



# Community Strengthening Evidence Review


December 2022


## Snapshot

- Strong community wellbeing is critically important for helping children, young people and families thrive, especially when they are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability.
- We conducted an evidence review on: What community engagement or community development theories, practices, and activities have been found to contribute to community wellbeing for vulnerable children, young people and families?
- It should be noted that the majority of the documents found in the review were qualitative in nature and/or were summaries or reports which did not provide details about methodology. As such the overall quality of this evidence was difficult to assess.
- The review identified five critical elements that are common across the evidence:
  - Inclusive and genuine co-design and partnership: Building authentic partnerships with community that work towards community ownership while also ensuring that the diverse voices of that community are represented.
  - Leveraging strengths and building capacity: Initiatives that are both strength-based and actively building community capacity.
  - Creating safe and effective spaces: Spaces that are safe and accessible to everyone to allow for the effective engagement of diverse community members.
  - Intersectional and safe approaches: Incorporating an understanding of how the different aspects of a person's identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability) can expose them to overlapping and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation to allow for the delivery of a more integrated, safe and holistic suite of services.
  - A whole system approach: Interventions that are part of a whole system approach that inter-connects multiple community cohorts and agencies.
- Implications for next steps are discussed.

## Introduction

Community wellbeing is a collective sense of belonging, participation, trust, and access to resources and services that allow individuals and their communities to





flourish and fulfil their potential<sup>1</sup>. Community can be critically important for helping children, young people and families thrive, especially when they are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability. To thrive, children and young people need ‘protective factors’ such as relationships with supportive adults, safe environments and places to play, and high-quality social, emotional and educational learning experiences.<sup>2</sup> The presence of more than one protective factor can reduce risks to a child’s development and life outcomes. By focusing on community wellbeing, services can help achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and families by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors within the community.

## Why is this important?

Compared to more traditional, often top-down approaches, community engagement and development approaches occurring as a relational process at a local level are proving more effective at improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.<sup>3</sup> The current review contributes to the evidence base by identifying critical elements common across the evidence in community development and engagement approaches that target wellbeing.

## What did the evidence review find?

### Method

Rapid Evidence Assessment was used to search and critically appraise evidence from the year 2012 onwards. The Evidence Portal Technical Specifications were not used in conducting this evidence review. This is because the technical specifications have stringent criteria for the types of study design that can be included in the review. In order to capture a wider evidence base, the review expanded the types of studies that could be included in the review.

Evidence was sourced through online database searches and submissions provided by organisations.


The review used a search strategy (See Table 1) to identify evidence for the research question:

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<sup>1</sup> Atkinson, Sarah, Anne-Marie Bagnall, Rhiannon Corcoran, Jane South, and Sarah Curtis. “Being Well Together: Individual Subjective and Community Wellbeing.” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 21, no. 5 (June 2020): 1903–21.

<sup>2</sup> Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C. “Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention.” Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, Tim, Myfanwy McDonald, Harriet McHugh-Dillon, and Sue West. “Community Engagement: A Key Strategy for Improving Outcomes for Australian Families,” 2016.



*What community engagement or community development theories, practices, and activities have been found to contribute to community wellbeing for vulnerable children, young people and families?*

The review also focused on contributions to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

