



VACCA

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD
AND COMMUNITY AGENCY

Connected by culture

MORWELL PARTNERSHIP

COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS FOR REDUCING
THE OVER-REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN IN
OUT OF HOME CARE IN INNER GIPPSLAND



ABOUT VACCA

VACCA has been the peak Voice for Aboriginal children in Victoria since 1977.

As the leading and largest Aboriginal provider of child, family and community supports and services in Victoria, we are proud to serve the Inner Gippsland Aboriginal communities. We provide over 80 program streams across the prevention to tertiary spectrum. Our service footprint includes early years, education, family services, youth and adult justice services, out of home care, family violence supports, refuge for women and children experiencing violence, youth services, cultural programs and camps, emergency relief and so much more. Our 100 plus local workforce means we are one of the larger employers of Aboriginal people in Inner Gippsland.

VACCA recognises and values the diverse views, aspirations and expectations of the Inner Gippsland Aboriginal community and the Gunai Kurnai people as the traditional owners of the land and waterways. We understand that our service to community requires active efforts to understand and implement community values, aspirations and expectations. We do not believe in only transactional supports or service delivery; we act with and for community, and we are committed to ensuring quality, trusted partnerships. We see our social license to operate as cumulative, meaning we too have long term expectations and aspirations and our goal is to build prosperity across the generations.

VACCA is uniquely positioned to bring people together, listen to their concerns and hopes for the future, and then work with Government through shared decision making about how to invest resources better, raise and value Aboriginal voices and achieve better outcomes for Community.



REPORT PREPARED BY THE VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD AND COMMUNITY AGENCY ON BEHALF OF THE MORWELL PARTNERSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team acknowledge the Gunai Kurnai people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Morwell Partnership is based. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and to our emerging young leaders and the children who are our future. We acknowledge the leadership and stewardship of the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLWAC) for supporting the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) to work on their land for Community.

- We acknowledge the funding provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and First Peoples State Relations under commitments to Close the Gap.
- We are thankful to the Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and the Victorian Close the Gap Partnership Forum for entrusting VACCA to lead Victoria's only Place Based Partnership and Community Data project under the National Agreement to Close the Gap.
- The team extends its thanks to all community and government representatives that embraced the citizen's jury approach and participated in the evidentiary process.
- We are grateful to Auntie Muriel Bamblett, Sarah Gafforini, Peter Hood, Paulette D'Argent, Belinda Kostas, Nicky Briggs, Anjee-Lee Bamblett, Laurie Marks, Greg Blakely, Elly Lee, Maddy Fox, Juliette Hubbard, Shantai Croisdale, Kerry Brogan and Joanne Luke who shared their specialised knowledge and expertise.
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- Finally, to community and stakeholders that shared their lived experiences and aspirations to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out of home care, we could not have achieved this without you.



**AUNTIE MURIEL
BAMBLETT**

VACCA CEO



**AUNTIE MARG
ATKINSON**

Local Elder,
VACCA Board member

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Place based approaches target specific circumstances of a place, and engage local people as active participants in development and implementation, requiring government to share decision making with community.

Place based approaches can complement the bigger picture of services and infrastructure in a region. They engage with issues and opportunities that are driven by complex, intersecting local factors and require a cross-sectoral, long-term response.

Victoria's Place Based Partnership and Community Data project chose Morwell in Inner Gippsland and focuses on Target 12 of the National Agreement, and includes all four priority reform areas. Specifically, target 12 requires that by 2031, the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care will be reduced by 45 per cent.

Aboriginal children are 11x more likely to be removed from their parents and placed in out of home care than non-Aboriginal children. For Aboriginal children living in Inner Gippsland, this rises to 28x more likely to be removed, making the 2031 target harder to attain.

Inner Gippsland communities often endure a fractured sense of identity, connection to culture and community due to the past colonial practices of land disposition and forced relocation to missions. It is exacerbated by ongoing systemic discrimination, entrenched poverty and alarmingly high family violence and crime rates.

One important obstacle to a reform agenda in out of home care and child protection systems in Victoria is racism. Aboriginality alone accounts for between 45-60% of reasons for reporting or increasing removal rates when compared to matched risks in non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children are then less likely to return home once removed and stay significantly longer in out of home care, again when compared to matched risks in non-Aboriginal children.

The orientation of child removal policy is that child removal is largely a first resort option for Aboriginal children, where the opposite should be true. Removal is, and only ever should be, a last resort; with priority in funding and activity given to addressing the drivers of removal (poverty, insecure housing, family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy etc) and focusing on prevention of removal and reunification through intensive family strengthening.

Alternative approaches to government driven policy are required. Through self determination, the value and gravity of weight in decision making must be transferred from government to community and the local ACCO experts in Aboriginal child and family strengthening.

What is not well respected or valued is that the local community share common aspirations and have tangible solutions to reduce the over representation of children in out of home care. This report is testament to this commitment.

Victoria's commitment to a Placed Based Partnership and Community Data project focussing on reducing the overrepresentation of children in Gippsland supported by VACCA, speaks of VACCA's enduring history as being the peak voice for Aboriginal children in Victoria; and our unrivalled outcomes in preventing children being removed and reunifying children with their family at higher rates than Government.

To ensure community-led outcomes on Closing the Gap, and to enable Aboriginal communities, representatives and organisations to negotiate and implement agreements with Government, we adopted a citizen's jury approach to our community consultations and aspirations mapping work as detailed in this report.

