

# Brokering School-Community Partnerships: Cross-Sector Advocacy and Hard Work



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**Abstract** Collaboration within government and across sectors can be challenging due to differing priorities, disciplinary perspectives and funding cycles. This complexity can be a barrier when it comes to enabling schools to respond to local contexts and developing strong community partnerships. This chapter shares insights from one Australian state government pilot program that aimed to broker cross-sector relationships to benefit the health, wellbeing and educational outcomes of school children and the broader community. Established in 2014, the Community Hubs and Partnerships (CHaPs) pilot program was initiated by the Queensland Government to work with all levels of government, non-government organisations and the private sector to plan accessible and cost-effective social infrastructure to connect communities and support coordinated delivery of community services. Based on the practical experience obtained over seven years, this chapter discusses strategies for brokering partnerships, along with the types of impact and outcomes that can be achieved through collaborative approaches to planning social infrastructure. To illustrate the approaches and strategies that support the establishment of schools as community hubs, it profiles two related projects: Yarrabilba Family and Community Place, and the Buzz at Yarrabilba.

**Keywords** Schools · Communities · Government · Partnerships

## Introduction

This chapter explores the lessons learned through the Community Hubs and Partnerships (CHaPs) pilot program which brought together a range of partners to plan and support the delivery of school-based community hub models in Queensland, Australia. The early objectives of the CHaPs program are explained and the context in which the program provides continued leadership and supports the collaborative planning of social infrastructure and integrated services in Queensland are described. Two

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community hub demonstration projects in the rapidly growing suburb of Yarrabilba in Logan, Queensland are showcased with the strategies found to support successful social infrastructure and services delivery discussed.

## **Social Infrastructure in Queensland**

The Australian state of Queensland is growing fast. From a population of 4.8 million in 2014, Queensland is expected to grow to 7 million by 2041 and reach 9.5 million by 2066 (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2018a). Most of this growth will be in South-East Queensland where most of the state's population is based (QGSO, 2018b). To accommodate this growth, the state government has identified large land holdings on the fringes of existing population centres as Priority Development Areas (PDAs). This represents a key strategy to enable private land developers to deliver new, affordable housing stock attractive to young families.

The education capital program in the 2021–2022 state government budget indicates the scale of investment required to meet service demand in response to this growth, with A\$2.6 billion allocated for new schools and A\$1 billion to provide new classrooms and facilities at existing schools to meet increasing enrolments (Queensland Treasury, 2021a). Further, combined spending on health and education facilities and services made up more than half of anticipated state government expenditure in 2020–2021 (Queensland Treasury, 2021b).

This rapid population growth and the scale of investment required presents challenges and opportunities for government systems at a federal, state and local level. The challenge is to ensure that appropriate, quality social infrastructure and associated services are planned to meet the needs of communities as they develop, while staying flexible and responsive to changing demographics.

In Australia, schools are built and operated by three systems: state government, Catholic schools and independent schools. All students have access to a state government school at no or low cost as an alternative to the Catholic and independent school offerings, which apply student fees at varying levels. In Queensland, 70% of students attend a state government school (QGSO, 2021). In new housing developments, such as the PDAs, the state school is often the first piece of state government infrastructure delivered and, with the right partnerships in place, can be leveraged to deliver other government services.

It is within this context that the CHaPs program was introduced to pilot innovative and collaborative social infrastructure approaches.

## ***Social and Economic Benefit for Queensland Communities***

New approaches to delivering social infrastructure have been developed based on evidence that improved service accessibility and delivery, achieved through coordinated and collaboratively planned social infrastructure, can drive positive health,

educational and social outcomes. For service delivery agencies, integration and co-location opportunities can facilitate a reduction in capital and operating expenses and create diversified revenue sources through partnership approaches.

The range of state government delivered, or funded, services considered through co-located and integrated delivery models with schools include child and maternal health, early childhood education, mental health, parent support, and skills development and training programs. Depending on local context and community needs, it's also commonly desirable to include employment programs delivered by job service providers, along with community development programs, such as playgroups and youth programs, delivered by local government.