*Table 1: Search strategy*

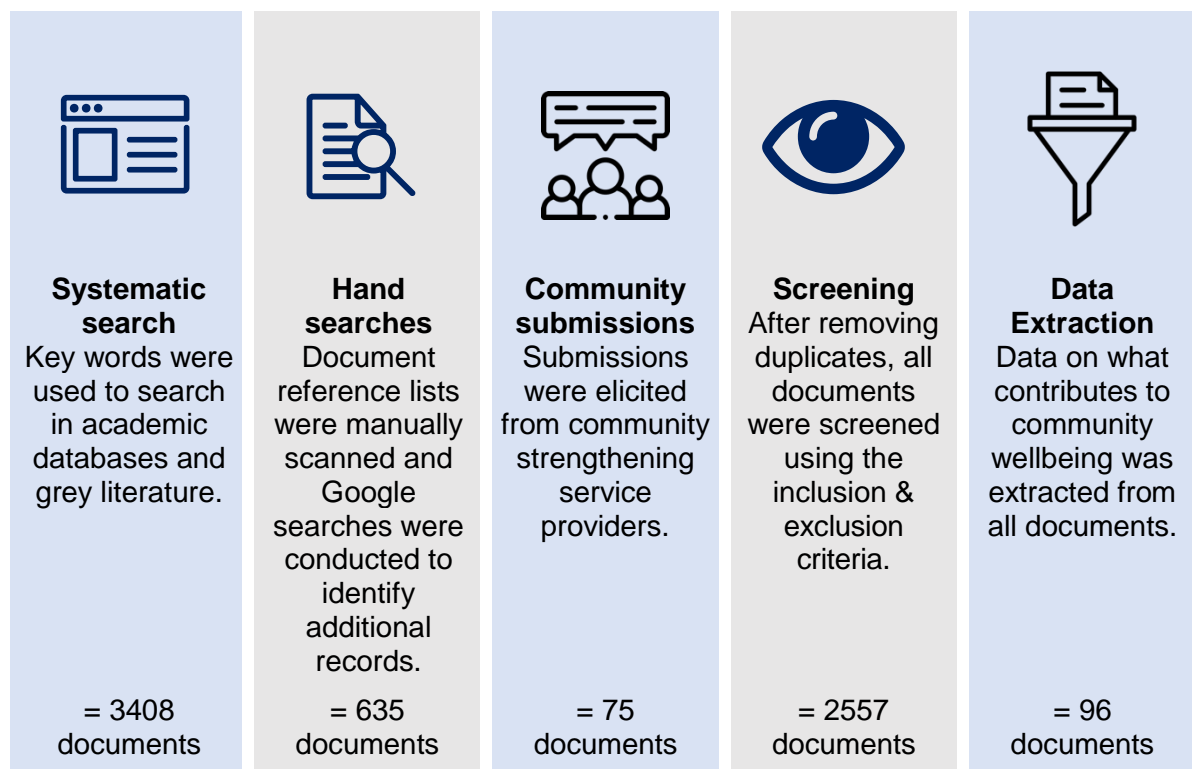
<b>Keyword search parameters</b>	(ab(Community-led OR "community develop*" OR "community engage*" OR "community based" OR "community consult*" OR "community empower*") AND ab(intervention* OR program* OR theor* OR initiative* OR practice* OR activit*) AND ab(wellbeing OR well-being))
<b>Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic databases</li> <li>• Grey literature</li> <li>• Hand Searching Google and document reference lists.</li> <li>• Submissions from TEI Community Strengthening Service Providers.</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engaged or led interventions, initiatives, or programs aimed at improving community wellbeing as either a primary or secondary aim.</li> <li>• Studies originating from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, The United States of America and Canada.</li> <li>• Studies published between 2012 and 2022).</li> <li>• Interventions targeting children, young people, and their families.</li> <li>• Interventions targeting vulnerable populations (including CALD and Indigenous communities and families).</li> </ul>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions delivered as part of a schools-based curriculum, where the program is delivered by school staff and teachers.</li> <li>• Social media/networking as an intervention.</li> <li>• Programs delivered by health care professionals.</li> <li>• Interventions that are not designed with the express purpose of improving community wellbeing as either a primary or secondary aim.</li> <li>• Interventions that do not target children, young people and families.</li> <li>• Studies that are not written in English.</li> <li>• Studies evaluating interventions in countries other than Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, The United States of America and Canada.</li> <li>• Studies published before 2012.</li> </ul>

Using the search strategy, we searched academic databases and grey literature and supplemented the results through hand searches of document reference lists and Google searches. On our behalf, NSW Department of Communities and Justice also

sent out a call to community strengthening service providers funded under the NSW Targeted Earlier Intervention program to share practice evidence information and materials about their work on this topic. Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, documents were screened for relevance at title, abstract, and then full text.

