

The **Albury** Project

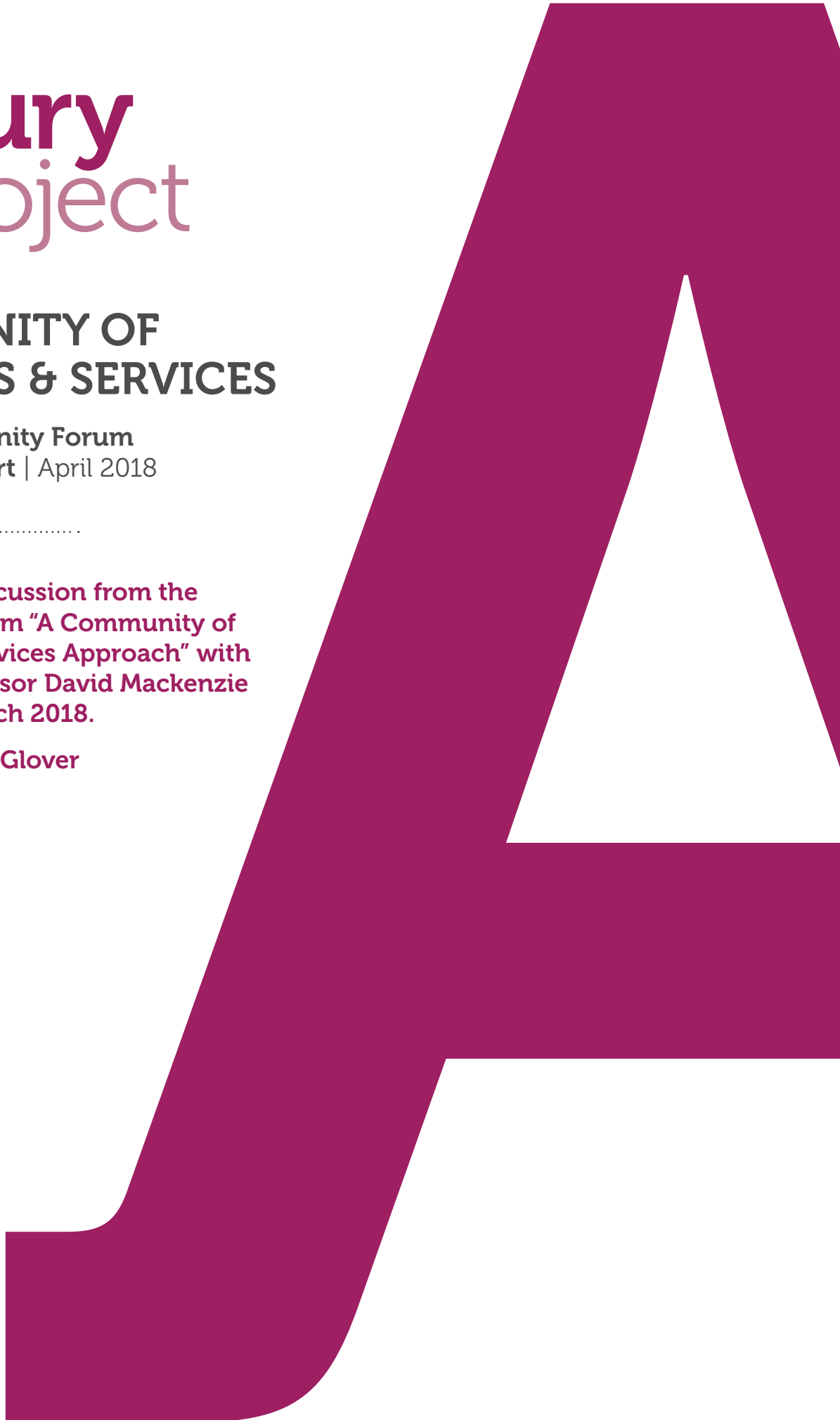
COMMUNITY OF SCHOOLS & SERVICES

**Albury Community Forum
Summary Report | April 2018**

.....

**Themes and discussion from the
community forum "A Community of
Schools and Services Approach" with
Associate Professor David Mackenzie
held on 6th March 2018.**

**Jon Park and Di Glover
Yes Unlimited**



INTRODUCTION

We thought it would be useful to capture some of themes and discussion from the recent forum, "A Community of Schools and Services Approach" with Associate Professor David Mackenzie and keep this really exciting conversation going. It was great to see the high level of community interest in the topic and we left with a strengthened resolve to pursue some movement in early intervention space. Around 60 stakeholders attended the forum with representatives from the Department of Education, Albury High School, Family and Community Services, Latrobe University, Albury Community Mental Health, Housing NSW, The Mayors of both Albury and Wodonga and a wide range of community based organisations. We have also arranged to catch up with and brief a number of people who were very interested but unable to make it on the day.

.....

OVERVIEW OF A COMMUNITY OF SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

For those who missed the forum or want a bit of a refresh, here is a non-technical summary of the model that was rolled out in Geelong:

The Geelong Project is a place-based, 'community of schools and youth services' approach to early intervention using population screening, a flexible practice framework and youth-focused, family-centered case management. The model builds in longitudinal follow-up support to reduce homelessness, and achieve sustainable education and lifetime outcomes. The model and the current project has grown out of a collaboration between university researchers and the Geelong Early Intervention Working Group, comprised of service providers and schools. The approach to early intervention is 'indicative prevention whereby the risk levels of individuals are identified and appropriate responses enabled. This is proactive rather than reactive, and the support for at-risk students and their families is needs-based, comprehensive and flexible. The project involves several major innovations.