In Queensland, a range of school-based, service delivery models operate across the state. Examples include:

- provision of support services for students delivered by the school through youth health nurses, youth support coordinators, other wellbeing support staff and general practitioners (Department of Education, 2021).
- provision of support services for the school community through the programs delivered in partnership with other organisations on school sites. For example, 17 Queensland schools host the National Community Hubs Program, focused on supporting migrant and refugee women to access services, leveraging existing facilities in primary schools (Community Hubs Australia, n.d.).
- co-location and integration models that provide services for the broader community such as: the Aura Community Hub, a local government community centre co-located with the Baringa State Primary School in Caloundra West, a growing coastal area at the southern end of the Sunshine Coast, 90 km north of Brisbane; or the integrated social, health and education services provided through the Yarrabilba Family and Community Place (YFCP) co-located with the Yarrabilba State School in Logan, described later in this chapter.

The first two approaches can be implemented at the school level, leveraging existing school facilities. The CHaPs program pilot therefore primarily focused on enabling the third category due to the requirement for bespoke operational models and tailored infrastructure solutions to support services delivered by multiple agencies, both government and non-government.

### ***The Role of the CHaPs Program***

The CHaPs program was initiated as a pilot by the Queensland Government in 2014 as a dedicated cross-agency and cross-sector social infrastructure program to champion and support collaborative approaches to planning, investing in and delivering social infrastructure.

The CHaPs pilot was introduced at a time when service delivery was facing the dual challenge of significant population growth combined with an increasingly complex and overlapping range of demands from service users.

During the early years of the CHaPs program pilot, the team averaged eight full-time staff and additional contractors with experience across a range of fields including stakeholder and community engagement, program and project management, strategic partnership development and infrastructure planning. The focus during this time was on identifying collaborative planning opportunities that could lead to facilities being co-located, shared and developed as integrated hubs.

One of the defining features of the CHaPs pilot was that it aimed to build collaboration and partnerships around existing assets or planned investments in new infrastructure, such as schools, to maximise potential to improve community outcomes, rather than establish a new investment program. This reflects the objective of the program, with its remit to respond to the state's need to deliver cost-effective services and social infrastructure in areas of high population growth within a constrained funding environment.

CHaPs' program objectives were aligned with the Queensland Government's Strategy for Social Infrastructure, introduced in 2019 to guide the planning and delivery of social infrastructure through place-based collaborative investment.

### ***Priority Development Areas in South East Queensland***

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) are parcels of land within Queensland identified for development to deliver significant benefits to the community.

There are two PDAs south of Brisbane supporting significant growth in the area from Brisbane to the Gold Coast: Yarrabilba and Greater Flagstone. A further PDA declared west of Brisbane is referred to as Ripley Valley and supports growth through the western corridor to Ipswich.

The Yarrabilba PDA was declared in 2010 and covers 2222 hectares within the Logan City Council Local Government Area (DSDILGP, 2021c). In 2016 the population was 4182 people (QGSO, 2019). This has been growing steadily, with the current population estimated by the developer, Lendlease, to be over 10,000 people (Lendlease, 2021). Lendlease is the sole developer of the Yarrabilba master-planned community that will provide a range of housing designs and price points as well as home ownership and rental options. Full development of the PDA is expected to take 30 years and is planned to provide 20,000 dwellings to house more than 50,000 people (DSDILGP, 2021c).

Greater Flagstone PDA, also in the Logan City Council Local Government Area (LGA), covers 7188 hectares. Full development is expected to take 30–40 years and provide approximately 50,000 dwellings to house a population up to 120,000 people (DSDILGP, 2021a). Ripley Valley, in Ipswich City Council LGA, is in one of the largest urban growth areas in Australia. It offers opportunities for further residential growth to meet the region's affordable housing needs. It currently covers an area of 4680 hectares and will have the potential to also develop into 50,000 dwellings to house 120,000 residents (DSDILGP, 2021b).