It should be noted that the majority of the documents were qualitative in nature and/or were summaries or reports which did not provide details about methodology. As such the overall quality of this evidence was difficult to assess. After screening, we identified 96 relevant documents. From these documents, we extracted data on the outcomes, theories, practices, barriers, and enablers to improving community wellbeing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Approach to searching, screening and extracting data



From the extracted data, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis and synthesised the themes found within the sources. Five critical elements were identified that contribute to strengthening community wellbeing.

## Key Findings

This review examined 96 articles published in the past 10 years (2012-2022). The tables below detail the document types (Table 2) and target populations (Table 3).

*Table 2: Reviewed documents.*

<b>Source type</b>	<b>Number of results</b>
Journal articles, theses, and book chapters	39 (1 book chapter, 2 theses, and 36 journal articles)
Grey literature	35 (33 reports, 2 web pages)
Community submissions	22 (19 reports, 1 web page, 1 research paper)

*Table 3: Document target populations.*

<b>Target groups</b>	<b>Number of results</b>
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	17
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people	8
CALD communities	6
Whole community	29
Families	15
Children and young people	13
Multiple groups	8

## Outcomes

The reviewed literature details community wellbeing outcomes across a range of domains at the individual, group and community levels. In seeking to improve outcomes at the community level, initiatives aimed not only to improve individual wellbeing but also to improve the community itself. This was particularly the case for initiatives that aimed to increase a community's sense of belonging and connection. Community engagement and development processes are complex and dynamic, making them difficult to evaluate. However, the reviewed literature indicates that there is growing evidence that community engagement and development approaches have a positive impact on community wellbeing.

## Common Outcomes

### *Community wellbeing initiatives **Increased:***

*Wellbeing, resilience, healing, safety, health, mental health, physical activity, self-determination, participation & engagement in community life, resourcefulness, sense of belonging, social networks, social connection, connection to culture, knowledge of culture, use of support services, access to service information and resources, volunteering pathways, Parenting/grandparenting/ caregiver skills, child/young people behaviours, relationship skills, family communication skills, school attendance, self-identity, confidence, leadership skills.*

### *Community wellbeing initiatives **Reduced:***

*Contact with the child protection system, contact with criminal justice systems, domestic, family and sexual violence, homelessness, social isolation, racism, social and financial disparity.*

## Critical elements and examples of implementation

A thematic analysis of these sources identified five critical elements that were common across the evidence. Table 4 below summarises these critical elements.

*Table 4: Description of critical elements.*

<b>Critical element</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><i>Genuine and inclusive co-design and partnership</i></b>	Evidence across the literature showed that co-designed, bottom-up initiatives result in stronger engagement, greater success and better sustainability <sup>4</sup> . Initiatives developed in authentic partnership with the community are critical for tailoring and evolving approaches in

<sup>4</sup> Bulloch, Hannah, William Fogarty, and Kate Bellchambers. "Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Services: Putting Community-Driven, Strengths-Based Approaches into Practice," 2019; Moore, Tim. "Developing Holistic Integrated Early Learning Services for Young Children and Families Experiencing Socio-Economic Vulnerability." Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, 2021; Powell, N, HE Dalton, and D Perkins. "A Collaborative Approach to Community Mental Wellbeing: Scoping Review." University of Newcastle: Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, 2018; Wong, ShinEn, Hannah Byun, Young Byun, and Shannon Harvey. "Community Builders Focus Group Interview Evaluation Report 202," 2022, 25.



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response to the community's needs.<sup>5</sup> True engagement with a community cannot be achieved by assessing their response to pre-decided information, strategies and marketing. The starting point is the engagement.<sup>6</sup> The evidence also emphasised that community wellbeing cannot be defined in a way that excludes a group of individuals. To truly meet the needs of a whole community, co-design and partnership should be inclusive of the diverse range of voices that might be impacted by an initiative.<sup>7</sup> From the literature, authentically partnering with community to improve wellbeing looks like:

1. Spending time and resources on understanding and building relationships with community
2. Developing a shared vision, a clear rationale and, in many cases, a theory of change
3. Incorporating and leveraging local community assets and strengths
4. Providing space for legitimate access and opportunity to engage
5. Engaging in culturally safe and relevant practices
6. Working towards community independence, autonomy and control.

