




Our Town at Year 3

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REFLECTING ON 2023

WELCOME TO OUR TOWN .



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Our Town works. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture; and we pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and into the future.

A shared vision and purpose

The vision is simple – mentally healthy regional towns.

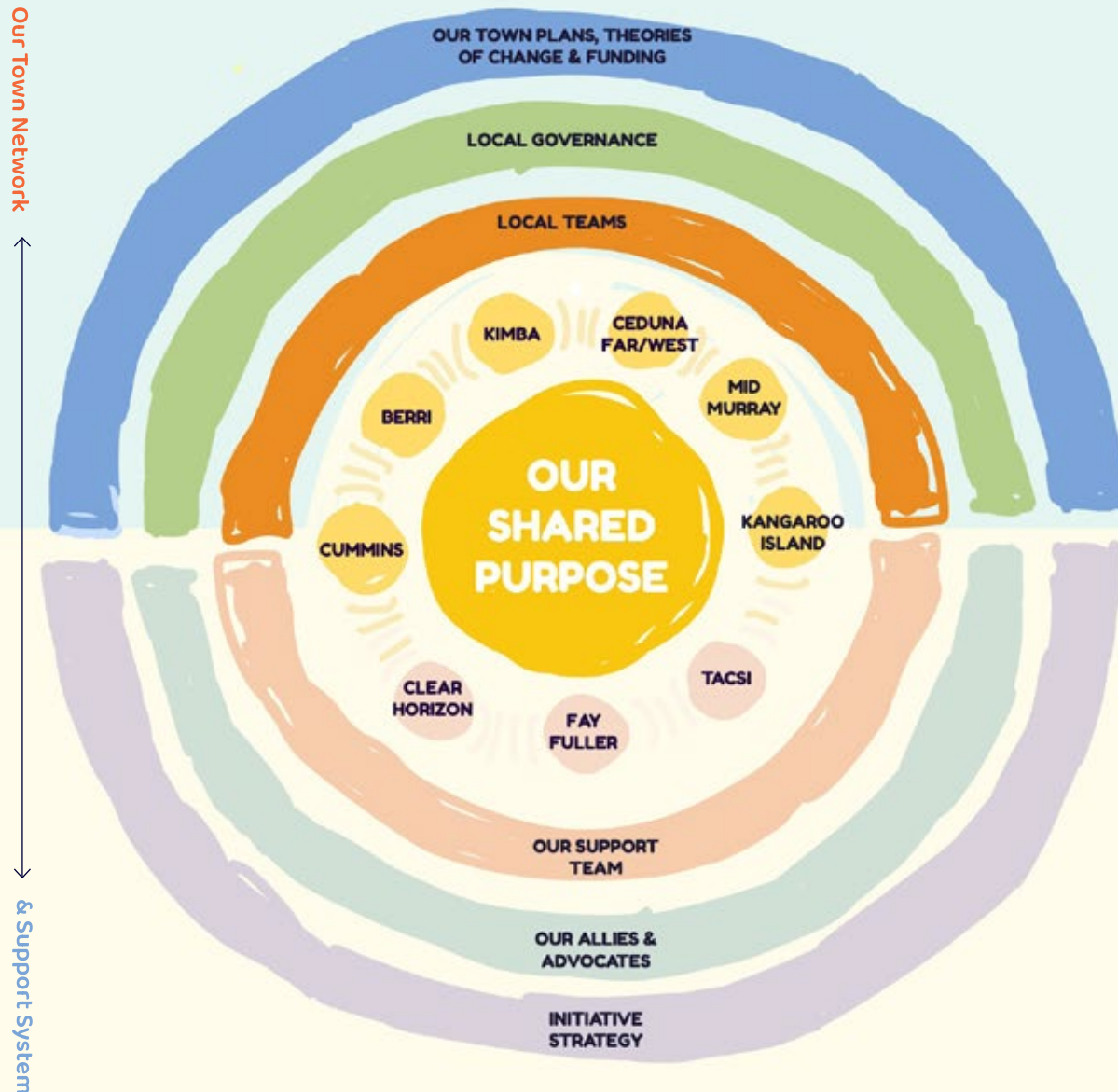
Our Town is a ten-year, place-based mental health initiative supporting community-determined and preventative responses to mental health. The initiative partners with six communities: Berri, Ceduna/ Far West, Cummins, Kangaroo Island, Kimba and Mid Murray.

Our Town consists of two models. The first model includes four communities, Ceduna/ Far West, Cummins, Kangaroo Island, and Kimba who are each fully funded for ten years under the initiative. The second model includes the communities of Berri and Mid Murray which to date have been supported through shorter-term government and philanthropic grants. All six communities receive funded capability development and participate in network learning opportunities.

Across the ten-year initiative, Our Town aims to understand and build evidence around creating the right conditions for contextual community-led change, which sits outside of a traditional service delivery model. Guided by both an initiative level and town-specific theories of change, Our Town is testing assumptions and learning by doing when it comes to prototyping approaches to support better mental wellbeing.

Three years into the journey, Our Town is using its learnings to advocate and influence systems for the better. This is happening across multiple levels and through a variety of methods. Trust-building activities within the community have allowed the initiative to develop advocates at the local level. Our Town has shared its learning on state, national, and international stages and actively seeks to understand and shift the conditions that have held community wellbeing and mental health challenges in place, sometimes spanning generations.

An innovative approach for an innovative outcome



Our Town is working differently than other traditional place-based models, eliciting longer-term, sustainable shifts in regional mental health.

Our Town is creating the space and conditions for communities to step into their power through a community-led approach, rather than a service-led approach. This self-determined and grassroots methodology supports communities to develop their own capabilities, resources and leadership and to design, test and evaluate the outcomes they want, as opposed to running pre-determined programs and processes on communities.

