

Strengthening our villages

'It takes a village to raise a child'

Stronger Families Alliance
Strategy for children, young people and families

2019 – 2024



Backbone support agencies for
the Stronger Families Alliance



Acknowledgement of Ngurra (Country)

The City of the Blue Mountains is located within the Ngurra (Country) of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. Blue Mountains City Council recognises that Darug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners have a continuous and deep connection to their Ngurra and that this is of great cultural significance to Aboriginal people, both locally and in the region.

For Darug and Gundungurra people, Ngurra takes in everything within the physical, cultural and spiritual landscape—landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, stories and special places. It includes cultural practice, kinship, knowledge, songs, stories and art, as well as spiritual beings and people—past, present and future. Blue Mountains City Council and the Stronger Families Alliance pay respect to Elders past and present, while recognising the strength, capacity and resilience of past and present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Blue Mountains region.

Gundungurra Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA)

The Gundungurra ILUA¹ is an Agreement between the Gundungurra people² and the NSW Government. Blue Mountains City Council acknowledges this ILUA and supports the Gundungurra achieve their aspirations through the ILUA by way of advice and initiatives from Council's Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

The Gundungurra ILUA broadly covers lands and waters of the southern half of the Blue Mountains LGA extending to the Southern Highlands, and including all the townships in these two regions. The ILUA acknowledges the Traditional Ownership by the Gundungurra of the country within these borders and highlights their aspirations for cultural maintenance and economic and social self-determination. As such, the Gundungurra ILUA provides the framework for Council and its partners in the community sector and other levels of Government to understand and work in a culturally appropriate and respectful way with the Gundungurra Traditional Owners. In developing and implementing actions for this Strategic Plan, Council and the Stronger Families Alliance members individually and collectively will seek to ensure that decision-making responds to the protocols for appropriate engagement of the Gundungurra and Darug Traditional Aboriginal Owners.

¹ An Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) is a voluntary agreement between a Native Title group and other parties on the use and management of land and waters. Indigenous Land Use a Agreements are established by the Native Title Act 1993. Native Title is the recognition in Australian law that some Indigenous people continue to hold communal, group or individual rights and interests to their lands and waters. These collective rights and interests come from traditional laws and customs. Native Title rights established by an ILUA have the same weight under federal law as a Native Title determination.

² The Gundungurra people are represented in this agreement by the Gundungurra Tribal Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association.

Contributors

This Strategy was guided by a Steering Committee comprising Alliance members who provided feedback and corrections at each step of the way. The authors (Colin Berryman and Ryn Vlachou from Blue Mountains City Council) would like to thank the following for their astute comments and thoughtful contribution:

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Executive Summary

The Stronger Families Alliance and how it works

The Stronger Families Alliance is a collaboration of Blue Mountains organisations, groups and individuals committed to collaborative action for the benefit of children, young people and families. These organisations include funded agencies, and State and Local Government agencies. Blue Mountains City Council and the Mountains Community Resource Network, facilitate the work of the Alliance providing “Backbone” support in a “**Collective Impact**” model.