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***Leveraging strengths and building capacity***

A strengths-based approach to improving community wellbeing was consistently shown as important for successful and long-lasting change within communities.<sup>8</sup> A strengths-based approach helps communities realise their collective strengths and vision for change, enables them to take control of decision-making and helps them mobilise their existing assets.<sup>9</sup> A strengths-based approach is also vital for addressing issues of discrimination and inequity within a community. While the literature overwhelmingly supports a strengths-based approach, it is also clear that leveraging community

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<sup>5</sup> Kulan, Melissa. "Connecting for Change: Implementing Research in the Practice of Community Allyship and Violence Prevention in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities." Women's Health Queensland, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Harwood, Richard C. "Putting Community in Collective Impact." The Collective Impact Forum, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Powell, N, HE Dalton, and D Perkins. "A Collaborative Approach to Community Mental Wellbeing: Scoping Review." University of Newcastle: Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Bulloch, Hannah, William Fogarty, and Kate Bellchambers. "Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Services: Putting Community-Driven, Strengths-Based Approaches into Practice," 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Murrup-Stewart, Cammi, Amy K Cammi, Laura Jobson, and Karen Adams. "Aboriginal Perceptions of Social and Emotional Wellbeing Programs: A Systematic Review of Literature Assessing Social and Emotional Wellbeing Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians Perspectives," 2019; Orpinas, Pamela, Rebecca A. Matthew, J. Maria Bermúdez, Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez, and Alejandra Calva. "A Multistakeholder Evaluation of Lazos Hispanos: An Application of a Community-Based Participatory Research Conceptual Model." *Journal of Community Psychology* 48, no. 2 (March 2020): 464–81.



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assets requires support. Sharing knowledge and supporting community learning and capacity building is an important step in this process. Long-term outcomes rely on communities being able to successfully continue the practices and activities that outside organisations have helped initiate and the success of initiatives often depends on genuine ownership by the community.<sup>10</sup> To remain responsive to community needs, a strengths-based approach should therefore include:

- An assessment of a community's capacity for independent action
- Development of mechanisms and resources for ongoing problem-solving
- Monitoring of effects over time
- Development of the capacity for evolution and self-renewal to address changing conditions.

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### ***Creating safe and effective spaces***

The evidence highlighted the importance of spaces that allow community members to come together to build and improve social relations. An effective and safe space encourages social connection, allows people to be honest about their experiences and identities, facilitates sharing of knowledge and resources, and can operate as a supportive community of care.<sup>11</sup> Space has the potential for encouraging healing, inclusion, identity-building, and the promotion of social cohesion. Further, spaces that are safe and accessible for all community members, especially marginalised, vulnerable, Aboriginal and CALD communities, are important for engaging, and thus improving the wellbeing of, the whole community.

From the literature, safe and effective spaces that contribute to community wellbeing often provide access to:

1. Direct services that meet the community's specific needs (e.g., childcare, family support and parenting programs)
2. Soft-entry points to important external services and information (e.g. mental and physical health services)
3. Peer support and experience
4. Volunteering pathways
5. Social networks and capital
6. Activities or other reasons to interact

Beyond the services and opportunities that these spaces provide, effective community wellbeing initiatives make sure that spaces:

- Are easily navigable and accessible by safe, efficient and affordable transport
- Are well-designed, safe and pleasant physical spaces

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, Tim, Harriet McHugh-Dillon, Kerry Bull, Rebecca Fry, Bella Laidlaw, and Sue West. "The Evidence: What We Know about Place-Based Approaches to Support Children's Wellbeing," November 4, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Bowes, J, and R Grace. "Review of Early Childhood Parenting, Education and Health Intervention Programs for Indigenous Children and Families in Australia," no. 8 (2014).