The Town Teams interact daily with their community, building deep relationships and exploring wider partnerships. They use social innovation practices to develop and test ideas that service-based systems are not commissioned to deliver. Although not always explicit, power dynamics and perceived norms are being shifted in Our Town with the community at the centre of their journey.

Supporting Towns through this journey is the Support Team. Across its multiple roles, the Support Team plays an important part in ensuring Towns' capability and growth is supported. This includes but is not limited to, coaching, learning, measurement and advocacy support. In 2022 this saw approximately 100 coaching sessions, 12 in-town working sessions and 8 cross community network sessions delivered by the Support Team.

What makes the Support Team so unique in the Our Town context is that they are also learning by doing and challenging assumptions alongside the towns. This means that at year three the Support Team are strategising how best to support Towns in ways that are genuinely needed and wanted, and delivered in ways that support lasting capability building.

Truly Community-led and Owned

Three years into the initiative Our Town has established multi-skilled, lived-experience teams to support short, medium and long-term community mental health goals and well-being outcomes. These teams are built by the community, from within the community, for the community.

Throughout the first year of Our Town each team looked to explore root causes impacting their town's mental health and well-being. Having the time and space to explore each town's context allowed Our Town's network to uncover deep-seated 'ah-ha' moments about each community. These insights have ensured that each Town's individual theory of change is based on community knowledge. These insights continually challenge the team's own assumptions around community wellbeing, often revealing deeply held and sometimes inter-generational cultures. For example, during 2022-23 after hearing that students at the high school felt connected to the school but not the broader community, Our Town Berri looked to test the assumption that young people were unwilling to volunteer within their community. Their testing of this assumption proved it wrong. In 2022, Our Town Berri,

in partnership with Volunteering SA/NT, connected 183 students to volunteering opportunities in their communities. These students completed 457 hours of volunteering. The impact is more than just numbers though, as one student commented 'I got confidence, I wasn't a confident person, and I've made so many new friends...those anxious feelings just float away when I'm in the community'.

As Our Town continues on its overarching pursuit of change, those who choose to walk alongside the initiative are continuing to challenge their own assumptions, and better understand the true meaning of 'community-led' in this unique shared-learning environment.

Investment in innovation, action and learning

Longer-term investment into Towns aims to provide the time and space to shift from striving for pre-determined KPIs to responding to community needs and long-term cultural change. Our Town is more than an investment of funds into communities, it is an investment in relationship-building, human connection and people power. Commencing the initiative, Towns looked to build trust within their communities, through community engagement and light touch community wellbeing initiatives.

In 2022, Our Town reached more than 2,500 people across the six communities through a blend of one-on-one engagement, activities and events.

This long-term investment in people and relationships allows towns to learn and develop by doing, whilst exploring innovative solutions to regional mental health and wellbeing. Some Towns have awarded grants to support the good work already happening in their communities, strengthening what is already working. Our Town has also upskilled individual community members to support one another. For example, across towns (Ceduna/ Far West, Cummins and Kimba), approximately 60 community members completed mental health training in 2022 to support others in their community.

In other areas of the initiative, Towns have highlighted and created innovative ways for different parts of the community to come together and connect. For example, Our Town Cummins noticed a lack of LGBTQIA+ networks within their community- so they created one. This led to the establishment of the first LGBTQIA+ and Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) groups in the Eyre Peninsula. Each group boasts a growing following and is set up to share, connect and support their communities.

Longer-term investment allows each town to grow at their own pace while being supported to grow the capabilities that matter to them. To support this, Our Town's Support Team provides coaching, learning sessions or peer-support activities across the initiative. This is an investment in people, outside commonly experienced traditional investment into place. Consequently, Towns have the time to establish their own governance systems, processes and partnerships across the network which are unique to their local context.

In year three, Towns are exploring how to collectively measure and understand their impact. As the initiative continues on its ten-year journey, Our Town will focus on regeneration and how the initiative can evolve to continue supporting community in ways that they identify.



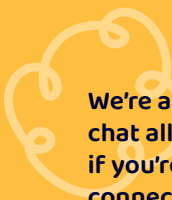
Meaningful influence and advocacy

Our Town has an established, strong, multidisciplinary team of advocates and allies who convene quarterly. Comprising of Our Town Leads and senior leaders across health, academia and government, the initiative's learnings are being shared to a broader audience. Through this space, Our Town Allies and Advocates (OTAA) members have the unique opportunity to gain crucial insight into what is working in the community, whilst also sharing the most valuable learnings from their sectors.

At year three, it is clear that Our Town is in an incredible position to influence and lead positive systems change. Not confined to place-based, community-led health initiatives Our Town expands opportunities across a variety of ecosystems. For example, many towns are exploring how education reform has the potential to empower

intergenerational community mental health and wellbeing, where communities have a positive culture of tackling mental health stigmas. Towns are also exploring how they can walk alongside other initiatives such as the Suicide Prevention Network, sharing their learnings from three years of deep dives, 'ah-ha moments' and testing of assumptions.

At this point in our theory of change Our Town is undergoing an important transition from Connect & Establish to Reaching Outwards. We are looking to capture more about what we are doing, seeing, and learning through working with our communities and are excited to share this openly with others who may be interested in learning alongside us. In the meantime, we invite you to explore the summary of our 2022 Periodic Evaluation or to dive deeper into our impact within each community. Check out last year's [Our Town impact shares here](#).



We're always happy to chat all things Our Town, if you're interested in connecting with Our Town, [reach us here](#) or individual towns can be contacted via their Town Landing Page on the Our Town website.