



# Our Town

Insights from  
2022 Periodic  
Evaluation

REFLECTING ON 2022

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.

## Introduction

**The Our Town initiative aims to support community-led mental health and well-being in regional and rural South Australia by creating the conditions for community-led change. Through this, it equips regional communities to lead mental health and wellbeing initiatives, with the ultimate vision of mentally healthy regional towns.**

Our Town is a place-based initiative with 'Town Teams' composed of local community members who bring their skills, expertise (including lived and living experience expertise), and deeply contextual understanding of their places to the work.

Our Town consists of two models. The first model includes four towns, Ceduna/ Far West, Cummins,

Kangaroo Island, and Kimba who are each fully funded by the Fay Fuller Foundation for ten years. The second model includes the communities of Berri and Mid Murray, who to date, have been supported through shorter-term government and philanthropic grants. All six towns receive funded capability development and participate in learning opportunities as a network. This is facilitated by the Support Team, a partnership between The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), the Fay Fuller Foundation (FFF), and Clear Horizon (CH).

As we discuss below, all facets of Our Town are strongly grounded in four principles co-developed by Towns and Support Team:

- community-led and owned
- modelling mentally healthy practice
- learning our way through change
- seeing and acting on the big picture

These principles provide a high-level framework for decision making and inform how Town Teams and the Support Team work together as well as how Town Teams work with their communities.

## The year's activities in a nutshell

In 2022, Town Teams built on their foundations of governance, operations, and team-forming while implementing a range of activities and initiatives.

Approximately 30 people were locally employed through Our Town as Town Team members and more than 2500 people across the six communities have been engaged through one-on-one engagement, events, and activities (though this number is presumed to be much higher due to a number of activities where reach data was not captured).

Across towns, there were 20 instances in which members from Our Town communities

who were not part of a Town Team were supported to initiate their own events, projects, and activities in partnership with Our Town. In the town of Ceduna/ Far West and parts of the Mid Murray region 9 additional community-activated projects were funded through small community grants provided by the Ceduna/ Far West and Mid Murray teams.

Across the year Town Teams engaged in capability-building and came together through Network sessions facilitated by the Support Team. This included approximately 100 coaching sessions, 12 town visits, 8 network sessions convened by TACSI, and 10 sessions with Clear Horizon's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Academy. Through this support, Town Teams laid the foundations for their own town-level MEL systems, including town-specific theories of change that map the outcomes they hope to achieve through their work with their communities over time. Towns also started collecting a range of data from their activities.

At the close of 2022 all of the towns took part in an end-of-year data harvest, sense-making, and reflection session. Their findings from these sessions were used to inform brief impact shares to communicate about the impact of their work to their community and other relevant stakeholders.

If you're interested to know more about Our Town in 2023 check out [Our Town in Year Three](#).