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- Include culturally competent, empathetic and safe staff
  - Include peers with lived experience
  - Provide opportunities for community to make changes to the space
  - Have interpreters available, and multi-language written and audio resources in community languages and accessible for those with disabilities.

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***Intersectional and safe approaches***

It is important for initiatives to widen their understanding of vulnerability and inequality by taking account of the complex and cumulative way that social identity affects wellbeing. An intersectional approach recognises that there are multiple factors of a person's identity (e.g. gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity) which can expose them to overlapping and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation.<sup>12</sup> Understanding this will enable initiatives to target people experiencing multiple and inter-related forms of disadvantage and provide a platform for the delivery of a more integrated, safe and holistic suite of services and supports.

A significant part of this approach involves not just awareness but also safety. According to the literature, safe implementation is:

- Developed with and supported by vulnerable communities and leaders
- Incorporates cultural and spiritual practices, principles, laws and ways of knowing
- Acknowledges the historical and social context of the community
- Enables people to maintain their identity
- Employs diverse staff who are able to be reflexive and aware of their own biases and privileges
- Holistically meets the diverse and intersecting needs of children, young people, families and communities.

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***A whole system approach***

The drivers of disadvantage and inequality often occur at multiple levels within a community.<sup>13</sup> The success of early interventions for children, young people and families can be limited if issues around environment, poverty and care are not addressed. To achieve enduring change, initiatives need to be considered at the system level in order to provide comprehensive, protective and preventative support. This highlights the need not only to target both place and person, but also to ensure that services and supports are multi-levelled, integrated across different sectors and mutually reinforcing.<sup>14</sup> Fragmented services can have less capacity to

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<sup>12</sup> Schulz, Simone. "Access System Redesign: Evidence Review," 2018; Kulan, Melissa. "Connecting for Change: Implementing Research in the Practice of Community Allyship and Violence Prevention in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities." Women's Health Queensland, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Moore, Tim. "Developing Holistic Integrated Early Learning Services for Young Children and Families Experiencing Socio-Economic Vulnerability." Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Wilks, S, J Lahousse, and B Edwards. "Commonwealth Place-Based Service Delivery Initiatives: Key Learnings Project," 2015.

support children and their families. Further, this is more likely to negatively impact disadvantaged families who may have limited skills, confidence, cultural or linguistic knowledge or support to interact with or negotiate these often complex systems.<sup>15</sup> Community level change is more likely to occur when people and services are synchronised and supported across the levels of a community's social system.

The critical elements were implemented throughout the evidence in a variety of ways. Table 5 provides examples of how the critical elements have been implemented in practice.

*Table 5: Examples of how the critical elements have been implemented.*


<b>Critical elements</b>	<b>Example Implementation Activities</b>
<b><i>Genuine and inclusive co-design and partnership</i></b>	<p>Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre's (KNC) Place Planning<sup>16</sup> initiative aims to build community cohesion and connection in social housing communities through programs that are initiated and co-designed by the community. The development of programs involved extensive consultation and engagement with community members and agencies. The programs included the voices and met the needs of diverse populations within the community. KNC made sure that the centre is a space for the community to legitimately help develop ideas that are then included in their approach. They also developed strong partnerships with a number of local services and organisations (including community groups, churches, and school groups). This resulted in more effective service delivery.</p> <p>Weave Youth &amp; Community Services (Weave), based in Sydney and Southeast Sydney, partners with consultants to understand what is most useful about how Weave and the sector can improve in order to better support local local Aboriginal people and families. By including Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients, community, and staff voices through a Stories of Lived Experience project,<sup>17</sup> Weave shows how genuine inclusive initiatives designed in partnership with community can give power, agency and ownership back to vulnerable communities.</p>
<b><i>Leveraging strengths and building capacity</i></b>	<p>The Lazos Hispanos program<sup>18</sup> in Georgia, U.S. was developed to enhance the health and well-being of Latinx residing in low-income communities in the Southeastern United States. The program incorporates assets and builds community capacity. Mobilising</p>

