



A STRONGER, MORE DIVERSE AND INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY SECTOR

Together in 2770 Collective, Mt DrUITT

This submission was collaboratively written by the following members of the Together in 2770 Collective: The Hive (United Way Australia), BaptistCare HopeStreet, Bidwill Uniting, Jesuit Social Services, The Salvation Army & HIPPY (Uniting)

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 2 |
| Together in 2770 Collective | 3 |
| Responding to the Issues Paper..... | 5 |
| 1. Problems and challenges | 5 |
| 2. Solutions and changes to be considered | 7 |
| 3. What success could look like | 9 |
| References | 10 |



Executive Summary

The Together in 2770 Collective welcomes the opportunity to present a submission for the development of a community sector that is stronger, more diverse and independent based upon our 7 years of collaborative work in the suburbs of Mt Druitt, NSW. The Together in 2770 Collective was established in 2015 and is guided by the belief that for outcomes for children and communities to be improved, a collaborative, place-based and ecological approach must be embraced to recognise that children belong to families, who live in communities who are affected by policies and systems.

We welcome any opportunity to discuss our recommendations further with the Department of Social Services and provide further examples of our experience of place-based and Collective Impact work in the Mt Druitt area.

Summary of recommendations:

We, the Together in 2770 Collective Impact Initiative aspire for a funding model for the community sector that is place-based, community centred and relationship based. One that prioritises collaboration and an ecological approach to address the complexity of disadvantage and enable communities to thrive.

Our recommendations are that funding approaches be adapted to embed the following four principles to ensure greater impact of the community sector:

1. **Place-based: Increased long-term funding for place-based initiatives that have strong and deep ties to their local community.**
2. **Community centred and relationship based: Funding is based on community voice and lived experiences and funding is flexible to respond to community's unique assets and barriers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are prioritised and embedded to promote community organisations and programs that embody decolonial practices. Incorporate funding to encourage the building of trust and relationships with communities and local organisations.**
3. **Collaborative: Funding prioritizes collaborative approaches that empower organisations to work together for change in communities rather than in competition or silos.**
4. **Ecological and systems-focused: Funding models use an ecological framework that enable organisations to engage with the individual's ecosystem including the individual and their relationship to family, community, country and broader policies and systems. Funding acknowledges and addresses the social determinants of issues facing communities rather than funding standard program delivery.**

Our recommendations in this submission have evolved from our learnings from collaborative, place-based Collective Impact work in the specific context in Mt Druitt. However, we believe that these principles are applicable for many other organisations working within communities of disadvantage and facing challenges in navigating funding to work collaboratively for meaningful change.

Some members of the 2770 Collective are also members of the Strengthening Communities Alliance, and we promote the recommendations for place-based work that are outlined in their '*Strengthening Communities Position Paper*' (Strengthening Communities Alliance)(2023).

Together in 2770 Collective

Together in 2770 Collective are a group of organisations and residents who have agreed to come together to focus on the priorities and aspirations of Mt Druitt residents, working in a place-based, innovative, and collaborative way to achieve long-lasting and system wide change. Mt Druitt is a diverse and vibrant community in Sydney where its people are resilient, strong, passionate, and kind. It is a community that is faced with complex social and economic issues that can lead to developmentally vulnerable children. In the past, the approach to providing support services in the 2770 postcode has been fragmented where services have operated in silos, resulting in service gaps, double-ups and a community left feeling 'handed-around'. The Together in 2770 Collective believe if we 'leave our egos and logos at the door', remain place-based, put the community first, and share our resources, we can break cycles of disadvantage and see children, families and communities thrive.

The Collective are deeply involved in the suburbs of Willmot, Lethbridge Park, Bidwill and Tregear in conducting community consultations and locally led initiatives around areas such as community connection, access to services, safety, housing, cleanliness and infrastructure. Each suburb has its own Working Group with representatives from community organisations, schools, preschools, Council, government, and residents which meet regularly to collaborate on innovative solutions to complex challenges in the community. The Collective additionally have a focus on families, particularly those with young children, and have collaborated on after school programs, playgroups, child health programs, and investment in our early childhood and care services.

Some of our participating organisations include The Hive (United Way Australia), Jesuit Social Services, The Salvation Army, Bidwill Uniting, HIPPY (UnitingCare), BaptistCare HopeStreet, Connect Child & Family Services, Fusion Western Sydney and local schools and early education centres. The Together in 2770 Collective has developed a series of Insight Papers. The Hive's Insight Paper "*A Collective Approach to Community Development and Mobilisation*" highlights our approach to community development and the effectiveness of our model (Together in 2770 (2022)).

This paper also outlines the Collective's guiding principles to engaging with First Nations peoples in a way that strives for a decolonised community development practice. This approach is based on being in-place and "blurring the distinctions" between services and First Nations Peoples. Relationships of accountability have been cultivated and have reconfigured the way services are developed and delivered.

We see "blurring the distinctions" as an essential element for services and workers to being seen as trustworthy – helping to create the conditions for collaboration with First Nations Peoples. Our place-based approach and increasingly agile and adaptive ways of working continue to resist fragmentation and allow for greater representation and participation in community development.