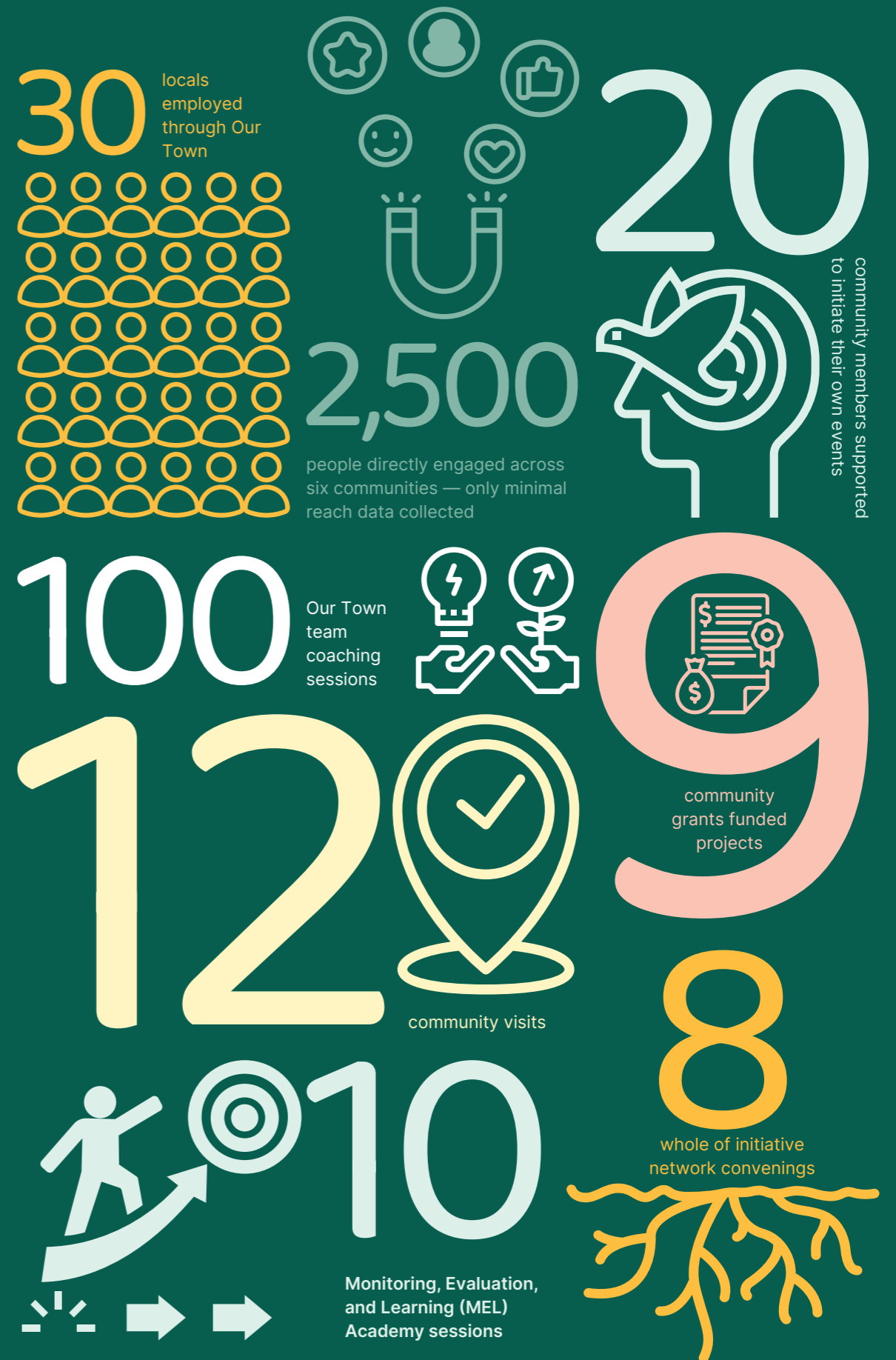
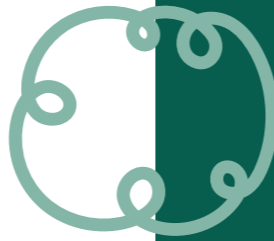


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## Evaluation in Our Town

Led by Clear Horizon, our embedded evaluation partners, Our Town is underpinned by an in-depth, learning-oriented approach to evaluation.

Evaluation in Our Town happens at several levels, and has been built out over time.

These levels include:

- Ongoing developmental evaluation of the initiative.
- Annual periodic evaluation of the partnership, towns, and progress against the initiative theory of change (ToC).
- Capability building to support Town-led evaluation of their own activities and progress against their own ToCs.

In 2022 we also began co-developing a shared impact measurement framework.

The purpose of this periodic evaluation was to capture key process learnings and emerging outcomes and impact to understand progress against the Our Town ToC and inform future planning and strategy.

The periodic evaluation was guided by the following four key questions.

### Q1

What are we learning about Our Town towns, their work, and ways of working?

### Q2

What are we learning about emerging impact in Our Town towns and across the Network?

### Q3

What are we learning about the Support Team's work, ways of working and collective contribution towards the Our Town vision?

### Q4

What do these findings and learnings mean for our work, and ways of working, moving forward?

Findings and learnings reported in this evaluation are based on data contributed by Town Teams at the end-of-year data harvest, sense-making, and reflection session. The sources of the data included:

- Impact log
- Reach metrics
- Interviews and observations
- Personal anecdotes and reflections

In addition, Clear Horizon collected data from Support Team members through interviews, surveys and reflections to capture key process learnings.

Town Teams are all on unique MEL journeys meaning the type of data, and the frequency in which data is collected, is varied. We anticipate the initiative's ability as a whole to systematically capture outcomes and impact will continue to grow and strengthen in the years ahead, particularly with the introduction of Our Town's shared measurement framework in 2023.