A citizens' jury is an innovative way to involve everyday people in decision making. This comprehensive, transparent engagement approach allowed the local Aboriginal community to be placed at the centre of the process. It brings together representative, and a random samples of Community who are briefed in detail on the background and current thinking relating to out of home care, asked to discuss possible approaches and/or solutions, and develop a set of local recommendations.

We adopted this approach in line with true shared decision, to create a balance between experts/stakeholders and local community. We found this offered an suitable approach to assess community views; and that it was more closely aligned than other western approaches to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. It allowed us to pay respect to lived experience, the yarning process and above all else privilege culture and seeks to embed the wisdom of Elders.

Relevant quotes from the consultation sessions are used to reflect the discussions held throughout the workshops. Over the 4 days of deliberations the Morwell partnership developed and analysed 15 proposed solutions to reduce the over representation of children in out of home care.

Solutions address the key requirements of early years and children in out of home care with a justice interface as well as identifying critical cross cutting projects that the community deemed necessary to support both the Place based partnership and the Community data project.

At the end of the 4 days, the group prioritised the resourcing of a youth focused space or activity/support hub to prevent current and future generations entering care, as well as the need for community development and governance to underpin this work as a cross cutting element.

In terms of the Community Data project the partnership identified a range of data projects that they collated under the banner of Building the Aboriginal Evidence Based for Gippsland.

This report will now form the basis for further exploration and development with the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury to formulate a budget bid as required under the NIRA.



ABOUT THE MORWELL PARTNERSHIP

The Morwell Partnership is a shared decision making group that forms an integral part of the governance structure of the Victorian Place Based Partnership and Community Data project.

Membership comprises local Aboriginal Community, locally based Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, three levels of Government including Police, all with a stakeholder role in the partnership and projects; as well as other Stakeholders invited to attend like mainstream community services and youth providers, education providers, experts advisors, research and evaluation specialists.

The Morwell partnership is the key consultative body for all local aspects of delivery and design. The Partnership will meet at least twice per year to ensure public accountability for the partnership activities and outcomes. From the membership a local executive group was formed as well as an Elders Council and a Youth Council to ensure adequate representation and diversity of views and expert advice.

ASPIRATIONS



Equity & Fairness

Consideration of the social, cultural and economic circumstances of families at risk of, or who have had children removed from their care.



Focus on Prevention

Addressing the drivers of removal, pathways for early help support, and developing an sense of community belonging



Education as key to better futures

Across all education settings, includes community awareness and navigation supports



Community involvement & representation

Shared decision making processes with a focus on Elders, youth and everyone in between



Building the Aboriginal evidence base

Research, data and evaluation of activities to measure desired outcomes



Strong and sustainable Workforce

Cross-sector collaboration including enhanced communication and service optimisation



Community Development & Community unity

Localised support networks, social trust and cohesion, elevating local voices and community development

CONSULTATION APPROACH

Part 1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment

VACCA utilised Comprehensive Needs Assessment methodology (CNA) to plan and scope the community consultation process as well as acting as a critical feature of the consultation process itself, as the findings formed part of the evidence presented.

The CNA process is a systematic method of identifying the health, wellbeing and service needs of a population, and identifying how those needs may, or may not, be met through the Place based Partnership and Community Data projects. To ensure this approach reflected Aboriginal ways, it also included visioning activities, yarning circles, healing and reflective sessions.

The CNA approach supported the local community to understand at a granular level what the child, youth and family services support needs are throughout the region to strengthen families and how best to act; either in the early years to prevent contact with child protection and child removals; or at the Out of Home Care Justice interface.

Part 2: Citizen's jury

A Citizens' Jury is an innovative means of involving everyday people in the process of normally government decision-making. They are the complete opposite of an opinion poll, instead they are an in-person, deliberative process. Our Citizen's jury process was held over 4 days, the first two days focusing on hearing evidence from expert witnesses and the last two days focusing on designing solutions, prioritising action and building the case for future investment.

At the end of the CNA and evidence hearing process, community and Partnership members a good understanding of:

1. Normative need through the use of expert opinion, based on research that is well documented in the literature
2. Comparative need through a comparison of prevalence and incidence in one area as compared to those in another area with similar populations and best practice. This can also be a comparison of perceived stakeholder or service provider needs versus community perceived needs
3. Expressed need as what can be inferred by a population group's use of services
4. Felt need as that which is expressed by community members.



CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- What does shared decision making look like in best practice?
- What principles do community want to see underpin reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in OOHC and how best might these principles be put into practice?
- To what extent do Community feel listened to and have the authorising environment enact shared decision making, and reduce overrepresentation in a self-determining way?
- What are the critical elements Community would like to see in the Place Based Partnership and Community Data project?
- What does community led governance and accountability mechanisms look like in Inner Gippsland?