<sup>15</sup> Moore, Tim. "The Impact of Neighbourhood Physical and Social Environments on Child and Family Well-Being." Presented at the Centre for Community Child Health Roundtable on Place-based approaches to supporting children and families, North Melbourne, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre. "Place Planning: Our Story," 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Weave Youth & Community Services. "Stories of Lived ExperienceL Weave Youth & Community Services Evaluation Report." Weave Youth & Community Services, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Orpinas, Pamela, Rebecca A. Matthew, J. Maria Bermúdez, Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez, and Alejandra Calva. "A Multistakeholder Evaluation of Lazos Hispanos: An Application of a Community-Based Participatory Research Conceptual Model." *Journal of Community Psychology* 48, no. 2 (March 2020): 464–81.



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existing assets, the program trains promotoras (a Hispanic/Latinx community member who receives specialised training to provide basic health education in the community without being a professional healthcare worker) in the community to serve as a bridge connecting community, providers of health and social services. This benefits the whole community as it provides knowledge on resources, services and support, and results in an empowered, committed community driven to connect people to resources.

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The City of Leeds in the UK established an asset-based approach to improving community wellbeing.<sup>19</sup> They hire a Community Builder for each initiative site who gains extensive knowledge of the community, finds active community members and connects them to each other and to local organisations. The Community Builder identifies strengths in the community (people and organisations) and increases their capacity for change by connecting them.

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***Creating safe and effective spaces***

The Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter Inc (FISH), in the Hunter Valley, NSW, has implemented the Parent Peer Support Project (PPSP)<sup>20</sup> which provides parents navigating the child protection system with emotional support, companionship and information. Child protection caseworkers and lawyers often have difficulty establishing trusting relationships in an environment where parents and children fear removal. As a result, the project uses parents with lived experience to support parents encountering the child protection system and help them overcome barriers to these services. Using peers with lived experience reduces power imbalances, builds trust, and encourages connections. PPSP provide cohesive solidarity in a space that commonly feels disempowering and isolating.

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The Pao Arts Centre<sup>21</sup> is another example of how creating safe and effective spaces is a key to strengthening community wellbeing. Located in an ethnic enclave community within Greater Boston in the U.S, the Pao Arts Centre is a space that fosters a sense of belonging, security, and cultural identity through creative placemaking using art and culture. Pao Arts Centre emerged as a cultural space owned by, created for, and based in the community. This creation of safe and effective spaces allows for stories about the forgotten history of immigrant communities to be heard and amplified.

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<sup>19</sup> Bagnall, A., J. South, S. Di Martino, K. Southby, G. Pilkington, B. Mitchell, A. Pennington, and R. Corcoran. "A Systematic Review of Interventions in Community Infrastructure (Places and Spaces) to Boost Social Relations and Community Wellbeing." University College Cork, Ireland: BMJ Publishing Group, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Cocks, Jessica, Lyn Stoker, Shantelle Common, Rachel Evans, Angela Geale, Lou Johnston, Felicity Kime, and Nicola Ross. "From Little Things Big Things Are Coming: Final Report of the Parent Peer Support Project 2020," 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Rubin, Carolyn Leung, Virginia Rall Chomitz, Cynthia Woo, Giles Li, Susan Koch-Weser, and Peter Levine. "Arts, Culture, and Creativity as a Strategy for Countering the Negative Social Impacts of Immigration Stress and Gentrification." *Health Promotion Practice* 22, no. 1\_suppl (May 2021): 131S-140S.