In 2022, Town Teams were still in the early stages of their decade-long journey to effect cultural and systems change in their local communities and beyond. Therefore, outcomes and impact reported in this document should be seen as a point-in-time snapshot of early signs of change.

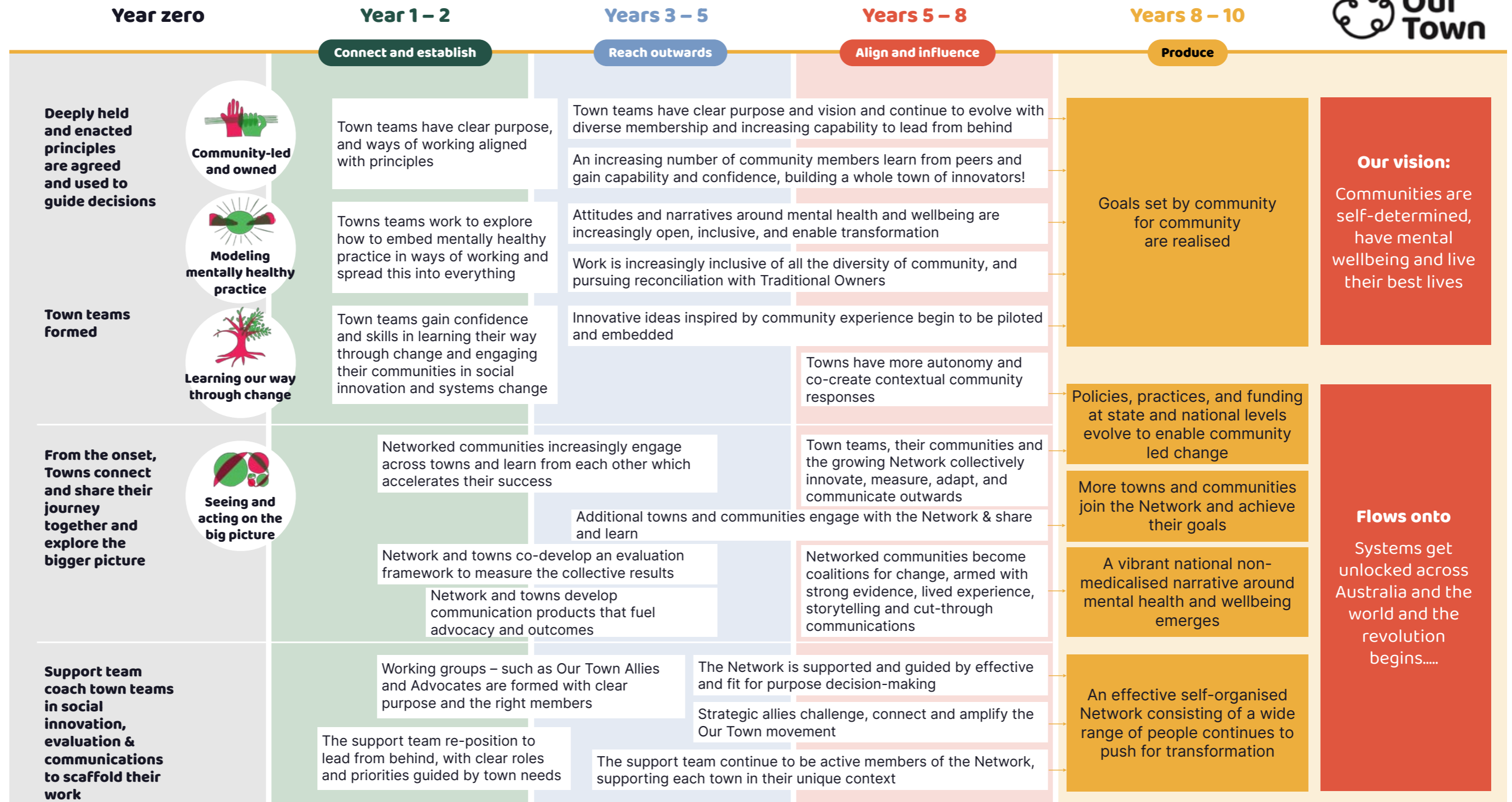
# Our Town Theory of Change

Our Town is guided by a 10 year Theory of Change (ToC) co-developed by Town Teams and Support Team. The ToC has four stages, **Connect & Establish**, **Reach Outwards**, **Align & Influence**, and **Produce**.