LIST OF EVIDENCE

WITNESS	EVIDENCE	JURY QUESTIONS
Muriel Bamblett CEO VACCA 	• Shared decision making and accountability • Best practice and learning • Harnessing innovation • Partnerships in practice	• What future do you see for children, young people and families in Gippsland in the next: 3 years? 10 years? Next generation? • What parts of the system don't work? What can we re-engineer? What can we do the Aboriginal way? • How can we think differently about funding sources? Partnerships? Agreement making? • Connection to culture: how do we support families whose mob is other Country connect to culture and build strong identities and families?
Paulette D'Argent Maternal and Child Health Nurse, Doula and Early Years specialist	• Best practice in Antenatal and perinatal supports and practice • Doula practice across life course • Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH) and other successful programs - the need for evaluations to demonstrate impact and the Aboriginal evidence base	• What is the experience of perinatal care in Gippsland and what needs improving? • How can we include whole families, including dads to keep families strong and safe in the early years and during pregnancy? • Are hospitals and maternity settings culturally safe and what needs to change? • How do we understand what the early years footprint is and where the need is to address it? • How do we better support young and new parents/mums both through services and outreach?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

Belinda Kostas & Nick Briggs
Senior Program Managers – Nugel (Guardianship / VACCA Child Protection)



- Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC)
- Supporting mothers, dads and whole families
- Importance of Elders
- Best practice in Gippsland in child safety and Family strengthening

- How can we better support parents of children who are in care to support reunification?
- How can communities play a role in preventing removal, keeping kids in care connected to community and culture, and supporting families that need extra support?
- What does cultural currency look like in community and the early years?
- Family violence starts in the home: how do we stop the cycle of children thinking violence is normal?

Angee-Lee Bamblett,
Director VAEAI



- Education across the life course
- Best practice in early years and early education settings
- Navigations supports, programs, gaps and opportunities in Early years education
- Best practice in early years settings

- How can we support more Aboriginal families to actively engage with early years programs?
- How can we upskill our current workforce and address workforce shortages in the early years?
- What are the early years education and play needs in community and the service footprint: how to address gaps?
- How can we embed language across early years centres and have Aboriginal led solutions?

Greg Blakely
Executive Director Children and Families, Southern/ Gippsland Region DFFH

- Government policy landscape and reform journey to reduce over representation of Aboriginal children in care
- Best practice and treasury ready programs
- Locally driven solutions not always prescribed by Government
- Local child protection snapshot data

- How do we map great work that's been done, connect it all up and to create a system that supports community seamlessly, so we don't overburden families?
- How do we support families and people needing support navigate services in the area as there are a lot, many duplicating effort and many with long waitlists?
- How do we create a vision that is Aboriginal led, reflecting the Aboriginal way of life so that ACCOs don't get played off against one another by Government commissioning processes?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

Uncle Lloyd Hood, Local Elder, RAJAC chair



- Lived experience
- Parental responsibility
- Respect and what that means in practice
- Role of grandparents and Elders in caregiving
- Need for new infrastructure, cultural spaces and funded activities especially sport
- Role of racism in policy, practice and behaviour

- How do we tackle the lack of parental responsibility in community and create better role models, especially male role models?
- How do we bring back community cohesion and respect towards one another?
- How do we empower community to embrace Aboriginal ways not 1800 numbers?
- What infrastructure do we need to create safe supportive spaces that build resilience and prepare our young people to be productive, functioning adults?
- How do we get a rehab centre locally to support families?

Laurie Marks, Victoria Police



- Successful diversion programs and outcomes
- Policing practice and protocols
- Community engagement and relationship building

- How do we evaluate the true impact of youth programs and their impacts like justice diversion programs, youth mentoring, re-engaging with school?
- We have a male violence problem, how do we help and support men with their behaviour, respect and healing to keep women and children safe?
- How do we address racist systems that disproportionately affect us without fighting racism itself and focus on transformation?
- What spaces do we need that allow young people access and support when they are feeling unsafe especially those with housing instability?

Stephanie Dalton, VALS & Inner Gippsland Dhelk Dja Chair



- Disengagement and racism in schools
- Prevention of FV as a driver for over representation in OOH
- Including lived experience voice in designing solutions about them – e.g. Parents and young people

- How do we ensure the voice of those we are designing services for are included e.g. youth?
- How do we address racism in schools to keep children at school?
- How do we provide more cultural activities that young people want to join, that are also healing and culturally enriching?
- How do we build up families and reduce traumatisation at both the removal and reunification?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

Elly Lee, Youth Justice Commissioner's Office, DJCS

- Government actions to reduce youth justice involvement
- Local Youth justice data
- New youth justice Bill: Raise the Age and trialling of electronic monitoring devices
- Cultural competency training
- Transition from custody to Community

- How do young people engaged with the justice system have their cultural and education needs met?
- How do we transfer resources from justice systems to ACCOs to better rehabilitate and heal young people with offending behaviours?
- What programs do we need to support young people in community, so they are less likely to have contact with the justice system?

Maddy Fox, Director First Peoples State Relations, DPC

- Commitments under the National Agreement to Close the Gap and Productivity Commission report
- Place Based Partnerships and Community data project criteria
- Treasury process to arrive at a budget bid: outcomes and avoiding future costs

- How do we balance community aspiration with solutions that demonstrate outcomes and prevent future costs (e.g. tertiary system involvement)?
- What does shared decision making look like in the budget bid process and how is self-determination prioritised?
- How will the Morwell Partnership bring about transformative change as identified by the Productivity Commission as critical to Close the Gap?