Mt Druitt Context

The Mt Druitt postcode has a long history of entrenched intergenerational poverty and social stigma with some of the postcode's twelve suburbs having exceptionally high rates of unemployment, crime, financial insecurity, and issues of domestic violence and mental health. According to the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)(2021), in certain Mt Druitt suburbs, 2 in 3 children start

school considered developmentally vulnerable, which is significantly higher than the national rate of 1 in 5 children. The percentage of children classed as developmentally vulnerable is only increasing, and so is the gap between Mt Druitt children and the rest of NSW. Living in a region of socioeconomic disadvantage, these children are starting school already behind compared to children from other communities, and without significant investment in Mt Druitt suburbs, these children will struggle to break out of the cycle of poverty.

The 2021 Census (ABS)(2021) and crime figures (BOCSAR)(2021) demonstrate the disadvantage the Mt Druitt postcode experience.

- The suburb of Bidwill had an employment rate of only 34.4% compared to the NSW state average of 58.7%
- In the suburb of Willmot, the median weekly household income was less than half that of the NSW average.
- The suburb of Willmot had only 3.7% of residents obtain a university qualification compared to 27.8% of NSW residents.
- The suburb of Bidwill consists of nearly 50% single parent families (48.4%)
- Up to 19.1% of households in Mt Druitt suburbs do not have access to a vehicle which is significantly higher than the NSW rate of 9%
- The 2770 postcode has a higher rate of crime in all categories recorded by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), including over double the state rates of drug offenses, assault, robbery, and malicious damage to property.

It is also significant to note that some Mt Druitt suburbs have 15.3% of their population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander compared to 3.4% of NSW.



Responding to the Issues Paper

In reviewing the Issues Paper, we have chosen to collate our reflections in responding to the sixth question regarding 1) Problems, 2) Solutions & 3) What Success could look like, each relating to the principles outlined in our summary of recommendations.

1. Problems and challenges

Place-based

- Place-based approaches have been repeatedly shown to be an effective way to address complex problems within communities, yet place-based initiatives are not funded sufficiently and the complexity of the entrenched disadvantage of communities and the systems surrounding them is not adequately recognized within funding grants.
- Funding is often given to large scale organisations who can roll out programs across large areas. This does not consider the individual needs and barriers facing smaller communities, therefore leading to programs being inaccessible or irrelevant to the community.
- Small, local organisations with strong relationships and trust within communities, knowledge of local challenges and assets, and experience working in the local community are often underfunded. These organisations are often overlooked and struggle to compete with bigger organisations in a competitive grant application process, despite the high quality and effective work they may be doing on the ground.
- The term ‘place-based’ has been broadly used and can often refer to work completed in large local government areas which can fail to address smaller community’s needs. Individual communities and suburbs within LGA’s face unique barriers and challenges and require targeted and tailored approaches, often suburb by suburb. When this doesn’t occur, we find ‘place-based work’ occurring in business hubs and with a limited range of community consultation, which then excludes those who face transport barriers or in areas of low infrastructure.
- Decision making for place-based funding is made by those without understanding of the local communities and the existing work occurring in those spaces.

Community-centred & Relationship based

- Funding is given to community programs “that have worked somewhere else” with little adaptation for the new context and without consideration of community’s unique needs.
- Funding does not consider community voice enough nor the leadership from First Nations people, culture and connection to Country.
- Funding arrangements rarely allow for the crucial, and slow-moving work of community engagement so relationships and trust can be built with the community. These relationships are the foundation for community participation, community leadership and long-term change.
- Smaller organizations or community groups lack funding for indirect costs and are often more stretched as they don’t have the supports larger organisations do. (NCOSS)(2022); (SVA)(2022)
The risk that organisations who are deeply rooted in community and having strong local connections may shut down due to insufficient funding and an increased demand is real and

underlines the vulnerability of the sector and an insufficiently funded collaborative approach.

- Short-term funding leads to high staff turnover and a disruption in the relationship and trust building with community and partners; resulting in community distrust, a slowing down of the community work, an unsatisfied workforce, and fewer community outcomes.
- Funding requirements may include an element of ‘co-design’ principles to encourage organisations to consult community in their project design. However, the true cost of this in both time and resource is not accommodated to ensure that the co-design process is authentic and genuinely driven by community and First Nations leadership and consultation.

Collaborative

- The real cost of collaborative and collective impact work isn’t funded, such as the importance of ongoing community engagement work to build relationships and trust in community or the building and maintaining of close connections and collaborations between community and other stakeholders. These are the glue of collective work. The fact that this work is usually unfunded brings a fragility to a collective impact model and is a barrier for organisations to collaborate or work in a collective impact model as their funding is insufficient.
- Organisations are required to compete against one another for funding. This creates an environment of siloed services that are not working together sufficiently, leaving community members confused and overwhelmed by a fragmented service system.