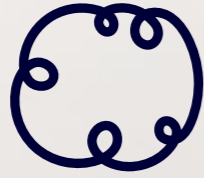
2022 marks the end of the **Connect & Establish** phase. At this stage, it was anticipated that Towns would be grounded in the Our Town principles and integrating and spreading capabilities across their teams

and towns. The Network — a convening of towns and key stakeholders - was expected to be evolving, with evidence of members leveraging resources, connections, and learnings to inform and drive their work

as a collective. This periodic evaluation has found that while there have been many learnings and iterations along the way, at the end of year two (2022) the initiative is on track and the ToC is holding true.



## Expanding Our Reach



Collectively, in 2022, approximately 30 local people were employed through Our Town as Town Team members, through fixed and casual contracts. In turn these local teams engaged more than 2500 people across the six towns through one-on-one engagement, activities, and events. In some of the smaller towns, this represented a sizable proportion of the adult population. Across towns, there were 20 instances in which community members (beyond the engaged team members), initiated events, projects, and activities in partnership with Our Town.



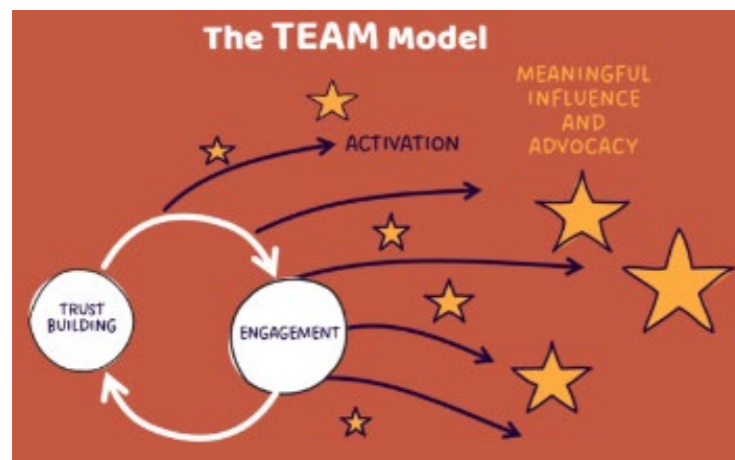
Reach	Details
<b>770 people</b>	Mid Murray reached 770 people across their region this year through events, programming, and 1-1 interactions with community members.
<b>700 people</b>	Over 700 people from 24 postcodes attended Berri's Our Town, Our Stories event in June. See <a href="#">this video about the event</a> and people's experience.
<b>602 people</b>	602 people have cumulatively visited the Cummins Village through events, workshops, and 1-1 chats
<b>28 kids &amp; 41 adults</b>	28 children and 41 adults engaged in Kangaroo Island's summer program which connected local community members with camps, excursions, and educational opportunities on the Island.
<b>120 people</b>	120 people (or approx. 23% of the adult population) in Kimba participated in the survey about how the Nuclear Waste Facility voting process has impacted on community members' mental health, wellbeing and relationships.
<b>355 people</b>	355 students, teachers, and community members engaged in Ceduna/Far West's School Gardening project which sought to shine light on different ways to support wellbeing.

## Our Town Towns

While each town travels its own journey, in 2022 there were clear indicators that most towns were beginning to move from foundational work (e.g. team forming, establishing governance and capability-building) into engagement and activation as they 'reach out' into their community and across the Our Town Network.

Despite their unique contexts, there is a pattern across the six Town Teams in how they are approaching this. We describe this pattern using the 'TEAM' model - Trust building/Engagement, Activation, and Meaningful influence and advocacy.

This model illustrates how ongoing and mutually reinforcing cycles of trust building and community engagement encourages activation of innovation in the community, and momentum for meaningful influence and advocacy.



Trust building activities are critical as they facilitate and strengthen engagement, building legitimacy of the Town Teams that is the foundation of a social licence to do the deeper work required for cultural change.

These 'light touch' activities and events like BBQs, comedy/music shows, or walking clubs, created comfortable and accessible pathways into Our Town for community members. Through these, Town Teams connected with community members and built rapport and trust, partnered with other trusted organisations, and demonstrated resource sharing such as making small community grants.