Auntie Marg Atkinson, Elder, Courts Victoria, VACCA Board member



- Importance of family and family strengthening
- Life trajectories and choices to be made – advice she gives young people at Court
- Importance of role models, respect and giving back to community – volunteering
- Young and new parenting supports

- How do we move beyond saying “we were lucky” because we grew up with family around us and make this the norm again?
- How do we make schools racism free zones, including on the bus to and from school?
- How do we create more positive role models in community that kids know they can rely on and turn to?
- How do we deal with loss and grief better as individuals and as community to heal ourselves and future generations?
- What early parenting supports do families need to raise healthy, thriving children?
- How do we value the voice of Elders in designing solutions to community issues?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

Auntie Judith Hood, Elder and respected person



- Cultural identity and knowing who you are and where you came from
- Community includes spaces, bus, places as well as people
- What safety looks like in Families
- Connecting with culture, language and Country
- Importance of Education on Country

- How do we bring back more volunteering or casual roles in community so that more can help out and keep people connected?
- How do we create more positive pathways for young people so that finding the right pathway is easier?
- How can we do more to talk about Stolen Generations, government policy not just for truth telling but as part of prevention work and healing?

Auntie Christine (Minnie) Johnson Elder, St Vincents, cultural mentor



- Importance of education across the life course
- Role of cultural mentors especially in education settings
- Importance of attachment and children having cultural anchors

- How do we walk with children and their education mentors to install a lifelong love of learning, knowledge and discovery?
- How do we bring back language to our children and young people?
- What does being proud to be Aboriginal and walking with heads held high feel like for young people?
- How can we do more in community to help with family finding and connections to mobs?
- How do we bring back community spirit and respect by establishing more community yarning spaces?

Kerry Brogan, Executive Manager Evidence and outcomes VACCA

- Gippsland data profile (areas of need)
- Best practice examples from VACCA and others on developing Aboriginal evidence and evaluation processes
- Voice as a data metric: measuring engagement and outcomes

- What data do we need to know we are successful? Both for the Partnership and for Community data project outcomes?
- How do we capture western data versus Aboriginal data indicators?
- What does building the Aboriginal evidence base look like?
- How do we use data to drive funding reform?
- What does shared decision making and genuine partnerships look like?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

**Peter Hood,
First Peoples
Assembly of
Victoria member,
Kurnai
Traditional
Owner**



- Practice versus reactive interventions and support structures
- Holistic support structures that include health, housing, education etc.
- Looking retrospectively at children's journeys to identify where systems failed to address each touch point.
- The role of self-determination in decision making.

- Are there scholarship and other education supports available and how do we support community to access these?
- How do we map the best intervention points to change trajectories?
- How do we minimise duplication in a saturated service area that still has big gaps in terms of what people need and want?
- How do we better attract funding to the area that meets the needs of Community

**Juliette Hubbard,
State Director
NIAA**



- Overview of community data projects under the NIRA
- Shared access to data at a regional level
- NIAA supports including shared data portal and webinar, toolkit supports

- What does data sovereignty look like and mean to community?
- What is the best way Community can learn about data and what supports do we need?
- What supports do Community need from all levels of Government to make this project successful?

**Shantai
Croisdale,
Director Practice
and Business
Development and
Innovation
VACCA**

- Developing a Cultural Safety Framework to guide treasury processes
- Using consultations to determine sector aspirations about what can be done differently in the budget process using an Aboriginal lens
- Fighting for Aboriginal measurements that show success
- Cultural safety Framework as an accountability mechanism

- How will a cultural safety framework over the Treasury processes enhance shared decision making and outcomes for Aboriginal community?
- How will the accountability mechanism work?
- What accountability mechanisms do we need for this Partnership and projects?
- What does cultural safety look like in our partnership and data project?

WITNESS

EVIDENCE

JURY QUESTIONS

**Joanne Luke,
Senior
Researcher
University of
Melbourne &
VACCA**



- Capturing data that is useable
 - What Building the Aboriginal evidence base could look like for Morwell?
 - Using the community data project to prioritise the strengths and aspirations of community
 - Critical reflection guide: What outcomes are important? What do we want to achieve?
- What is the difference between western data and Aboriginal data; and what consequence does that have for this partnership and community data project?
 - Who will be the data custodian of anything we develop and how will community gain access?
 - How will we ensure data sovereignty?

**Troy MacDonald,
Traditional
Owner, Chair of
GLWAC**



- The importance of Traditional Owners
 - Practice advice on supporting Aboriginal communities to set the agenda and framework that can affect system change over the long term.
 - Scaling up best practice and learnings and creating solutions to address the gaps
- What do we need to sustain?
 - What do we need to improve?
 - What do we need to fix?
 - What does repurposing in place look like?
 - What role do the ACCOs in Gippsland play in the conversation? Delivery? Supporting community in their aspirations?

**Will Morgan,
Youth voice,
Lived experience
Community
member**



- Importance of role models especially male role models for young men
 - Stepping up to be role models to the next generation
 - Supports to stay in school and achieve an education
 - Importance of cultural mentors and community/workers that believe in you
 - Aspirations for the future and importance employment, drivers license etc
- What does a role model look like and how do we build these skills for generations to come?
 - How do we create opportunities for young people to mentor and support younger ones?
 - How do we make sure the services we already have are culturally safe?
 - How do we build the capacity of local services to be more strengths based than seeing young people as a deficit?
 - How early will we target interventions to prevent contact with child protection/justice?
 - How do we instil hope in young people when we have a cost of living crisis and no intergenerational wealth?