Focus areas and projects

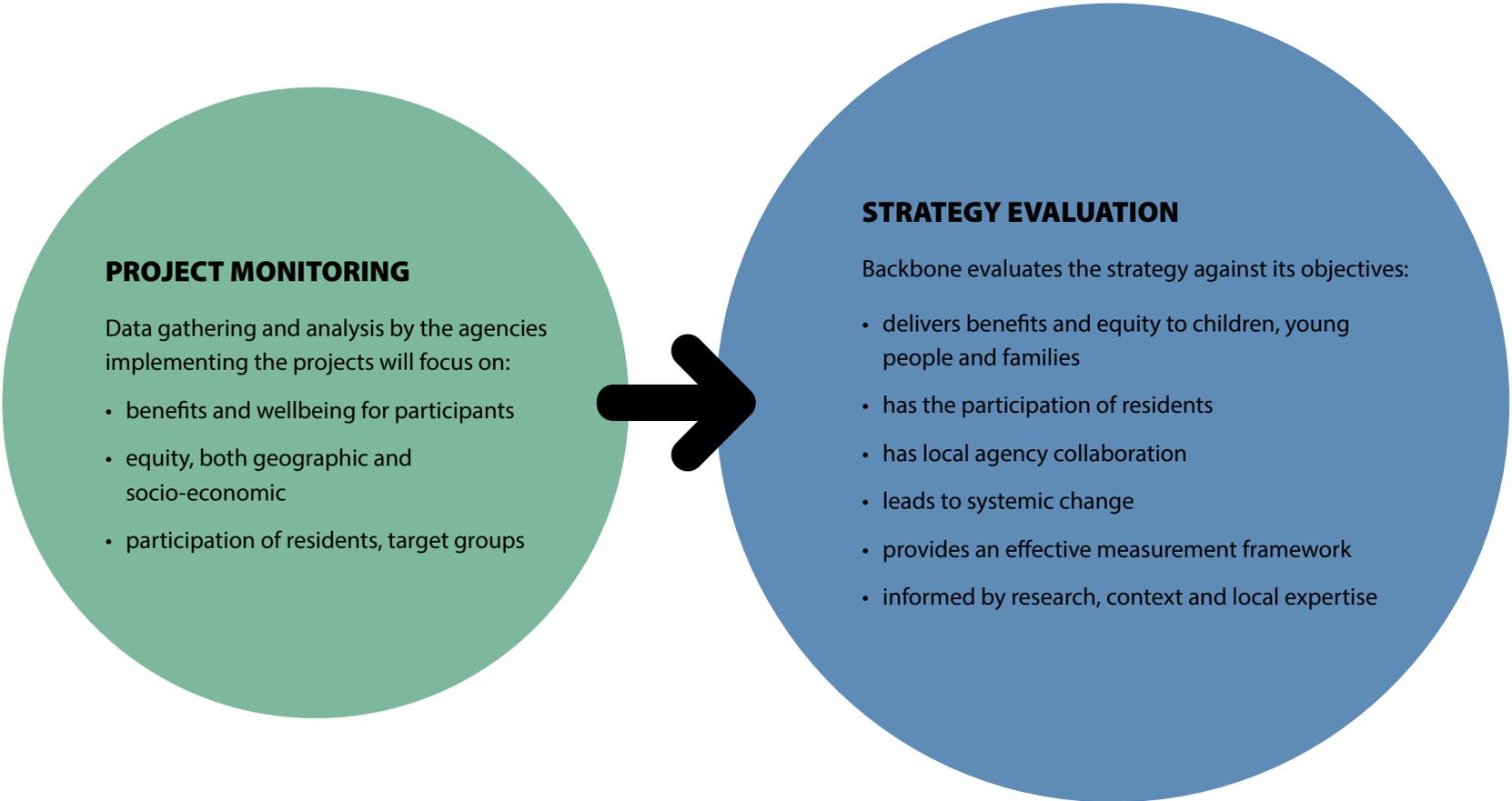
Projects implemented by the Alliance are developed through an iterative process, with each new project informed by evidence of prior projects’ impact, the identification of best practice, and through processes of open discussion and decision-making by Alliance members. New projects are implemented on an average two year cycle. Projects are determined in each of four Focus areas: Children; Young People; Parents and Carers; and The City. Projects are broadly framed to achieve our Vision: to provide opportunities for children and young people to thrive, to nurture them as responsible citizens, and for parents and carers to fully participate in community life. Initial Projects under this Strategy are:

CHILDREN	YOUNG PEOPLE	PARENTS AND CARERS	THE CITY
<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Children Start School Ready to learn – Developmental checks and support strategies</p>	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Children and Young people are emotionally resilient</p>	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Parents and Carers are confident in their child’s development and learning</p>	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Our community is child and youth friendly: consultation Child and Youth Safe Events</p>
<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Related Council-Led Projects</p> <p>Early Childhood Education Coordination and Support Project</p>	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Related Council-Led Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D&A Harm minimisation • Social Enterprises • Positive Education Network 	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Related Council-Led Projects</p> <p>Grandparents and Elders Support project: research and recognition</p>	<p>2019 – 2020</p> <p>Related Council-Led Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BM Community Safety Strategy • BM Gender Equity Strategy

How we will know we have made a difference: Project Monitoring and Strategy Evaluation

The Alliance assesses the value of the Projects implemented, and the overall worth of this Strategy, through two interconnected processes: Project Monitoring and Strategy Evaluation. As Members report on these projects to their Agency management and funding bodies, their own monitoring processes are used to

measure impact. Information from these monitoring activities will be used in the final Evaluation of the Strategy by the Backbone agencies. This Monitoring and Evaluation structure is represented in the below diagram.



