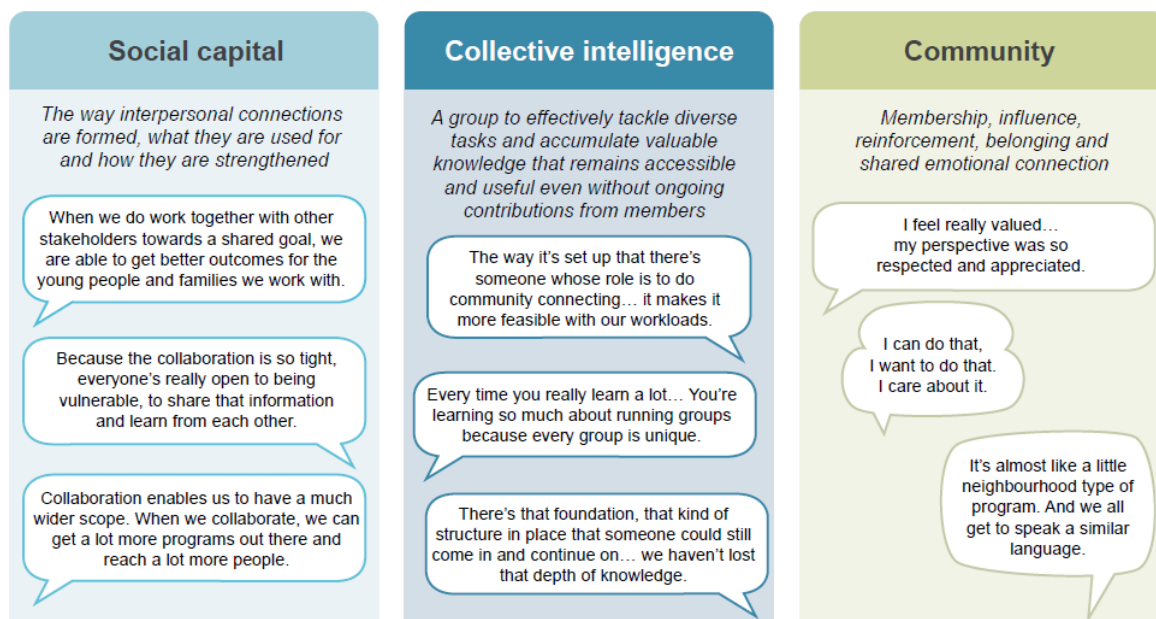
- **A strong support entity:** Sometimes called a backbone structure, this is a person or group whose role is to provide practical and emotional support, and act as the point of contact for coalition members and stakeholders. This role acts as the linchpin, fostering initial connections and facilitating the network's growth.
- **Cultivating a collaborative culture:** Prioritising values such as collaboration, respect, openness, and reflection within the network fosters a culture that encourages active participation and shared ownership among all stakeholders.
- **Effective inter-agency communication:** Frequent and meaningful communication among network members promoted information sharing, group reflection, and continuous learning, ensuring alignment with common goals and a unified vision.
- **Clear and inclusive communication:** By consistently communicating group goals, vision, and priorities at every level of work, from program facilitation to coalition management, the network ensures that its community-driven approach is integrated seamlessly into its organisational processes.

The Yarra CTC Facilitator Network served as a valuable template of best practices for implementing place-based approaches and building successful coalitions (see Figure 8 above). As outlined in this evaluation, these principles are essential not only for enhancing client outcomes, but also for creating a fulfilling and impactful environment for workers. By embracing these principles, communities and organisations can emulate the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network's success and contribute to the development of strong, resilient, and caring communities.

Themes

The following 3 main themes were constructed from facilitator interviews, each of which reflect the overarching importance of collaboration and support in the Yarra CTC approach (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Yarra CTC Facilitator Network focus group themes



The themes were generated using Braun and Clarke's (2023) Reflexive Thematic Analysis process, which involves 6 steps: data familiarisation; data coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and producing the report.