Community Data Project

Overall Outcomes

- Education from other services and systems about systemic racism and processes and their understanding of our outcomes
- Culturally safe schools
- Culturally safe sporting programs – lets strengthen AFL, Netball and higher-level sport partnerships down in the region

Community Governance Outcomes

- Healthy inclusive partnership
- Well governed and supported leadership groups and accountability mechanisms
- Workforce development and coordinated network supports
- Strong communication and community awareness
- Strong secretariat and backbone supports
- Monitoring and evaluation framework
- Access to data and data sovereignty

Youth Outcomes

- Youth leadership - Having their own voice, strong and respectful young women and men
- Breaking the cycle - Reducing CP, YJ and VicPol involvement
- Better educational outcomes, life skills and community participation
- Cultural safety across the service system
- Healthy relationships, Respect for women and decrease in violence rates
- Participation with kids from different demographics
- Mentoring, role models
- More engagement at school
- Services to be supportive, focus on life skills, culturally safe L2P w right mentors, better and safer conversations about stories
- Accessible cultural activities and connections eg. art classes, wood burning, ceremonies, teaching the next generation, story telling
- Increased employment pathways and supports
- Decrease in suicidality, mental health issues and increase in youth confidence and self-esteem and access to healing and support services
- Youth voice as part of governance mechanism inclusive of all regardless of mob
- Decrease in substance use and abuse and access to rehabilitation and prevention programs

Early years and family strengthening Outcomes

- Strengthening families activities, more families staying together safely
- Less children removed from families within the first 2 years
- More culturally safe birthing programs and supports with increased access to early help and prenatal/postnatal supports
- Community garden and spaces that helps support storytelling and Connections to Elders
- Early years and education settings teaching language and prioritising cultural learning and truth telling
- improved sexual and reproductive health with less teenage pregnancy, healthy relationships and decrease in violence
- Improving social and communication skills, adult and youth employment pathways
- accessible parenting supports and programs
- Intergenerational healing and access to counselling especially where violence is present
- Cultural activities where all community can come together – possum skins, belly casting + painting, birthing rituals, welcome baby to country ceremonies
- Less interaction with the justice system across the community
- increase social cohesion, trust and community participation



Measurement

How we will tell our story

- Photos /animations / short films /documentaries /video / social media
- Attendance
- Education retention and completion, upskilling and qualification attainment
- Workforce
- self reports and professional reports
- Trust and connection with mainstream
- Murals / Plaques
- Traditional data and Aboriginal data metrics - real time, summaries and predictions
- Narratives and storytelling plus recorded interviews and podcasts, yarning circles
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Community feedback and evaluations
- Impact assessments
- Research projects
- Mentor networks and new structures formed
- Innovation and novel solutions



Community voice

"The pendulum has swung too far – we need to get back to the family. Aunts and Uncles stepping in, good roles models. I had that growing up – I want that for kids again today."

"When I sit in court I don't want to see parents waiting with their children – I don't want children to think going to court is normal because it isn't. Once they are stuck in the system it becomes a way of life."

"Respect to Elders is lost and that is one of our biggest strengths as a people. We need family, friends especially at school, not just Aboriginal friends, supportive people around us like a shield because then the racism doesn't touch you as much."

"When I used to volunteer in schools their little faces light up and I love it too and a nice cuddle. Even the ones with sad lives, real poverty, they were so happy to see you and it shows that one person turning up just for them changes how kids see the world."

"When we grew up, on school holidays, weekends everyone worked picking fruit, vegies anything that was asked. Then after we shared our food so that everyone got something. We learnt hard work pays off and so does kindness and that when you are a community you don't go without."

"A lot of people don't know how to be parents anymore. Most just need a bit of help, others need more and that's ok no parent is perfect. Some parents need help from the start, other's need help later But no mum or parent should feel judged or that they can't say I don't know what I'm doing, please help. We don't have family around us anymore so we need our services to wrap around our new parents."

"We often focus on numbers and not what's happening at home especially with education. Poor school attendance, that's because we have a lot of kids staying home and looking after family members, we need carers so kids can be kids. We blame them, but look at them, what beautiful kids to look after family first."

"You can get all the tickets in the world, but you need to be able to work in your own community. You need a job that means you can have food, bills and a house – I'm not even saying a good one – just safety. You don't need much."

"We need to understand what is important about family to us so we can share it and teach the next generation. Or look at your grandkids - what's important to them is turning up, of sharing experiences with you, just spending quality time."

"We worry only about the kids that are getting in trouble, but we also need to target the kids that are doing well too because they need support, culture, connections. We need to change the way that we're thinking e.g., providing resources to kids who want to do sport but whose families can't afford it."

"Racism kills kids. Its so heartbreaking to see kids become suicidal from racism. We see racism change behaviour – we all try to fight it but racism's always been here and always will be. We need to stop fighting, we have more important things to focus on. Racism is wrong, we all know that – but lets give our energy something worthy of us and our children."

"Not being able to read and write is a disaster in the past and worse now. I told my kids they could do whatever they wanted, they didn't have to stay in school forever but they had to read. Every day learn something new or different. Education, whatever it is, is the difference between life & death."

PRIORITY SETTING

Priority setting involved making decisions about which needs will be addressed and what services or programs will be funded or developed to address them (and how limited resources will be redirected). Priority setting involves ethical considerations, because decisions about the best use of scarce resources require ethical judgements about 'who benefits' and who will 'miss out'.

Priority setting is influenced by:

- Government policies or program requirements
- Economic rationale as to 'why' certain interventions are beneficial and the costs and benefits associated with taking action
- Available resources
- Preferences of interested parties and stakeholders including health professionals, local communities, industry groups or consumers.