What is the Stronger Families Alliance?

The Stronger Families Alliance³ is:

- A network of Blue Mountains organisations, groups and individuals
- Committed to collaborative action through a **Collective Impact** approach
- Supported by Blue Mountains City Council and the Mountains Community Resource Network as **“Backbone”** organisations
- Directed by Main Group of Alliance members and supported by an Executive
- Working to improve outcomes and opportunities for Children, Young People and their Parents/Carers in the Blue Mountains

Timeline

- 2006: Formation
- 2010: Produced first Child and Family Plan (0 – 12 year olds)
- 2014: Expanded to include young people (12- 18 year olds) and focus on resilience and wellbeing
- 2015: Adoption of Collective Impact Approach
- 2016: Adoption of **Ultimate Outcomes**
- 2017: Began Shared Measurement Project
- 2019: Strategy for Children, Young People and Families

See detail of our Journey in the Roadmap below!

³ See Alliance Strategy Support Documents for further detail on membership, structure of the Alliance and Collective Impact Theory

STRONGER FAMILIES ALLIANCE ROADMAP



3. Vision: What we want to see

- Children and young people thrive and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Parents and Carers have the opportunity to participate and make a positive contribution to community life

1. Beginnings: 2006

Joint initiative of FACS, Blue Mountains City Council and MCRN, working together to improve collaboration between services supporting children and families and addressing neglect and abuse of children 0-8 (then expanded to 0-12 years old). A number of projects delivered: eg School-based Hubs; BushTrackers; Paint the Blue REaD.

2. Evolution

Development and confirmation of the Alliance approach, adoption of COLLECTIVE IMPACT strategy; culminating in the evaluation of process to date in 2016. Significant refocus on 0-18 and WELLBEING OUTCOMES leading to an agreement on a COMMON AGENDA for the Alliance.

4. Knowledge

We will know we're making a difference by identifying and collecting the right information / measures.

5. Focus: 2017

Agreement on four Areas of focus: **Children, Young People, Parents and Carers, and the Community.**

- **Children Ready for school**
- **Young People Emotionally Resilient**
- **Parents / Carers Confident and Engaged** in their child's development
- **Blue Mountains is known as a Child and Youth Friendly City**

6. Implement

Working Together on the four initial Projects through determining:

- WHAT is happening CURRENTLY?
- WHAT we WANT to see happen?
- HOW we will achieve this?
- How we will KNOW our impact for each project?

7. Review and Recharge

Sharing what we have learnt

- Who do we need to **ENGAGE**?
- How do we find ways to make **GOOD outcomes ONGOING**?
- Determine **WHAT** to do next in each of the four focus areas: i.e. continue same projects and/or take on something new?

Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families

The Alliance has developed a theoretical and practical analysis of best practice in the support for children, young people and families, along with measurement of outcomes of interventions⁴. From this work the Alliance adopted Ultimate Outcomes for children and young people (see below). These Outcomes are

aligned with a framework for resilience and wellbeing that acknowledges three principles of child development: Being, Belonging, and Becoming. The Alliance also acknowledges the importance of supporting carers of children and young people.

Ultimate Outcomes		Age 0-5yrs	Age 5-12yrs	Age 12-18yrs
Being	Children and young people are safe, healthy, flourishing and have a secure cultural identity.	1. Children and young people have equitable access to the resources they need to reach their full potential. 2. Children and young people are safe, healthy, flourishing and secure in their cultural identity.		
Belonging: Community & place	Children and young people feel they belong to the community and the place where they live.	3. Children have secure and nurturing relationships with their family, friends and the community.	4. Children and young people feel valued by the community and have positive participatory connections with family, friends, community and the place where they live.	
			5. Children and young people contribute to others, the community, the place where they live and the environment.	
Becoming	Children and young people reach their full potential.	6. Children meet their holistic developmental milestones.	7. Children and young people engage in education and have developmentally appropriate self-regulation & life skills.	
			8. Young people are well connected with post school pathways to quality education and / or employment.	
Caring	9. Parents and carers participate in and make a positive contribution to community life			

⁴Shared Measurement Framework for the Stronger Families Alliance: 2018: Regina Hill Consultants. Commissioned by BMCC.