## ***Opportunities to Broker School-Community Partnerships in Yarrabilba, Logan***

The CHaPs program successfully demonstrated a coordinated, cross-sector approach to planning school-based hubs in the rapidly growing Yarrabilba PDA in Logan. Yarrabilba's population is largely comprised of young, aspirational, working families. The median age of residents is 25 years and 31% of residents are under 14 years old, compared to 19% across Queensland (ABS, 2017). Notably, population projections indicate that younger age groups will be more prevalent in Yarrabilba for at least the next 20 years (QGSO, 2019).

Other indicators from the 2016 Australian National Census depict a community of contrast. High weekly incomes and a large working population could be mistaken as markers of an affluent community, whereas factors such as the high rate of rental housing tenure and proportion of one-parent families suggest that residents face financial and social challenges. Adding weight to these indicators of vulnerability, stakeholders have identified low levels of school readiness among children, high rates of domestic violence and high rates of substance abuse as prevalent in the broader region. These are potential drivers for emerging service needs within Yarrabilba.

Yarrabilba is approximately 15 minutes by car from the nearest, smaller, established population centres of Jimboomba and Logan Village, and approximately 30 minutes by car from the larger centres of Beenleigh, Beaudesert and Loganlea where health and wellbeing services can be accessed. The relative isolation of Yarrabilba from existing service networks and the unique demographic characteristics of the community were cause for the CHaPs program to prioritise collaborative social infrastructure planning for the emerging Yarrabilba community in 2016.

## **Case Studies**

The following case studies provide information on the CHaPs program's involvement in supporting innovative social infrastructure and integrated service responses in Yarrabilba.

### ***Yarrabilba Family and Community Place (YFCP) Demonstration Project***

Given the profile of residents, one of the earliest service delivery priorities for the community was early childhood services and support, with a parcel of land on the Yarrabilba State School site identified as a potential site for a community-focused facility. In February 2018, the Queensland Government committed \$3.6

million in capital funding for the delivery of the Yarrabilba Family and Community Place (YFCP) to provide health, education and community services to meet the community's needs.

The planning and establishment of YFCP was facilitated by the CHaPs program team. A cross-sectoral project steering committee was established to co-design a purpose-built facility and collaborative operational model. Through this process, it was agreed that the state-wide Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service would operate the centre, supported by programs provided by other project partners such as Logan City Council and the Department of Education. This was seen as an opportunity to trial a new approach to service delivery for the state. The model was informed by best-practice case studies and the experience of the committee members in visiting a range of early childhood-focused service hubs around Australia.

The model of service focuses on a soft-entry approach, creating a warm and non-threatening environment that children and families can engage with at will. A primary focus was building foundational, trusting relationships with families to be able to support and empower them to self-identify and address more complex issues as they arise. Staffed by health professionals, the YFCP offers flexible health, educational and community services and activities which support the growth and development of children and families. The focus is on universal services that engage parents in non-stigmatising ways, which includes playgroups, health clinics and KindyLinQ, a play-based program providing early learning experiences that families can attend in the year before their child starts kindergarten (Cortis et al. 2009).

Importantly, the YFCP enables a range of services that would not normally be available at such an early stage of the Yarrabilba community's development lifecycle. An example of this is midwifery and child development services which, through the YFCP, can be scaled to demand and offered before a dedicated health service is delivered in later stages of the Yarrabilba PDA. The range of services will change over time to meet changing community needs and demographics.

Findings from the YFCP first-year baseline evaluation provided promising evidence that the model had a positive impact with parents and children accessing the health, early education services and social programs offered at YFCP (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020). Survey data demonstrated that over the course of a year, an increase of 25% of users agreed that families "know the services my family needs" and an increase of 30% agree that "I know how to access these services when my family needs them" (p. 21). Additionally, the co-location of the integrated services hub with the primary school was reported by families as being responsive to family schedules and enabling improved accessibility of services.

One of YFCP's unique features is the open-plan design of the facility, with one large main common area (203 m<sup>2</sup>) with a communal kitchen, casual seating, books and toys (Fig. 1). As part of the centre's soft-entry approach, families are welcome to use this space and access the kitchen at any time, without the need for an appointment or to be attending an organised program. The post-occupancy evaluation, undertaken to review the effectiveness of building design and functionality, found this feature,

supported by a mix of informal and formal meeting and consultation spaces, to have contributed to the success of the approach (Fulton Trotter Architects, 2020).