These diverse and at times competing interests made priority setting and evidence based decision-making a challenging process to navigate. The triangulation process involved:

INDEPENDENT VOTING

Utilising voting software partnership members were asked at the end of day 2 to vote and decide on whether the focus on the partnership would focus on early years of OOHC with a justice interface. While voting resulted in the majority electing to choose both focus areas. Yet as is evident in the recommendations, the group did express a preference towards the youth focus area.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The secretariat conducted a thematic analysis of issues and solutions proposed by community and stakeholders and formulated these into 15 discrete project areas. These were then sense checked with community and the partnership. Workshop activities determined areas that required follow-up and further exploration or data analysis to clarify issues and confirm findings.

PRIORITY SETTING

Members on day 4 on the consultation process were asked to review, analyse, match to data and best practice examples a short list from the 15 project aspirations identified. Again through an independent voting approach, members were asked to first prioritise 10, then 6, then 4, then 3 projects they would like to take forward to model development. At the end of each priority setting round, results were discussed with community and opportunities to refine and change priorities was offered.

RANKING PROCESS

At the end of the priority setting rounds, members ranked the final 3 areas of focus into order of most need that would be then used to develop a model for the formation of a budget bid to Treasury.



Youth focussed community space with youth led programming and supports

- Central location for planned and drop in activities and supports
- Open to All Aboriginal young people
- Non-stigmatising youth designed activities like homework clubs, living skills, camps, art, craft, dance, Culture
- Brokerage and infrastructure support
- Elders support
- After hours and outreach support



Community Data project that builds the Aboriginal evidence based across the continuum of the child protection system including prevention and family strengthening

- Establishment of a portal/website to share local data, evidence and progress of place-based partnership
- Capacity building activities with Community and ACCO's
- Identify what data (new and existing) Community want to collect and develop Aboriginal methods including cultural tools/instruments for collection, analysis and presentation
- Look at project ideas not prioritised if data can be captured, collated and used in the future



Coordinating supports and community strengthening activities led by VACCA as auspice/backbone support in partnership with Community including the formation and ongoing support of the Partnership, an Elders Council and a Youth Council.

- Ongoing governance support and coordination
- Community development upskilling and engagement opportunities
- Community awareness and navigation supports
- Ongoing cultural awareness opportunities and training in region
- Policy, strategy and advocacy advice
- Workforce strategy and dedicated secretariat

YOUTH FOCUSSED COMMUNITY SPACE

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Inner Gippsland data shows that Aboriginal children and young people have high rates of child removal, family violence, justice involvement, unemployment and poor health outcomes such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, poor nutrition, life skills and housing instability. Family violence and incarcerated parents are a significant driver of contact with child protection and justice systems, and results in many children being carers for younger siblings, Elders or parents; high rates of school attrition, development delay and acquired brain injuries as well as the development of complex behavioural and emotional issues resulting from poor attachment, exposure to violence, neglect and intergenerational trauma. Many young people and adults abuse alcohol and other drugs, engage in high risk behaviours and suffer sexual abuse and exploitation.

Inner Gippsland has lower rates of social cohesion which is exacerbated by historical land dispossession and assimilation policies impacting connections to culture, country, community as well as Aboriginal identity. Male roles has been identified as a critical area of concern for the next generation. The cultural load on Elders is immense and many Elders live well below the poverty line yet continue to care for grandchildren and undertake volunteer supports.

Inner Gippsland however has multiple mainstream youth service providers, some with Aboriginal targets, a youth hub and programs to support young people stay in school, yet none are Aboriginal led with cultural safety being an area of critical concern to community. With high out of home care rates, family violence and AOD issues, youth mental health concerns and high suicidality, a radical shift is required to change outcomes for young people, through increased access to Aboriginal led and culturally safe programming and supports.

Through the consultation process community identified a need for an Elders council that is outside of the Traditional owner group so that it is inclusive of all Aboriginal peoples in Inner Gippsland, many of which are not Traditional owners of the land. The Group also identified the need for a similar youth Council to oversee and upskill young people in governance structures and develop leadership skills. While there are youth voice structures through Local Government and the Traditional owners, again, there is no inclusive space that supports all Aboriginal young people in the region.

Activities young people identified as critical need areas:

- Ability to be supported to obtain a drivers license
- Focussed and culturally safe supports to re-engage with school, improve literacy skills and seek out education pathways like vocational practice learning
- Respectful relationships information and supports including sexual and reproductive health
- Workforce preparation skills, traineeships and upskilling programs
- Safe supported places to seek help and refuge when needed

ASPIRATIONS

- That more children complete school to a minimum of year ten, that no child over 10 years old cannot read or write and that there are more alternate education opportunities
- That schools and mainstream service providers are culturally safe and have a zero tolerance to racism
- That less young people under 20 years of age become parents, and when they do young parents are supported to keep baby in their care safely and free from Violence
- That young people have access to safe, stable and sustainable housing to ensure they can stay in school, develop life skills and transition to independence free from trauma
- That young people are able to access mental health supports locally and the rate of suicide, AOD use and anti-social behaviour decreases.
- That children and young people are strong in culture, are connected to family, community and Elders and are resilient and thriving.
- A representative Elders and Youth Voice/Council that has adequate funding and the authorising environment to support governance structures under Close the Gap in Inner Gippsland
- An active and inclusive partnership forum that brings together community to drive reform and influence policy and practice strategically