About this Strategy

This Strategy aims to deliver significant and measurable benefits to children, young people and families living in the Blue Mountains. It is informed by local evidence and international research and builds on opportunities for collaboration in our work with communities.

Vision

Children and young people in the Blue Mountains are provided with opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential within a rich natural and cultural environment

They are nurtured to become engaged and responsible citizens socially, emotionally, culturally, environmentally and economically

Parents and Carers are supported in this holistic strategy, enabling them to participate and contribute positively to community life.

Strategy Objectives

To achieve its Vision, the Strategy will identify and develop a series of projects for children, young people, parents and the City which:

1. Delivers measurable benefits to children, young people and families, particularly those who may be vulnerable or marginalised
2. Utilises the participation of Blue Mountains residents, particularly communities of interest with specific strengths and skills⁵
3. Evolves in collaboration with relevant Blue Mountains agencies
4. Leads to systemic change within Blue Mountains City Council and community agency partners⁶
5. Provides a framework enabling individual organisations to measure their contribution to outcomes
6. Is informed by research and analysis of community need⁷, opportunity and context, and the expertise of the Alliance

The Strategy will be Evaluated against these Objectives, drawing upon information provided on the projects delivered under the Strategy (points 1, 2 and 3) along with assessment by the Backbone agencies (points 4, 5 and 6).

⁵ This objective has arisen as a result of various critiques of Collective Impact. For more detail see Strategy Support Document Section

⁶ Ibid

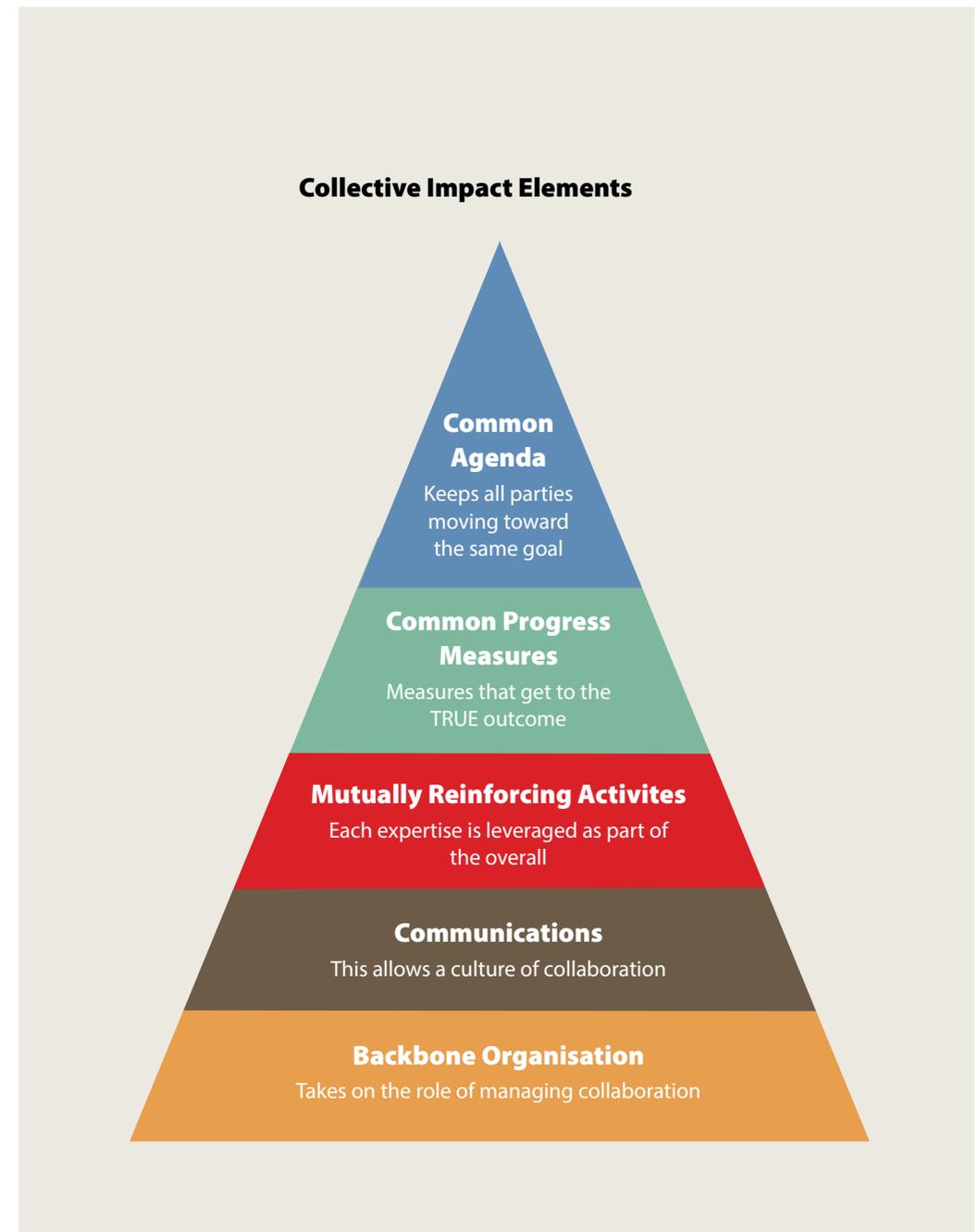
⁷ Research and analysis of community need has been made possible through the creation of a dedicated social research position at Blue Mountains City Council