Ecological & System-focused

- Funding models focus on programmatic responses to individual's issues and fail to acknowledge the complex systems that lead to entrenched disadvantage that communities live in
- Funding focuses on specific issues or programs (E.g. health, DV, crime, mentoring) and neglects the social determinants of these issues and the complexities individuals face within families, communities and systems. This funding approach embeds programmatic work within silos rather than working across departments and sectors. Community is left with limited opportunities and remains “stuck” in one way or another within the systems that aren’t working for long-term change.
- Services across the systems are complicated and don’t communicate with each other leaving the community confused and unable to fully engage with the systems and access the support required.

2. Solutions and changes to be considered

Place-based

- Funding is provided that is flexible and responsive to local needs after consultation and research of the community.
- Funding is prioritised to organisations who already are working in the community, with strong community links, and can demonstrate the effectiveness of their work.
- Funding should focus on the depth of effectiveness and impact within the community instead of prioritising a broad reach of programs/services/initiatives with quantitative results. Unique characteristics and complexities of a specific place and the community need to be considered and should be reported on.
- Funding opportunities should explicitly define what is meant by place-based work and prioritize community work happening at a local level to meet local community needs.
- Decision making happens as close to the community as possible with involvement from local organisations, policy makers or community members such as in the grant selection process or project implementation.

Community-centred & Relationship based

- Accountability within funding provision to ensure that community voice informs community work, ensuring that any initiative/program/service is based on local community aspirations, issues and needs and remains responsive and innovative to changing needs.
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice is included and embedded within program delivery, decision making, funding priorities and grant provision.
- Community plays an active part of the work at all levels. Community feels valued and listened to and sees the work is responsive, which leads to an engaged community, who participates, takes ownership, develops leadership and is invested in the work and long-term change. Community is not regarded as just a recipient, but also a valuable contributor.
- Funding contracts are longer-term, flexible and allow for changes to adjust services/programs/initiatives to meet the needs and aspirations of the community. Longer-term funding enables organisations to retain staff, which is essential to build strong and trusted relationships with the community.
- Adequate time is given to organisations seeking to apply for funding to engage in a genuine process of community consultation in order to co-design projects and initiatives that are being funded. Funding should prioritise initiatives that have been developed in partnership with community members and with First Nations leadership and consultation.

Collaborative

- Funding prioritizes organisations with deep levels of collaboration, as it is understood that this is where a greater community impact and social change can be achieved. For example, stakeholders, such as community members, community groups, community organisations, service providers, businesses and government work collaboratively to understand community hopes and needs well. Together they work to reach community aspirations and meet community needs.
Moreover, a collaborative approach enables a response to the complexities of everyday life

and the systems that communities navigate. It is important, if not essential, for reporting having a stronger emphasis on the level of collaboration.

- Funding covers the real cost of collaboration and so acknowledges the importance of collaboration and prioritizes coalitions. By doing so, duplication of services and competition are reduced. Furthermore, smaller organisations and community-led initiatives who have close local links but often struggle financially, are more supported and strengthen the collective work, and don't risk reducing services or worse, closing, which would have a detrimental effect on the community work and progress in the community as a whole.
- Funding criteria that focuses on the depth and extent of collaboration among stakeholders is established. Existing and effective collective impact initiatives are continually funded to expand their collaborative work in community towards long-term change.

Ecological & System-focused

- An ecological framework is used for developing funding opportunities that recognizes the close connection and interdependence between individual, family, community and the existing systems, including businesses, services, government and the environment (Bronfenbrenner)(1979).
- Funding acknowledges the complexities that community face, is holistic and uses an ecological framework. It prioritises models that work with an ecological framework and use a systems lens.
- All parts of the system are involved in community work and held accountable to each other, including the relevant levels of government within the systems.
- Funding is long-term and outcome-focused and offers flexibility for innovative approaches to meet the needs of a changing community and changing systems.
- Ethical and effective reporting takes place that measures community impact across the systems.



3. What success could look like

Funding that is place-based, community-centred, relationship-based, collaborative and follows an ecological framework will lead to successful community work and collective impact initiatives, which have:

- Established and maintained strong local connections and built relationships and trust with the community over years, enabled by sufficient and ongoing funding and the opportunity to invest in community engagement, community and First Nations leadership and collaboration.
- Work that is characterized by community engagement, participation, capacity building, leadership and ultimately long-term change within the community and the systems.
- Strong local knowledge and understand the changing needs of the community and systems.
- Strong collaborations between local community, community partners, different levels of government and businesses to address and change systems long-term that impact the community.
- Community-led initiatives and smaller organisations are supported and held by the backbones of Collective Impact initiatives and strengthen the work due to the strong local links.
- Organisations are seeking deeper, more authentic co-design processes with First Nations communities when developing community projects and initiatives.
- Delivered adaptive and innovative and work across the systems in an ecological framework to create long-term change in the communities. Silo-thinking and working are of the past.
- Decision making is close to the community to be relevant and having the ability to understand and meet changing community needs.
- Local workers employed and community is involved in all aspects of the work and decision making.
- Community work is accountable and assessable, eg. Demonstrated processes of collaboration, avoidance of duplication
- Ongoing funding that allows for continuity of collective impact work, staff retention and strong relationships that create the opportunity for deeper and more impactful work across the systems, fosters needed change and higher community outcomes and leads to equity and more balance in society.

References

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