STRENGTHS OF PROJECT

- One-stop shop for culturally appropriate services that Youth co-design so they are meaningful and YP will participate in
- Building community cohesion, public safety and safe space where young people feel they belong
- Access to outreach and transport options to decrease barriers to participation
- Require community collaboration and active efforts so that all of community has a role in creating better outcomes for young people
- Intergenerational healing through access to mental health supports to stop cycle
- Focus on education and learning in safe spaces to create awareness of strategies to improve future outcomes
- On country solutions so connections can be maintained and increase support options
- Build cultural connections, strengths and relationships especially where Elders are supported to be involved

BENEFITS TO COMMUNITY

- Intergenerational healing decreasing suicides, AOD abuse, exposure to and use of violence and criminal behaviours
- Actions are scalable and agile to meet changing needs of community and families
- Improve community connection, pride, resilience, culture, Self-determination, social and emotional health.
- Increase Employment opportunities now and in the future through skills development and practical learning
- 24/7 access to support and safe Adults
- Increased productivity and household wealth
- Focus on whole family and the environment in which the young person lives
- Increased community participation and social cohesion
- Increase parenting capacity and function resulting in less children being removed or having contact with the justice system

ALIGNMENT TO PLANS

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- Victorian Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2024-2034
- Victorian Youth Strategy 2022-2027
- Anti-Racism Strategy
- Youth Justice Strategic Plan & Wirkara Kulpa
- Victorian Skills Plan
- Roadmap to Reform: strong families, safe children
- Marrung
- Dhelk Dja
- Korin Korin Balit Djak
- Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic strategy

SOLUTIONS

1. Empower local community to develop and lead youth programs in a central, accessible location that privilege culture, education, employment pathways, wellbeing, life skills with access to Elders and positive role models.

An Aboriginal youth space would operate out of retrofitted local space, and would ideally utilise a 24/7 three worker model based of VACCA's Aboriginal Access Point journey walkers and engage volunteers, Elders and local ACCOs to run programs and services designed by Aboriginal young people. We would develop a Community of Practice to maximise outcomes with other Aboriginal Youth Hubs. Brokerage would be a critical point of difference to support young people access. The site would also operate as a Child and Youth Advocacy Centre and utilise ACCO services and outreach including victim support services to compliment the healing service. The 24/7 service would include access to food, shower/laundry, safe spaces like gym, video games, etc and a ride home. Will be supported by an app to access support and information.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: DJSIR, DJCS, DFFH, Office for Youth, Sport & Recreation Victoria.

2. Buy three Vehicles to support Learning to drive & Youth Outreach

One that is a 7-9 seat van or bus that will allow outreach; the other two cars that can be used by staff/volunteers to support young people to get their drivers licence.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: Department of Transport)

3. Invest in Young people's Voice/Council

This group would be supported by the secretariat functions so would only require operating and program resources.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Department of Government Services Local Council and DFFH/Office for Youth

4. Invest in Elders Voice/ Council

This group would be supported by the secretariat functions so would only require operating and program resources.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: DGS, Local Council and DFFH/Office for Ageing

5. Increase local coordinated resources for Community.

Community connector programs and navigation/wayfinder supports are cheap and effective to fund but provide significant economic outcomes.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

6. Reduce Racism and increase mainstream and community cultural safety

VACCA is funded by DSS to deliver foundation cultural awareness training and trauma training to all DSS funded agencies across Victoria. Expanding this to all CSOs, Government departments and interested stakeholders in the region is cost effective and sustainable.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Department of Government Services, Department of Premier & Cabinet, DFFH

SOLUTIONS

7.ACCO Pilot of DJCS Youth Employment Scheme

Replicating the internal successful program DJCS funds for entry level positions for young people, this would be applied to ACCOs across the Gippsland regions. This is estimated to cost is low and will include an evaluation.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: DJCS

8.Invest in a Local Aboriginal Child and Youth Healing Team (including disability assessments, plans & supports)

Utilising existing VACCA proven models, an Aboriginal specific healing service would provide long term mental health solutions and healing services. The Yoorrook Justice Commission found that around 70% of young people who have contact with corrections have a development delay or disability. The Healing team through it's clinicians would provide disability assessments and Plans.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Department of Mental Health, DFFH – Office of Disability, Department of Health, Department of Education

9.Mixed use Youth refuge, transitional housing and rehabilitation facility

For 16 -25yo a mix of a Youth Foyer/Village 21 model, a secure 6 bed AOD facility and/or MH treatment beds (day stay or 6 week program) for children aged 8-12 & 13-18yo and a short term refuge/ safe space for children in OOHC or experiencing FV, utilising Government land and includes infrastructure and operational funding. Based of Centres in New York (like the summit or Covenant House) the facility would have different levels or wings that provide focussed spaces to support the needs of young people and prevent homelessness. Staffing ratios would dependent on the resident mix and need to be scoped but would be the first of it's kind in Australia.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: HomesVic, DFFH, DJCS, Department of Health, Department of Mental Health

10.Child & Youth Trauma Response Team (CYTR)