What have we done in developing this Strategy

Collective Impact Model

The Alliance adopted the Collective Impact model as the appropriate framework for developing local collaborative action. Collective Impact was first described by John Kania and Mark Kramer to describe a collaborative way of working, (see [here](#)). The model identifies five elements underpinning successful collective ventures:

1. A **common agenda** for change including a shared understanding of the problem
2. Collecting **data and measuring results consistently** across all the participants
3. A **plan of action** that identifies mutually reinforcing activities for each participant
4. **Open and continuous communication** across the many players
5. **Backbone organisations** with staff and a specific set of skills to coordinate the initiative



Collective Impact Model: Mark II

The Collective Impact model has evolved over time. The adjacent diagram illustrates recent changes, or “shifts” in the Collective Impact approach. Column 1 represents how Collective Impact theorists framed community development work prior to Collective Impact. Column 2 is the first iteration of Collective Impact, and Column 3 represents its development over time⁸.

The Shifts that are most relevant to the evolution of this Strategy, are:

1. **Shared Measurement to Strategic Learning⁹.** The implementation of the Shared Measurement and Action Planning strategy proved difficult and complex for many in the Alliance, in the context of time and capacity constraints. A Strategic Learning approach, which does not require the same degree of consistency and commitment to measurement techniques, may better serve this Strategy’s Objectives.
2. **Continuous Communication to Authentic Community Engagement¹⁰.** The predominance of agency representatives in the Alliance membership, rather than resident / community representation, has meant that Continuous Communication has been largely operating between agencies. As a result, the Alliance is identified as an interagency project, rather than a community participatory project.
3. **Mutually reinforcing activities to systems focus.** Taking a systems focus enables organisations to tackle the systemic conditions that perpetuate disadvantage. The Alliance can look for opportunities to apply this lens to its work at a future date if conditions allow.

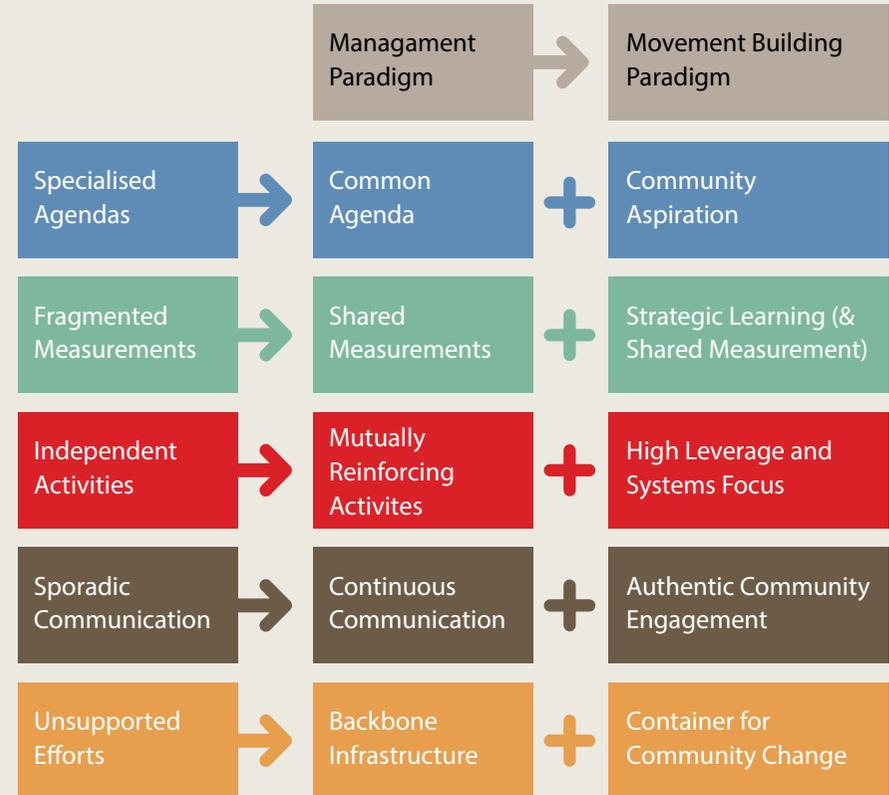
⁸ <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/sites/default/files/Collective%20Impact%203.0.pdf>