A close reading of the interview transcripts, along with an understanding of the Theory of Change and intended collaborative outputs, helped to generate the themes. This was in keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2023) conception of themes 'as patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept.'

Theme 1: Social capital

Britannica defines social capital as a theory that ‘involves the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks. Social capital revolves around 3 dimensions: interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation), levels of trust that characterise these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation’ (Poteyeva, 2023).

Founded on a culture of reciprocity, utilising social capital requires organisations to actively draw on resources embedded in the social networks within their organisation and between themselves and other groups, and to support the strengthening and expansion of these networks (Williams et al., 2022).

There is compelling evidence for the impact that social capital has both on organisational functioning and personal mental health (Boyd et al., 2008). Outcomes for organisations include a wider reach across and within networks and communities, reciprocity, employee retention, and more streamlined processes.

Discussions in the facilitator focus groups highlighted elements of social capital, including those detailed below.

Building and leveraging relationships

- ‘So one of the parents came through intake... seeking...support. And then when I realised that they had already done Tuning in to Teens®...it instantly became a warm referral. Because they knew the facilitators, and I said I know them, I’ve worked with them.’
- ‘I know other staff will say, “Oh, I met X worker through facilitating the program and I was able to link this family to them because now I know them.”’

Collaborating in partnerships

- ‘So we do things in partnerships. Rather than things being siloed and being delivered within an organisation and within a team...we do things in partnership across the organisation, across organisations, across teams, across professionals.’

Advocating for shared goals

- ‘We can advocate for certain things, or we can build better relationships and partnerships potentially through that process.’

The supportive structures that enhance the effectiveness of programs and initiatives

- ‘I feel like the structures that I’ve seen in place have been amazing, so helpful for someone like me, that’s just come in to participate.’

The strength of bonds facilitated by the network building a culture of openness, honesty, and growth

- ‘Because the collaboration is so tight everyone’s really open to being vulnerable, to share that information and learn from each other.’

The facilitator focus groups emphasised the significance of networks in improving outcomes. Facilitators discussed the benefits of having connections with schools, cultural workers and education workers, which led to achieving directed outcomes that wouldn’t have been possible without these network connections.

The facilitators highlighted the importance of knowing what’s happening in the sector, such as waitlists, themes and issues, which helped them make appropriate referrals and assist others effectively.

This knowledge exchange also facilitated navigation through the school system and fostered a better understanding of available support services.

They acknowledged the value of collaboration among different organisations with varying expertise. They believed that no single organisation could cater to all needs and that collaboration leads to better results and is considered good business practice.

The groups recognised the preventive aspect of their work, helping parents become aware of potential challenges that might arise as their children grow older. They stressed that collaboration with other organisations supported parents and young people and strengthened their support network.

Because the collaboration is so tight everyone’s really open to being vulnerable, to share that information and learn from each other.

The facilitators emphasised the strength of their collaboration, which fostered an environment where everyone felt comfortable being vulnerable and sharing information openly. This openness allowed them to learn from each other without fear of judgment.

The facilitators noted the significant growth in their efforts to reach a broader audience. They started with only a few initiatives per year but have now expanded to numerous activities every term. They highlighted the growing number of organisations involved in the collaborative TINT program, leading to the formation of a strong network of facilitators. This expanded network has likely enabled them to have a more extensive and positive influence on the community they serve.

Theme 2: Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence is defined as a group's capacity to perform a wide variety of tasks, as well as to collect a useful bank of information that is not dependent on an individual member's continued involvement to be maintained. It has been shown to be heavily influenced by group composition, structure, diversity, and the inclusion of members with high levels of social perceptiveness. Collective intelligence is consistently predictive of future performance and is associated with a group's ability to engage in tacit coordination (Chikersal et al., 2017). These components were reflected in the facilitators' discussions, highlighting how emotional and practical support enabled them to focus on growing their collective intelligence; how information sharing, via learning from others while imparting their own knowledge, developed the group knowledge and understanding; and how dynamic and active collaboration led to thriving and self-sustaining collective intelligence. The 2 following primary areas were highlighted.