Through VACCA's FV team, Child and Youth Trauma Responders and family violence victim advocates would work hand-in-hand with police officers to provide timely, expert outreach and support to children, young people and caregivers impacted by family violence. Trialling a new Family Violence notification system that supports police's L17 process will enable CYTR teams to engage as soon as possible after a Family Violence incident happens, ideally within the first week. They then undertake an assessment to identify what trauma reactions might be going on for affected children. Practical tools and strategies are then provided to reduce trauma reactions and avoid PTSD for the young person and their caregiver / any appropriate person the young person trust. Then up to eight support sessions (but can be extended) will be provided.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Family Safety Victoria, DJCS (Office for Family Violence)

COMMUNITY DATA & GOVERNANCE

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The Inner Gippsland community is somewhat fractured in terms of community cohesion, trust and relationships. The Morwell Partnership formation through the community consultation process has sparked community interest in being involved in improving community spirit, belonging, participation and engagement with the primary goal of reducing the overrepresentation of children in out of home care and subsequent contact with justice system. A central coordinating role was also identified as lacking and while this would be supported under the secretariat function highlighted in part 1, the partnership and community need ongoing funding to be able to meet and undertake governance functions.

There are workforce challenges in all industries but there is a unique challenge faced within ACCOs, especially those in regional areas like Inner Gippsland as the population is too small to meet service demand. It is further compounded by a lack of affordable and suitable housing to attract required workforce to the area. Funding for critical back of house functions through corporate levies are constantly being squeezed by funders especially Government who hold the fallacy that ACCO overheads are lower than what they would fund themselves. This creates sustainability issues and has the potential to impact the quality and range of services/ program provided that meet community expectations and human rights.

The Morwell partnership requires the following workforce:

Youth Focussed Hub and activities

- Youth workers with training and expertise in complex behaviours
- Mental health and AOD clinicians
- Early childcare workers
- Teachers and tutors for primary and high school students
- Personal trainers
- Art, dance, cooking, technical and cultural instructors
- RTO teachers
- Driving instructors

Secretariat staff

- Community connectors and navigation staff
- Policy, project, communications officers
- Support staff like cleaners, administration, drivers
- Traineeships and Volunteer coordinator and volunteers

Community data project

- Research and evaluations officers
- Data analysts and data entry
- IT, web and software support

ASPIRATIONS

- Central coordinating role to support workforce attraction and future pipelines that may include Traineeships, placements, Career trackers, Volunteers
- That all community have equal access to upskilling courses and local education and employment pathways
- That Elders, respected persons and Cultural mentors are paid to support staff and community and to support ACCOs carry cultural load.
- The meaningful actions are taken to build ACCO capacity especially their back of house functions and infrastructure needs.
- We have Gippsland life course workforce strategy that developed and implemented with support from an investment strategy (early years to aged care)
- Robust community governance structures and accountability mechanisms to ensure local design and delivery.
- An active and inclusive partnership forum that brings together community to drive reform and influence policy and practice strategically
- A functioning and aligned community data project that supports community, stakeholders and partners access relevant data to drive and inform meaningful change in the region.
- That the Governance Committee could go on study tours to learn from other Place based projects and Community Data projects around Australia and to present our work at Conferences and events

STRENGTHS OF PROJECT

- Self-determination in action
- Identifying gaps and developing a more robust understanding community needs in data
- Structured workforce and community development program
- Elevates the voice of community
- Learn from other jurisdictions and Develop Communities of Practice
- More local employment opportunities and local workforce development opportunities
- Addresses issues like limited transport options to access services and supports
- Brings in new people/workforce that adds to community strength and cohesion

BENEFITS TO COMMUNITY

- Creating positive change, building resilience within community and respecting the diversity of views in community
- Creating new ways of working together and shared decision making whilst privileging Aboriginal ways of being and doing
- Building on own database that leverages Aboriginal data sovereignty
- Creating solutions that are owned by and led by Community
- Builds social capital, economic prosperity and intergenerational wealth
- Keeps people out of trouble
- Builds prosperity across generations



SOLUTIONS

11. Invest in Secretariat support (partnership and community data project)

A strong and functioning backbone is required to ensure all activities within the Place Based Partnership and Community Data Project are effective and meet Community Aspirations. This requires a mix of staff across ACCOs in Inner Gippsland as well as paid roles for Elders and supports for Volunteers.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: DPC, DFFH

12. Develop a local governance group workplan that includes developing the skillset of the Local Governance group and Communities of Practice with Other jurisdictions.

This activity would be supported by the secretariat functions so would only require operating and program resources to bring in expert trainers, speakers etc and funding for travel for study tours to learn from other jurisdictions.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: DJSIR, DGS

13. Community Data project platform, training and data reporting

Supporting local partners to access and use existing data relevant to the Place-Based Partnership and to identify data gaps in order to measure outcomes and preferred ways of collecting, sharing and using new data. This activity would be supported by the secretariat functions so would only require operating and program resources like seeking external training supports etc.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: DPC, DFFH

14. Build the Aboriginal Evidence base

Ensuring both the partnership and community data project is delivering and meeting expectations, a monitoring and evaluation framework is required. Program and research project funding is required to meet the expectation of how community would like to capture and share data as identified earlier in this report. Every activity undertaken under this project will have an evaluation component to ensure we are building the Aboriginal evidence base.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: DPC, DFFH





RECOMMENDATION

That the aspirations of the Morwell Partnership be reflected in the shared development of a model that is adopted by Treasury to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in Child protection in Inner Gippsland for the remainder of the National Agreement to Close the Gap agreement period (up to 2031).