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the differences within the shifts, see Strategy Support Document Section 2

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the differences within the shifts, see Strategy Support Document Section 2

Collective Impact Changes

Six Shifts



Initial project development

In 2017 the Alliance adopted four Focus areas: Children; Young People; Parents and Carers; and The City, and initiated the following four Projects and identified monitoring processes and measurable outcomes for them. These were:

1. Early Childhood development

We worked with Community Health and Early Childhood Educators to increase the rate of age appropriate development checks for children before starting school. We will measure our impact using the Australian Education census data and data from Community Health regarding the uptake of checks.

2. Confident and engaged parents support their children's development and learning

We talked to parents/ carers and service providers about access to information on school holiday activities. We wanted to ensure service providers coordinated with each other so that low cost accessible activities were available on at least three days per week of the school holidays, and were promoted on the **Alliance website**. Our measure of success included: number of members promoting the calendar; number of families who accessed the calendar; and number of activities members contributed to the calendar.

3. Young people are emotionally resilient

We held in depth conversations with over 100 young people across our schools about their mental health and resilience. We wanted to know how best to support them to help them achieve the outcome of being safe, healthy, flourishing, and confident in their cultural identity. We documented our research **here**. We will continue sharing this information with schools, parents and young people to support their emotional resilience.

4. Community Safety: The Blue Mountains is recognised as being a child and youth friendly community

We asked the community, including young people, about what safety means to them in order to contribute to the outcome that children & young people feel safe. We have documented this research **here**. This will help inform priorities for our future activity.

5. We also created a **baseline for wellbeing and resilience** in our Blue Mountains community with a survey of over 2,500 community members including young people using the validated Personal Well-being Index and the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale. You can read this **here**.

Key Challenges in Implementing this Strategy

In the process of Strategy development a range of challenges in collaborative work emerged. These will need to be factored into how the Alliance works, and the expectations that Projects implemented under this Strategy will deliver on the **Ultimate Outcomes**.

These challenges include:

1. Shared Measurement challenges

- a. Focusing on data rather than what is being learned and understood
- b. Difficulty in choosing, or being able to access, the right indicators
- c. Making sense of data
- d. Understanding how each member contributes to shared measurement
- e. Time and capacity limitations of member agencies

2. Impact of the Funding Environment

- a. Reform across government funding programs and competitive tendering has had a disruptive impact on service providers and families over the course of the work of the Alliance. More recently, the drawn out timeframe for funding reform of family funded services has resulted in uncertainty for service providers and impacted on collaboration capacity.
- b. Competitive tendering has eroded collaboration and new initiative development, leading to a focus on individual outcomes in core service delivery areas at the expense of universal early intervention programs
- c. "Early intervention" is framed around a narrow understanding of the highest individual need, at the expense of inclusive community level strategies.

3. Ownership and Leadership

- a. The Collective Impact model, which entails the role of Backbone to one or more agencies, creates challenges in ownership of the Alliance by its general membership
- b. Theoretical knowledge in community development and coalition building needs to be broadened.

4. Community Engagement

- a. The framing and structuring of Collective Impact collaboration in the Alliance has previously been service focused
- b. Action must be steeped in a sound understanding of the political and social context that gives rise to inequity and vulnerability

5. The General difficulty of doing Collaboration – the gap of intention and reality

- a. Collaboration is challenging: it requires resources, trust, time, and motivation
- b. Organisations are required to move from an output framework to an impact framework
- c. Embedding Alliance activities, and commitment to a shared agenda and collaboration, into the work of member organisations, is difficult due to the issues above. However, it is needed if the Alliance is to create systemic, long term outcomes.