Continuous learning and adaptability

This is the importance of ongoing learning and adaptability, which are essential components of collective intelligence. In a collaborative environment, individuals and groups must continuously learn and adjust their approaches to better address the unique challenges and opportunities they encounter.

- 'We're all going to be continually learning; it's not finite.'
- 'You're learning so much about running groups because every group is unique.'

Role specialisation and structure

This approach allows individuals to focus on their specific areas of expertise. Such a structure is a key element of collective intelligence, as it ensures that each member's contributions are maximised within the group's collaborative efforts.

- 'The way it's set up that there's someone whose role is to do community connecting... it makes it more feasible within our workloads to go, "I can do that. I want to do that. I care about it."'
- 'There's that foundation, that kind of structure in place that someone could still come in and continue on...we haven't lost that depth of knowledge.'
- 'I think it's all about bandwidth for me because of what I've found is if I have to do a lot of extra groundwork on top, it's just too much.'

Facilitators highlighted the significance of both practical and emotional support, acknowledging that it contributed to the smooth operation of their initiatives and provided a strong foundation for their collective intelligence. Practical support, such as managing bookings and coordinating with schools was praised for strengthening facilitation skills and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the groups. The well-organised and well-run nature of their efforts, combined with personal touches like check-ins and follow-ups, created an environment of care and consideration.

The facilitators expressed appreciation for opportunities to share their perspectives, recognising that they are the ones delivering the program and their input is valuable. This inclusive approach fostered a culture of collaboration and empowered facilitators to contribute to the collective intelligence of the group. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of coming together to co-facilitate and engage in professional learning opportunities. The inclusion of presentations from various organisations allowed them to gain a better understanding of each other's work.

Facilitators expressed how facilitating the parent groups led to continuous and stimulating learning experiences. Each group they worked with was unique, providing valuable insights into running effective sessions. This organic learning process enhanced their facilitation skills and contributed to their collective intelligence.

It makes it more feasible within our workloads to go, "I can do that. I want to do that. I care about it."

Performing in mentorship roles also provided them with new opportunities for learning as they gained insights from the newcomers and the parents they worked with. This reciprocal learning process contributed to the collective intelligence of the facilitator network.

The facilitators valued the foundation and structure in place that allows for continuity even if there were changes in personnel. The depth of knowledge was preserved, and this stability contributed to the collective intelligence of the group.

They recognised the dynamic nature of their work, with each group being unique based on the facilitators' contributions and perspectives. The diverse ideas and experiences contributed by each individual enriched the collective intelligence of the facilitator network.

The facilitators appreciated opportunities for professional learning and information sharing. Even if they were not directly co-facilitating, these sessions enabled them to gain a better understanding of each other's work.

The coordination and support they received was highly valued, often being mentioned as a direct cause of their satisfaction with the Yarra CTC approach. The facilitators spoke highly of RAV's Community Liaison Officer, whose role acted as both scaffold and backbone to the entire endeavour.

Theme 3: Community

Community can be conceptualised as being composed of 4 elements: membership, influence, reinforcement, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Membership can be viewed as a sense of belonging and personal relatedness to other community members. Influence refers to feeling of the work and the members mattering both to each other and in their wider work. Reinforcement is fulfilling needs and a sense of shared values and goals. Shared emotional connection is the feeling of shared history, identity, and context.

As demonstrated by facilitator feedback, a sense of community has a high correlation to work satisfaction, buy-in, and a general positive, enthusiastic, and optimistic attitude to the work that is being done:

A strong sense of belonging and feeling valued was evident in the facilitator feedback

- 'I've had experiences with different organisations, and it's just worked so well. I felt really valued and appreciated, and it was a really good vibe. It was amazing.'
- 'I've been lucky with the people that I've had contact with, everything's just been such a positive experience and I felt really valued even though when I did, my Tuning in to Teens® that was my first one, maybe my second one...'