The Year Three Evaluation of Yarrabilba Family and Community Place (Deloitte Access Economics, 2021) identified the soft entry model as a key enabler of high-quality service delivery. It highlighted how the wrap-around and co-location of services is facilitating increased information sharing among services resulting in more timely and holistic support for families in Yarrabilba. For example, 71 children received an earlier diagnosis or referral than they would have if YFCP did not exist. Nearly 70% of service users reported an improvement in social participation, which was seen as a major benefit as many families moving to the region had limited social support networks and were at high risk of social isolation.

This independent three-year evaluation of the YFCP re-confirmed the first-year baseline evidence and highlighted that the most significant longer-term impact of the model is the ability to reach families who otherwise would not have engaged in health, education, or social services.



**Fig. 1** Yarrabilba family and community place (Image by CHaPs)

## *The Buzz at Yarrabilba Demonstration Project*

Lessons from the YFCP initiative were used to inform subsequent collaborative social infrastructure planning and investment approaches in Yarrabilba. A key lesson from YFCP implementation was that more time between the initial funding announcement and the building's construction would have been beneficial to fully explore all the potential service delivery partnerships and confirm operational funding arrangements prior to the facility opening. With no delivery timeframe set, the Buzz at Yarrabilba project, discussed below, presented an opportunity to take a more staged approach.

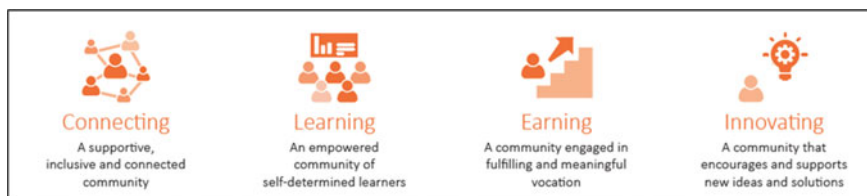
In 2018, CHaPs identified an opportunity to consider service delivery and facility partnerships across a precinct consisting of state and Catholic secondary schools, the first Logan City Council district community centre, sports fields and a small neighbourhood retail centre. Exploratory discussions started with land-owning agencies before the delivery timeframes for the two secondary schools were even confirmed. Around the same time, the Queensland Government committed funding for a neighbourhood and community centre in Yarrabilba. The proposal of a shared facility to deliver integrated services for young people and the broader community on the Council site emerged following a range of workshops, including a precinct master-planning process.

During 2019, a cross-sector project steering committee developed the proposal further and in January 2020, CHaPs delivered a collaborative investment business case involving the Queensland Government, Logan City Council, Brisbane Catholic Education and Lendlease (the land developer). This secured support for the delivery of an integrated services community hub in 2022. Developing the business case included a community needs analysis and research on best practices. The business case ultimately recommended a particular approach to ownership, capital and operations funding, and outlined an operational and governance model. The business case also proposed partner agencies' roles and responsibilities in an implementation plan.

The investment model includes a mix of capital and operational contributions secured from all parties, with the agreed community outcomes of 'connecting, learning, earning and innovating' (see Fig. 2) providing a strong basis for all partners to demonstrate alignment of objectives and guide implementation decisions. The core operating principle of The Buzz at Yarrabilba hub is the integration of the partners' service delivery priorities through the appointment of a single Hub Operator with responsibility to coordinate the delivery of programs and services to achieve positive outcomes for the community.

The Yarrabilba State Secondary College and San Damiano Catholic College are active partners in the project, seeing significant benefits in programs, activities and support services for young people under the "connecting, learning and earning" themes. Innovation is also a high priority for the schooling partners, with entrepreneurship programs already on offer at the Yarrabilba State Secondary School. Each partner will have access to the hub to offer programs, and the schools intend to use the space for joint programming, extending the range of courses and activities available for their students through a partnership approach.