The **first innovation** is the way in which students at-risk of homelessness are identified. Population screening for risk is carried out using a short Student Needs Survey (SNS). The SNS is completed by every secondary student in a school and results are matched with a separate list of school identified at-risk students (local knowledge). A follow-up brief screening interview is then conducted. The screening interview checks whether or not their

information about risk is valid and current and engages the student with The Geelong Project. Referrals to case management are then jointly decided between The Geelong Project team and schools.

A **second innovation** is in service delivery. The Geelong Project Practice Framework provides for a differentiated three level response:

(a) Tier One - a non-case work response, either active monitoring by school staff, or a secondary consultation where a referral is made to another program or agency or some advice given to a non-TGP action;

(b) Tier Two – case work support, either a brief counselling-type of case work or case management by The Geelong Project; and

(c) Tier Three – wrap-around case management for complex cases requiring the formal involvement of several agencies. Youth-focused and family-centred case management means that direct engagement and support is provided to a young person as the client, but also, work with family members is undertaken. The support work involves both community sector workers and school staff working together in a more coordinated, interprofessionally collaborative type of practice.

A **third innovation** is the way 'collaboration' is and will be operationalised. This requires inter-agency agreements between various parties. In Geelong, an eWellbeing IT Platform is being built to facilitate the more complex information needs and flows of a whole of community more integrated local support system. This platform will allow the efficient tracking of young people at risk of homelessness within and between agencies.

The SNS survey, currently being further developed, has proven to be a practical tool for identifying risk. The profile of the 'risk of homelessness' for Geelong students is one per cent of students at high risk (i.e., a score of 9-10 out of 10) and another three to four per cent where risk is indicated (i.e., a score of 7-8). Students at-risk of homelessness are also more likely to be at risk on other issues as well. These results are consistent with earlier research. In a school of 1000 students, on average, about 10 might be at high risk and for another 30-40 risk is indicated. But, there is considerable variation between schools. Risk of homelessness is somewhat higher for females, and significantly higher for Indigenous students.

For about half (51%) of the highly at-risk students and about two-thirds (66%) of student with an indication of risk, school is OK compared with other students. This is an important finding because it means that at-risk students are not necessarily failing at school, although they are at higher risk of disengaging from school and becoming early school leavers. The SNS produced new data on couch-surfing suggesting that while many young people at risk couch-surf at times, the number doing so on any one night is probably less than previously thought, however this can occur on numerous occasions throughout the year.

Data on risk was used to demonstrate how estimates of youth homelessness can be constructed from whole of school data, and also how the extent of need for early intervention can be estimated.

Reconnect is an important program that the evidence suggests has contributed significantly to reducing youth homelessness. An appreciative critique of the Reconnect program has contributed to the approach adopted by The Geelong ix Project. A premise of the new reformed model is that schools need to be connected in a systemic way with youth agencies that engage in a range of early intervention activities, including and most importantly family support work. In order to meet all the needs of young people and their families, this requires a place-based communitywide organisation of schools and services, not just bilateral 'referral-based' relations between some schools and agencies who only fulfil a certain function.

(The Geelong Project: A Community of Schools and Youth Services Model for Early Intervention, 2013)



The Albury Project

KEY INSIGHTS

Some of the key insights that arose during the forum and the following conversations included:

- A general consensus of frustration in foreseeing the likely trajectory of young people with early indicators of risk and not having the necessary service mechanics in place to adequately respond. Often this means that we are left waiting until a young person shows up with a 'problem' before we start responding.
- While there is positive work happening in different spheres this is usually dependent on the significant amounts of good will and relationships built up over time, which means communication and true collaboration can be fragile. The tendency for programs/key staff to come and go only exacerbates this problem.
- Historically educational disadvantage and social disadvantage have been framed as separate issues, resulting in schools being expected to take care of one and services taking care of the other. These two issues are fundamentally linked and services or schools cannot address the complexity often involved in these situations in isolation.
- By reducing the demand at the 'pointy end' this kind of early intervention model has the potential to impact outcomes of the entire service system i.e. by getting in early the potential to reduce the pressure on acute mental health services, increased school engagement is likely to improve employment outcomes, early support for families means less likely to need child protection involvement etc
- With the right framework and more nutting out of the detail a number of services would be willing to commit to an Albury Project. Ideally this would be a cross border Albury-Wodonga Project, though the challenges of managing the two different service systems, the number and structure of schools and the vastly different funding buckets could make this a difficult starting point.
- David Mackenzie summarized the compelling outcomes of the project in Geelong. Between 2013 and 2016 there was 40% reduction in young people presenting to crisis accommodation services, a 20% reduction in early school leaving and 50% improvement in school disengagement. (See more here in the evaluation report: <http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/projectachievements/>)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Some important questions that were raised for further exploration:

- How do different parts of the service system fit into The Albury Project and what role would they play?
- What would be an appropriate governance/ leadership structure?
- What would be a sustainable funding model look like for The Albury Project? How can we adapt the diverse bags of existing funding to come together in a systematic way? How might we go about advocating for this a community?
- Recognizing the complexity of systems change, what would be an achievable starting point that we can build from?
- When do we start?

NEXT STEPS

The Albury Project Team have an upcoming meeting with Albury, James Fallon and Murray High Schools and other key stakeholders to look at the details of the model and how this might be adapted to our local context. We will be undertaking some resource mapping work to get a sense of what is currently available that could be part of an Albury Project. We will also be beginning conversations with the relevant government departments at a number of different levels to see how they may be able to support us with this work. For anyone who would like to contribute further or has any thoughts on progressing this idea it would be great to hear from you. David Mackenzie has very generously agreed to continue working with us, so we look forward to making the most of his expertise and experience in Geelong.