Shared vision and goals was another important community-building aspect:

- 'I think fundamentally is that it's driven through a vision and that there's a shared vision, and people across organisations understand the vision.'
- 'When we do work together with other stakeholders towards a shared goal, we are able to get better outcomes for the young people and families we work with.'

Actively checking in on individuals and encouraging open communication fostered a strong sense of support and belonging within the facilitator network. This approach ensured that everyone's wellbeing was considered and contributed to a positive group dynamic.

The emphasis on hearing and respecting each facilitator's perspective, even from those new to the program, demonstrated the inclusivity and value placed on diverse ideas and experiences. The availability of supervision, support, and professional development strengthened the facilitators' abilities and promoted reflection, creating a supportive and collaborative environment for the group.

The sense of community among stakeholders strengthened the program's impact on families, and the shared understanding of concepts like emotion coaching enhanced the facilitators' work both formally and informally.

The facilitators expressed a strong sense of buy-in and commitment to their work, feeling that they could make a positive impact and cared deeply about their efforts, making it feasible to take on their workload with passion and dedication.

The shared vision and purpose of the Yarra CTC initiative contributed to a sense of ownership and pride. Organisations and individuals could connect with the vision in a way that was relevant to their own missions, fostering a collective belief in the work they were doing.

The Yarra CTC initiative fostered a sense of community, akin to a neighbourhood, where facilitators felt they spoke a similar language and had shared understandings in concepts like emotion coaching. This shared identity created a cohesive and connected network.

When we do work together with other stakeholders towards a shared goal, we are able to get better outcomes for the young people and families we work with.

Facilitator workshop

In late 2023, a workshop was run with 14 TINT facilitators from the Yarra CTC Facilitator Network. During this workshop, the facilitators were asked to identify instances in the preceding year when they had referred TINT participants to other services after identifying a need for extra support.

The facilitators described 4 instances of personal follow-up, 6 instances of sharing information about other services/resources, 9 instances of direct referral to services and/or organisations, and 2 instances of the facilitators directly collaborating with another organisation themselves.

Overall, the facilitators identified 20 separate organisations that were contacted for collaboration of any kind, and a total of 82 instances of collaboration. These numbers build on the information provided in the focus groups around social capital, giving concrete examples to reinforce the impressions of collaboration, relationships building and networks improving outcomes.

Additionally, during the workshop, the facilitators talked about how they drew on the TINT content to inform and enhance their practice in other areas. They spoke of examples of working with clients where their greater insight and skills in understanding parent-child dynamics, explaining emotions, active listening and emotion coaching, improved their direct practice with young people and families.

They also spoke of how experience in the program bolstered their professional identity and confidence, and how the experience of facilitating TINT built on their existing skills of collaboration and co-facilitation.

These experiences reflect the focus of group discussions around collective intelligence and community.

Next steps

As highlighted earlier in this report, the process of developmental evaluation to bridge the somewhat inflexible processes of formative and summative evaluation, is a natural fit for this area of work. Indeed, a common element that both CTC and place-based approaches share is continuously assessing the progress of the implemented programs and interventions to determine their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments, which could just as easily be a definition of developmental evaluation. It is also a process without a clear end point. This report is a first step in defining, evaluating and developing our approach to place-based initiatives.

Recommended focus areas for future evaluation of the Yarra CTC initiative include:

- Improved connection to community and services (directly with parents).
- TINT expertise embedded in community (informed quality, skills, strategy, context).
- Increased sharing of knowledge and information between parents.
- Targeted culturally and linguistically diverse-focused TINT messaging and engagement.

An ongoing developmental evaluation of the growing engagement with, and messaging aimed at, culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the City of Yarra is currently underway.

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