

## What the Queensland Family and Child Commission and the Queensland Council of Social Service learnt about partnering to do place-based work

*Strengthening our place* is a partnership between the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) and Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS). The partnership supports the child and family support sector to engage in collaborative, community-led place-based responses in Central Queensland while documenting and promoting the value of place-based approaches across Queensland in improving outcomes for children and families. A reflection on our place-based partnership was written in November 2018 at the end of Phase Three of *Strengthening our place* with some key learnings and project outcomes identified.

## What would we tell others who are looking to partner in guiding place-based work?

* Spend enough time on the partnership. This took a lot of our time, but contributed to a culture of robust, open and honest feedback while working together. This assisted in
  + - * + gaining clarity about expectations, capabilities and roles amongst project partners and plan within this scope
        + co-designing in the planning stages of each phase of the work
        + developing shared messaging about what the work was, and how we wanted to work with community
        + reflecting on what’s working and not working, and resolving issues as they arise.
* There is no denying that resourcing complicates things, and the nature of collaborative, community-led work does not lend itself easily to traditional funding and contractual arrangements. The balance between accountability and flexibility is hard to get right, but spend time trying to get it right, and keep revisiting.
* Vision together and with community. One of the most useful exercises we did was developing a program logic, but we should have involved more stakeholders to ensure we were on the same page, and it would have been beneficial to do it earlier. Developing a program logic gives the opportunity to gain clarity about what success would like, and what outputs will lead to the outcomes you agree on. A program logic also assists in communicating the ‘story’ of the work – a benefit when there is staff turnover both within a team and in the communities where you are working.
* Remember that you will have dual accountability to balance – to each other as partners, and to the community you are working with. This needs to be articulated clearly right from the beginning.
* Leverage from one another’s expertise and capability. Agile project management, evaluation experience, group process and facilitation, community engagement, systems thinking – everyone has something useful to offer, but you won’t know what it is unless you lay it all on the table.
* If resourcing allows, have a joint presence at key points in the project and at community events. This models collaborative relationships and is the best way of understanding what place-based work really is.
* Place-based work involves trying new things out, sharing resources and information, and sometimes taking risks. Because of this it requires an iterative approach and high level of trust. Honesty feeds trust, so be transparent and upfront about expectations, disappointments and limitations.

## Project outcomes from partnership working

### Conversations took place that otherwise wouldn’t have

The nature of the place-based approach, which is to consider complex problems and how they can be addressed in new ways, encouraged people to have conversations that went beyond everyday delivery issues. This enabled both community members and QFCC and QCOSS to talk about issues that were complex, challenging and ‘tricky’ in a safe and open environment and brought previously hidden issues and expectations into the open.

These conversations brought people together who otherwise wouldn’t have connected with each other. This happened ‘on the ground’ in the communities, between the project partners and community members and between the project partners themselves. This meant that new solutions and innovative responses to prioritised issues were possible.

### New relationships were established

As a result of these opportunities for conversations, new relationships have been established. Once again this happened in varying ways, including between:

* different community organisations
* Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations
* QCOSS and QFCC
* government and community.

These relationships have provided a foundation for other pieces of work beyond the *Strengthening our place* project.

### A greater level of community engagement was achieved

The Strengthening our place teams within QFCC and QCOSS found that the level of community engagement achieved through the partnership and the place-based approach would have been unlikely through other kinds of approaches or by either partner alone.

Each partner brought different and complimentary credibility to the project which helped build connections between a wider range of organisations that neither partner would have engaged with on their own. For example, QCOSS has now more than doubled the number of people/organisations who are now familiar with QCOSS.

### Place-based theory has been tested

The *Strengthening our place* project has enabled the previously theoretical understanding of place-based work to be ‘grounded’ in practice experience. This has given the project partners a deeper level of credibility in their support of this approach, as well as:

* evidence of outcomes of the approach
* lessons and insights about what works and what doesn’t
* several resources that will be of benefit beyond the project.