By the end of 2022, all towns had established formal or semi-formal working partnerships with their local school(s), enabling them to actively engage young people within school settings as well as outside of school in Our Town-hosted spaces.

**Example** The Our Town Berri team has established its first community connector role in partnership with Volunteers SA and the local school. This will be the first time Berri has had someone in a position like this locally working out of the school to connect students with volunteering opportunities in the community. The partnership approach will create the infrastructure to sustain this role regardless of Our Town Berri's involvement.

There were also opportunities for community members to engage more deeply, for example, in 2022 across three of the towns, Ceduna/Far West, Cummins and Kimba, approximately 60 community members completed mental health trainings to equip them to support others in the community.

Town Teams were starting to spread the Our Town principle, 'community-led and owned' as a cultural practice to nudge systems change at a local level.

**Example** In September 2020, the Kangaroo Island Council raised concerns about the mental health space on the island with the Mental Health Commissioner. The Commissioner agreed to work with local mental health services to seek a pathway to support the island, part of which included a discussion with the community first to capture their views. In 2022, to ensure islanders had a voice in a safe and supported environment, the Commissioner engaged the Kangaroo Island Our Town team about facilitating the community conversation. (OTKI team member, Impact Log entry)

Both trust and active engagement appear to be vital building blocks for activation and meaningful influencing. By activation, we mean community members other than Our Town team members taking the initiative to lead or contribute towards activities, events, and projects in partnership with the Town Teams. In 2022, instances of broader community activation were seen in all of the towns, from offers to cater or co-host Our Town events, to submitting applications for community grants, to activating a youth workshop.

We also saw some early sparks of meaningful influence and advocacy across the year including:

- Influencing local stakeholders including councils, schools, and NGOs to adopt community-led and activated solutions for change in their communities by modelling community-led ways of working.
- Town Teams being invited to share externally on local, state, and national stages about Our Town, mental health and wellbeing, and community-led approaches.

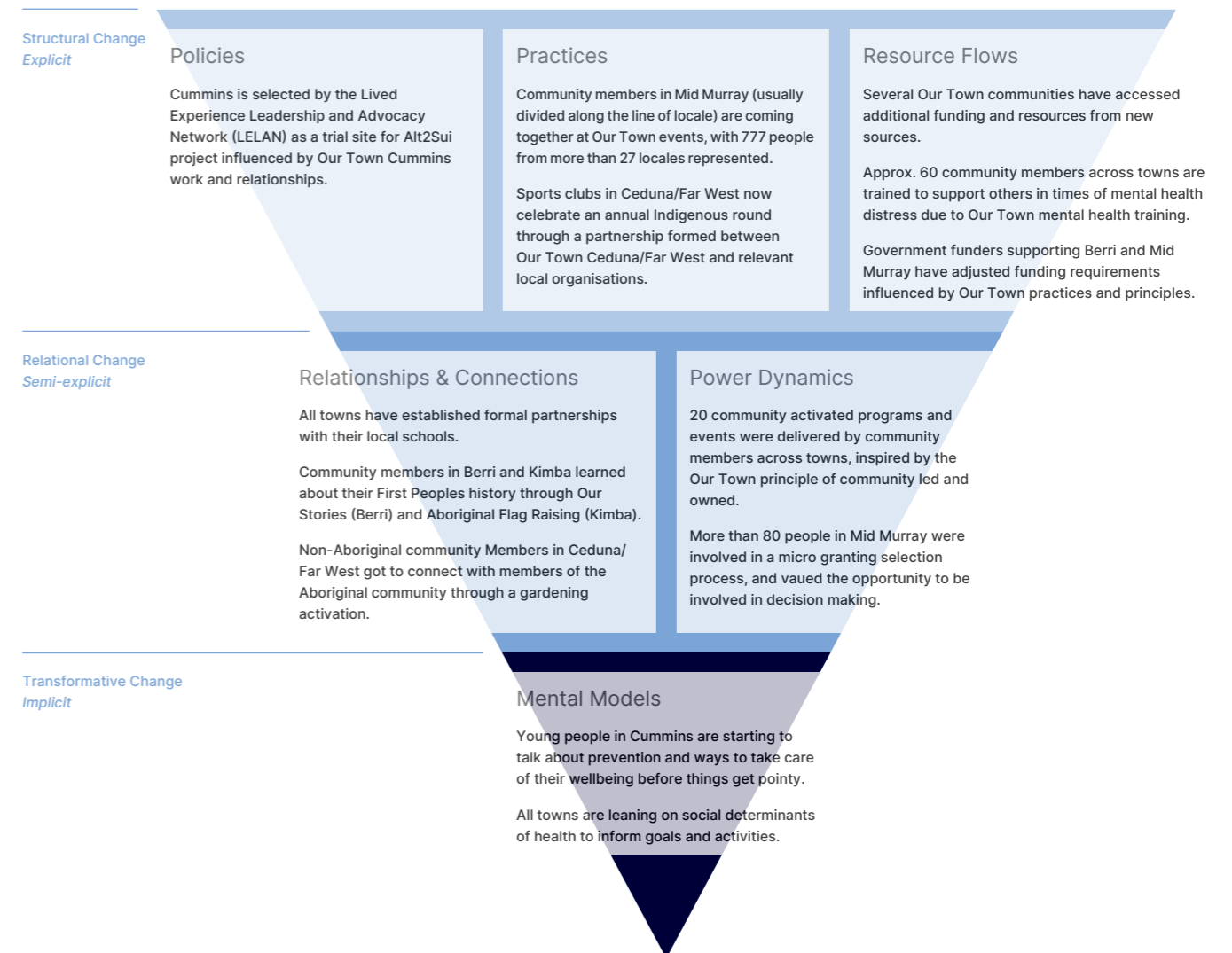
We also saw an increase in trust and connection across the Network with many instances of towns reaching out to each other to share resources and to seek and give advice.