**Fig. 2** The Buzz at Yarrabilba community outcomes framework (Institute for Social Science Research, 2020)

Because an early planning process was initiated in 2018, well before the schools opened, both were able to be master planned with community use and accessibility across the hub precinct in mind. For example, the Yarrabilba State Secondary College hospitality facilities are easily accessed from the street and closely link to the hub site, providing potential for out-of-hours training and for students to gain industry experience by catering for hub events. The sports halls and performing arts buildings have also been located to provide the best opportunity for community use after hours. The oval on the San Damiano Catholic College site has also been positioned to support community access.

### ***Partnerships: Focusing on Alignment of Partner Agency Objectives and Outcomes***

Given the CHaPs program did not have a dedicated infrastructure funding budget, the CHaPs approach focused on aligning individual and shared partner agency objectives and securing commitments for delivery of community hub projects. In particular, establishing a shared vision and defined outcomes, and continuing to refine these over the planning and implementation phases, has provided a strong foundation for collaboration.

The proposal for the YFCP was closely aligned with the Department of Education's focus on supporting positive early childhood development and the department's strategic objective to "engage early with families and children to give them the best start" (Department of Education & Training, 2017, p. 6). However, the funding submission also built on the relevance of the project to the Queensland Government support for the Logan Together movement, which is applying a collective impact approach to improve the wellbeing of children. The government commitment for the Logan Together roadmap, which included goals to provide accessible and integrated community services and community hubs, provided the authorising environments for agencies to pursue new integrated services approaches in Yarrabilba (Queensland Government, 2017, p. 3).

For The Buzz at Yarrabilba hub, the alignment between Logan City Council's objectives for a community centre and the Queensland Government's Neighbourhood and Community Centre program led to the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy becoming a core operational and capital funding contributor for the hub. Both organisations have objectives to strengthen communities and improve health and wellbeing outcomes through provision of community infrastructure (CHaPs, 2019).

With six partner agencies, defining the community outcomes of “connecting, learning, earning and innovating”, along with associated indicators, has been an important process to ensuring each partner can see how their objectives will be addressed through the hub's operations. The outcome indicators will be incorporated into the contract, with the hub operator allocating responsibility for coordinating programs, services and community access. This has also helped to demonstrate the synergies across the four themes, reinforcing the value of the unique partnership of community, education and employment interests. For example, volunteering supports community connections and is a first step to building skills under the learning and earning themes.

### ***Investment: A Staged Approach to Decision-Making***

There are many options for the ownership, operations, governance, and funding of community hubs to be explored with prospective hub partners. To ensure that each agency was able to dedicate the resources required for detailed planning, The Buzz at Yarrabilba hub model was progressed through three decision-making stages with the following documentation provided for senior executive endorsement:

- a high-level project proposal recommending that a model for a shared community and education facility be developed by a cross-sector project steering committee
- a collaborative investment business case setting out the rationale for investment, the proposed operational, governance and funding model, partner agency contributions and the implementation plan
- a facilitation agreement providing an overarching legal framework for the design, construction, funding, tenure arrangements, operation and use of the hub.

This process has allowed for an increasing specificity of the arrangements for delivery of the hub to be developed at each stage, with representatives from project partners able to engage, in good faith, in detailed negotiations with the endorsement of their senior executives.

## **Collaborative Planning: Strategies Supporting Delivery of Schools as Community Hubs Projects**

Government policy frameworks increasingly promote a more joined-up and collaborative approach to state government service delivery, but in practice there are significant systemic barriers to this occurring. These include insufficient visibility of service planning and needs assessments across government agencies, different thresholds and timelines for investment in infrastructure and services, and the inflexibility of traditional funding and operating models. Funding guidelines for services generally apply on a state-wide basis for consistency in program reporting and performance monitoring, which can mean there is little flexibility to tailor service agreements to place-specific models. Collaborative projects involving schools have the added complexity of providing social and community services for adults whilst assuring stakeholders that due regard has been paid to the safety of students.

The following strategies were useful in overcoming the barriers to planning and delivering a network of integrated community services in Yarrabilba.