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***Intersectional  
and culturally  
safe approaches***

The Women's Community Ally Network (CAN) Practice Studio<sup>22</sup> based in Queensland engaged community members to identify a model for responding to and preventing gendered violence in families, workplaces, and communities. The CAN project is underpinned by an intersectional understanding that women's experiences of inequality and discrimination vary according to gender identity, culture, and socio-economic status. As a result, they aimed to make sure that the perspectives and knowledge of women from diverse backgrounds, including CALD communities, were given a voice in designing the project's content. Accessibility was ensured by including interpreters and child-minding services, transport subsidies, using well-known venues and accessible time frames. Staff also acknowledged their own privilege and community members were recognised and compensated for their time and expertise.

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The Aboriginal Infant Development Program (AIDP)<sup>23</sup> in British Columbia, Canada implements a culturally safe approach. Aware that families are wary towards them due to the historical trauma of children being taken away and their connection to welfare authorities, staff explicitly deferred developmental screenings and extensive paperwork in the early stages of their relationships with Aboriginal caregivers during the program. This allowed for greater trust and relationships to be established and built between workers and communities during the early stages. In addition, staff practiced reflexivity, acknowledged their own privileges and were aware of the historical trauma of the communities in which they served.

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***A whole system  
approach***

In the UK, the Early Learning Communities program<sup>24</sup> uses a whole system approach to improve outcome for children living in poverty. The program works to improve children's learning environments and systems so that they have access to relationships, interactions and experiences that will support their development at home, in school and in the community. The UK government is working with program partners across the UK to form a network of 'Early Learning Communities' that will co-design and improve early learning systems in communities.

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In 2016, Save the Children UK launched the Children's Community initiative in Wallsend, England.<sup>25</sup> This initiative established a whole system, neighbourhood-level partnership between schools and children's centres, the local authority, public health, the clinical commissioning group, the local churches and voluntary sector, police

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<sup>22</sup> Kulan, Melissa. "Connecting for Change: Implementing Research in the Practice of Community Allyship and Violence Prevention in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities." Women's Health Queensland, 2021

<sup>23</sup> Gerlach, Alison J., Annette J. Browne, and Margo Greenwood. "Engaging Indigenous Families in a Community-Based Indigenous Early Childhood Programme in British Columbia, Canada: A Cultural Safety Perspective." *Health & Social Care in the Community* 25, no. 6 (November 2017): 1763–73.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, Tim. "Developing Holistic Integrated Early Learning Services for Young Children and Families Experiencing Socio-Economic Vulnerability." Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Early Intervention Foundation. "Wallsend Children's Community, North Tyneside." Early Intervention Foundation, August 23, 2018.



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and the community. The goal was integration and collaboration between all local partners in order to provide children with holistic support across home, school, community, education, and health. The Children's Community is also seamlessly support children throughout their lives with the understanding that progress made during the early years needs to be sustained and built-on as children get older.


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## Where to from here?

The findings of this evidence review have implications for the design and delivery of community strengthening services. The five critical elements identified here have the potential to improve the wellbeing of communities, and may be particularly important for vulnerable, Aboriginal and CALD populations.

It is important to note that improving community wellbeing requires a long-term commitment to local projects and the communities involved in them. A significant part of this investment is building both the capacity of service providers and the local evidence base. Community strengthening initiatives not only need to be well integrated and coordinated but also need to undertake rigorous evaluations and remain flexible to the needs of diverse community members. Providing evidence that a community's engagement is having a meaningful impact is important, not only for maintaining that engagement, but also for making sure that the content and implementation practices of an initiative remain relevant to that community.

The next steps in achieving better community wellbeing outcomes could be to:

1. Further evaluate the quality of the evidence, identify what evidence is missing or unknown (for instance, what is the evidence on how to best train service providers to be reflexive?) and determine what further evaluations need to take place;
  2. Identify the capacity of service providers and how this can reasonably be expanded;
  3. Increase the capacity of service providers to do rigorous evaluations that can effectively inform local decisions and generate local evidence, by providing training and resources;
  4. Develop research tools that are appropriate and accessible for local service providers to use;
  5. Explore methods for how to negotiate, strengthen and integrate relationships between local service providers (for example, by improving referral pathways).
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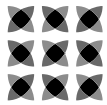
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