Key questions to guide the next phase of work at the town level include:

- How might we build off the strong anchor of our principles-focused approach and cement it even further into our ways of working, especially for new people, and new partners?
- How might we collectively learn how to work more inclusively with all the diversity that is community with reconciliation with Traditional Owners?
- How might we collectively explore what working deeply with systems change looks like in practice?

Using the 'Six Conditions of Systems Change' framework we can map the impacts arising from Our Town activities.

### Example achievements in 2022 across 6 Conditions of Systems Change<sup>1</sup>



1. Kania, J, Kramer, M, Seng, P. The Water of Systems Change. Boston. FSG. 2018. PP. 4.

## Our Town Support Team



In 2022 the Our Town principles continued to be a grounding force for the Support Team. Through the end of year survey, Support Team members reflected that Our Town principles continue to be “of high importance”; with ‘modelling mentally healthy practice’ and ‘community-led’ rated highest. Across the Support Team meetings, documentation and communication, the principles were looked to and called upon as a way to prioritise, align, challenge, and collectively envision the future of Our Town. Support Team members reflected how the principle of ‘learning our way through change’ fostered a culture of embracing ‘failing forward’, and coming together in the face of challenges that are part and parcel of a complex initiative like Our Town. This facilitated trusting and collaborative relationships across the partnership.

As the Connect & Establish phase of the ToC comes to an end and we move into Reach Outward the desired outcome for Year three (2023) is that the “Support Team re-positions to lead from behind, guided by town-identified needs.”

While this process of re-positioning is not yet complete, there has been a substantial amount of movement in this direction. A reconceptualisation of what we mean by ‘community-led’, and continued encouragement for Towns to be connecting and sharing independently across the Network are two ways this is happening.

Key questions to guide the next phase of work at the Support Team level include:

- How might we continue to support each town uniquely to ensure the foundations are solid for all towns, whilst honouring the different contexts, ambitions and priorities of each Town?
- How might we continue to operationalise our new understanding of what community-led means for Our Town?
- How might we streamline our work as a Support Team across disciplinary and organisational boundaries, without blurring the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each partner?
- How might we organise and resource ourselves to effectively begin ‘reaching out’ with an influencing and advocacy focus?