See the Alliance Strategy Support Document: Section 2, for more detail on the learnings for the Alliance on collaboration and Collective Impact.

Where do we want to be in the Future?

Children and Young People:

The key elements of the Alliance Vision require that this Strategy gives attention to children and young people

- Reaching their full potential; and
- Being actively engaged in contributing to society, the environment, culture and the economy.

This very broad vision for children and young people provides the scope for all Alliance members to contribute to outcomes.

Parents and Carers:

Parents and carers will have opportunities to participate and contribute positively to community life. The wellbeing of parents and carers is essential to supporting the wellbeing of children and young people. The Alliance believes that a balanced family life is one where all family members have opportunities for individual fulfilment and participation in community life.

The approach taken in developing projects includes

- i. Seeking the participation of residents and local agencies
- ii. Gathering evidence of effectiveness & community benefit
- iii. Planning to deliver identifiable & measurable outcomes
- iv. Analysing of demographic data

Initial Projects for 2019 – 2020 are outlined in the table (page 16).

How we will get there? Implementation 2019 - 2020

Children	Young People	Parents & Carers	Our City
Children start school ready to learn	Young people are emotionally resilient	Confident and engaged parents support their children's development and learning	The Blue Mountains is recognised as being a child and youth friendly community
<p>In 2019-20 we want to:</p> <p>Increase Parent/carer awareness of the importance of developmental milestones & attachment;</p> <p>Decrease child developmental vulnerability.</p> <p>In order to:</p> <p>Reverse the increase in vulnerability indicated by AEDC 20120-2018;</p> <p>Support awareness of early childhood services and resources/supports;</p> <p>Increase parents' confidence and engagement with their children.</p> <p>BEING 1&2; BECOMING 6</p>	<p>In 2019-20 we want to:</p> <p>Support young people with peer support skills</p> <p>In order to:</p> <p>Shift the stigma of mental health;</p> <p>Increase coping skills and manage stress;</p> <p>Increase Confidence and skills in dealing with mental health concerns;</p> <p>Strengthen skills to support friends with mental health concerns.</p> <p>BEING 1 &2</p> <p>BELONGING 3 &4</p> <p>BECOMING 7¹¹</p>	<p>In 2019-20 we want to:</p> <p>Increase parents' and carers' confidence and skills</p> <p>In order to:</p> <p>Respond to their children's concerns;</p> <p>Support young people and children in talking to parents;</p> <p>Ensure parents are present, connected and ready to listen;</p> <p>Increase community connections and supports for vulnerable families;</p> <p>Support families to have supportive networks and connection to each other and services: CARING 9</p>	<p>In 2019-20 we want to:</p> <p>Promote Safe Space/ Young people friendly city</p> <p>In order to:</p> <p>Create safe, trusting services and organisational spaces with peers;</p> <p>Provide zones that are gender safe day and night.</p> <p>BELONGING 3 &4, CARING 11</p>

¹¹ See how these activities link to the **Ultimate Outcomes Framework on page 9**

How will we know our impact

The Alliance will continue to work collaboratively on iterative short term projects relating to our four focus areas (Children, Young People, Parents/Carers, Community) to inform our work. A copy of the Planning and Monitoring Template for Implementation Groups can be found **here**. In summary the information covered in these templates will include:

1. Measurable benefits delivered to children & young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalised ie

- a. Who benefited and to what extent, determined by numbers participating (including age & gender); surveys and feedback
- b. Equity in terms of resource distribution, ensuring participation and outcomes are equitably distributed according to geographic and demographic vulnerability

2. Participation of Blue Mountains residents including

- a. People directly affected by project activities or outcomes
- b. People in a Community of Interest or Community Of Place

3. What changed as a result of these activities including

- a. Assessment of impact and/or
- b. Assessment of outcomes

We will also engage our members to identify how their agency core work and activities contribute to Alliance Outcomes for: Children; young people; Parents /Carers and the City. See our Tracking Template for Members **How Alliance Members contribute to Alliance Outcomes here....**



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the Stronger Families Alliance