### ***Broad and Early Cross-Sector Engagement to Identify Service Needs and Collaboration Opportunities***

Prior to identifying the specific project opportunities in Yarrabilba, CHaPs organised a series of workshops and forums to enable cross-government and cross-sector discussion on planning for social infrastructure and services in Yarrabilba. These forums brought together representatives from Commonwealth, state and local government, the land developer, non-government social service organisations, the schooling sector and local community service providers.

Benefits of this broad engagement and information sharing approach included:

- The information shared on the pipeline of services and infrastructure planned for delivery in Yarrabilba informed the timing of collaborative projects. For example:
  - the construction of stage 2 of the Yarrabilba State School presented an opportunity to deliver the YFCP as an additional facility on site in a cost-efficient way
  - with both the state and Catholic education sectors commencing planning for delivery of their first secondary schools in the same precinct, a working group was initiated to explore collaboration potential, resulting in the initiation of The Buzz at Yarrabilba hub early in the design and planning of both schools.
- Limited demographic data was available for this emerging community. Real-time information from the non-government sector, with on-the-ground experience of the challenges faced by families and children, was important to demonstrate the need for Queensland Government investment in the YFCP.

- Relationships were established with a range of key organisations that ensured the right representatives could be invited to be involved in project scoping and initiation. Additionally, key champions for projects emerged from outside the Queensland Government and were instrumental in securing support and project resources.

### ***Providing Leadership and Neutrality***

The CHaPs program provided strategic leadership and resources that were key to moving the projects from ‘a good idea’ to delivery. This included:

- establishing and leading project governance, ensuring the right organisations were represented in the planning and establishment phases
- detailed project implementation planning and reporting
- developing customised project outputs, for example drafting the business case for The Buzz at Yarrabilba, which responds to partner agency programs
- problem solving and negotiating between partners, for example negotiating a lead agency to operate the YFCP
- expertise in customising funding and contracting to support planning activities, for example the concept planning to develop costings for The Buzz at Yarrabilba
- providing seed funding for early concept design work, to aid buy-in from partners.

As CHaPs did not have an operational role in the delivery of services, it was perceived as having the neutral objective in negotiations of supporting improved community outcomes through integrated service delivery.

The need for this role was most critical in the planning and implementation phases of a project when partners’ roles were still being negotiated. Without this facilitation role, the collaborative projects may have stalled, as no single agency was responsible for driving the concept development. In the establishment phase, where the lead roles were agreed for delivery and operations of the facility, CHaPs transitioned project leadership to the partner agencies.

In circumstances without an external project facilitator, clarifying the project facilitation responsibility and recognising the resources required to bring together a collaborative social infrastructure project would be an important first step for project partners. As the CHaPs program continues to evolve, the templates and tools developed from demonstration projects such as the YFCP and The Buzz at Yarrabilba are being made available to support other projects.

## **Conclusion**

Global and local trends, stresses and impacts over the past two years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and savings and debt measures, have highlighted an urgent

need to maximise investment in the state's social infrastructure. There is growing understanding that the quality of social infrastructure is inextricably linked to the accessibility and impact of the essential services and programs needed to support quality of life and economic prosperity.

It is now more important than ever to move beyond standalone, sector-specific asset planning to integrated planning. It is also critical that service delivery organisations have the partnership and planning capabilities required to deliver fit-for-purpose, productive social infrastructure and services.

These emerging priorities have underpinned a refocus of the CHaPs program to enhance reach and impact across Queensland post-pandemic and leading up to the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032. The CHaPs program will continue to support cross-sector partners and stakeholders through an advisory role that draws on the strategic learnings, tools, templates and processes developed over the previous seven years of CHaPs program delivery.

The demonstration projects outlined in this chapter are not only benefiting the communities where they are located, the learnings are also helping to build capability and inform government infrastructure policies and strategies. Working with stakeholders and other jurisdictions to understand and unblock systemic barriers to collaborative social infrastructure planning is the next step in maturing the CHaPs program. In accordance with the original intent of the program, supporting positive community outcomes through partnerships, co-location and integration of community infrastructure and services will always be at the heart the program.

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