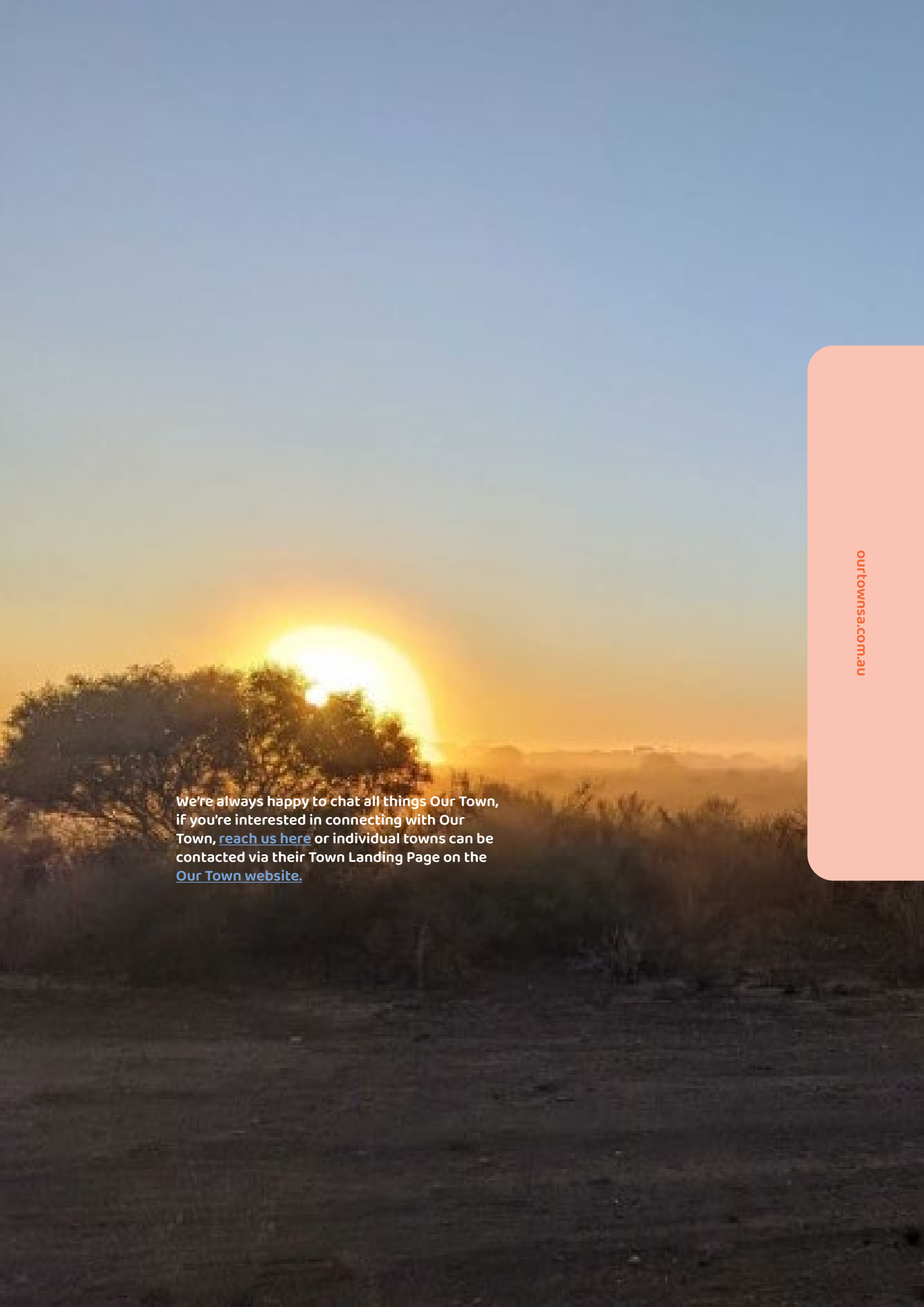
## Conclusion

The 2022 Periodic Evaluation found that overall the initiative is on track against the initiative level ToC. Our Town’ Towns have built strong foundations, fostering trust, and establishing partnerships, and the Network has evolved to support cross-town connection and sharing. Twenty Twenty-three will be a transitional year as we move into a new phase of the initiative that will require the Support Team to reposition itself to lead from behind.

As we come together to determine what else our Reaching Out phase might entail, we will be looking to capture more about what we are doing, seeing, and learning with our communities and sharing this openly with others who may be interested in learning alongside us.

**In the meantime, we invite you to dive deeper into our impact within each community. Check out last year’s [Our Town impact shares](#).**



A landscape photograph showing a bright sun setting behind a line of trees and a fence. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the foreground is a dark, grassy field.

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](#).