

Evaluating our collaborative approach to strengthening family relationships in the City of Yarra

Research summary

Between 2017 and 2024, we worked with the Yarra Communities That Care® initiative to deliver evidence-based messaging on social and emotional literacy to families in the City of Yarra.

We coordinated a network of Tuning in to Teens® and Tuning in to Kids® parenting program facilitators, from multiple partner agencies, to deliver programs in Yarra. This collaborative, place-based project has led to the formation of a strong, integrated service network to better support local young people and families.

We evaluated the Yarra Communities That Care® Facilitator Network model to understand the principles and themes that led to its success.

What we did

Building on positive program feedback and achievements from 2017–2022, we conducted an evaluation of the Facilitator Network’s collaborative and place-based approach.

Our aim was to better understand the Facilitator Network’s contribution to systemic change and to apply these learnings to future place-based approaches within our respective agencies.

The evaluation project team adopted the ‘Place-Based Evaluation Framework’ and developed a comprehensive Theory of Change. Our findings are detailed in our 2024 report.

Why we did it

Collaborative place-based approaches are increasingly viewed at federal, state and local levels as a promising way to address complex social problems. Previous evaluations and literature have identified successful collaboration and a strong support entity as the key enabling factors that make place-based approaches successful.

Our collaborative place-based approach to strengthening family relationships in Yarra is a local example of this. The evaluation report, alongside emerging evidence, has directly influenced our ongoing strategies for place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives which strengthen family relationships and improve wellbeing.

‘Collaboration enables us to have a much wider scope. When we collaborate, we can get a lot more programs out there and reach a lot more people.’

- Network Facilitator

Program delivery

- 67 programs delivered to 545 participants
- 20 multicultural programs
- 14 webinars and information sessions with 1,383 attendees

Partnership and collaboration

- 13 partner agencies
- 69 practitioners in the Facilitator Network
- 22 partner schools

Evaluation method

- Place-Based Evaluation Framework
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews and a workshop with facilitators

Focus group findings

Core principles for successful coalition

1. Strong support entity
2. Cultivating a collaborative culture
3. Effective inter-agency coordination
4. Clear and inclusive communication

Benefits of a collaborative approach

- Increasing social capital
- Harnessing collective intelligence
- Building community

Learn more

- Read the full evaluation report: rav.org.au/news/yarra-ctc-evaluation
- Email us: evaluation@rav.org.au

What we found

In April 2023, 4 focus groups and interviews were held with 9 facilitators in the Facilitator Network. These sessions confirmed that the 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.

Key principles

The Facilitator Network exemplified the transformative power of establishing a closely connected coalition of facilitators and stakeholders.

Their work together transcended the limitations of traditional program provision and demonstrated the importance of the following key principles.

1. Strong support entity

Sometimes called a 'backbone structure', this is a person or group whose role is to provide strategic planning, stakeholder management and practical support, and to act as the point of contact for coalition members, stakeholders and community members. They're the central pillar that fosters initial connections, facilitates the network's growth and drives strategic progress.

2. 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.

3. Effective inter-agency coordination

Frequent and meaningful communication among network members promotes information sharing, group reflection, and continuous learning. This ongoing exchange ensures alignment with common goals and a shared vision.

4. 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.

Benefits of a collaborative approach

Three main themes were constructed from interviews and discussions in the facilitator focus groups, all of which reflect the overarching importance of collaboration and support in the Yarra approach.

Increasing social capital

Working collaboratively influences how interpersonal connections are formed, what they are used for and how they are strengthened.

'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.'

Harnessing collective intelligence

The group can collectively and effectively tackle diverse tasks and amass valuable knowledge that remains accessible and useful even without ongoing contributions from members.

'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.'

Building community

The Facilitator Network provides membership, influence, reinforcement, belonging and shared emotional connection.

'It's almost like a little neighbourhood type of program. And we all get to speak a similar language.'

Practice implications

The Facilitator Network is a valuable template of best practices for implementing place-based approaches and building successful coalitions.

The key principles outlined in the evaluation 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 Facilitator Network's success and help build strong, resilient and connected communities.