



A JOURNEY OF CO-DEVELOPMENT

The Boori Milumba Model

April 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The partners acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters now recognised as Australia and pay their respect to the ancestors and Elders of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

Charlie Ashby, the Cultural Leader at Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, created the artwork for the model and the program to symbolise the three stages of co-development. We thank Charlie for his creativity and generosity in providing permission to use his artwork within this report. Requests and enquiries concerning the use of the Boori Milumba logo or artwork used across the three stages of co-development should be emailed to manager@cullunghutti.org.au.

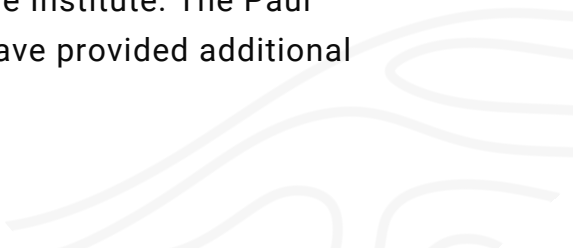
Artwork for the figures in this report were created by contemporary artist and teacher, and Cullunghutti board member, Holly Sanders. Holly is a proud Bundjalung woman from the North Coast of New South Wales (NSW) who is currently living on Yuin Country on the South Coast of NSW. Through her artwork, Holly aims to share stories, culture and Country in a contemporary way.

Special thanks are given to Harley Grundy for his exceptional photography and to Kaysha Carlson for her invaluable artwork and photography. These contributions have significantly enriched the visual narrative of this document.

The Partners also express their gratitude to Ria Cleary for her efforts and dedication to synthesising the content gathered for this report, which reflects the invaluable input from all members of the Boori Milumba Steering Committee.

SNAICC - National Voice for our Children and Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre provided the imagery within this report. Do not alter or reproduce imagery without permission from SNAICC.

Funding from the Australian Government Department of Education supports the project and the establishment and operations of Parkville Institute. The Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Wiggs Family Foundation have provided additional funding.





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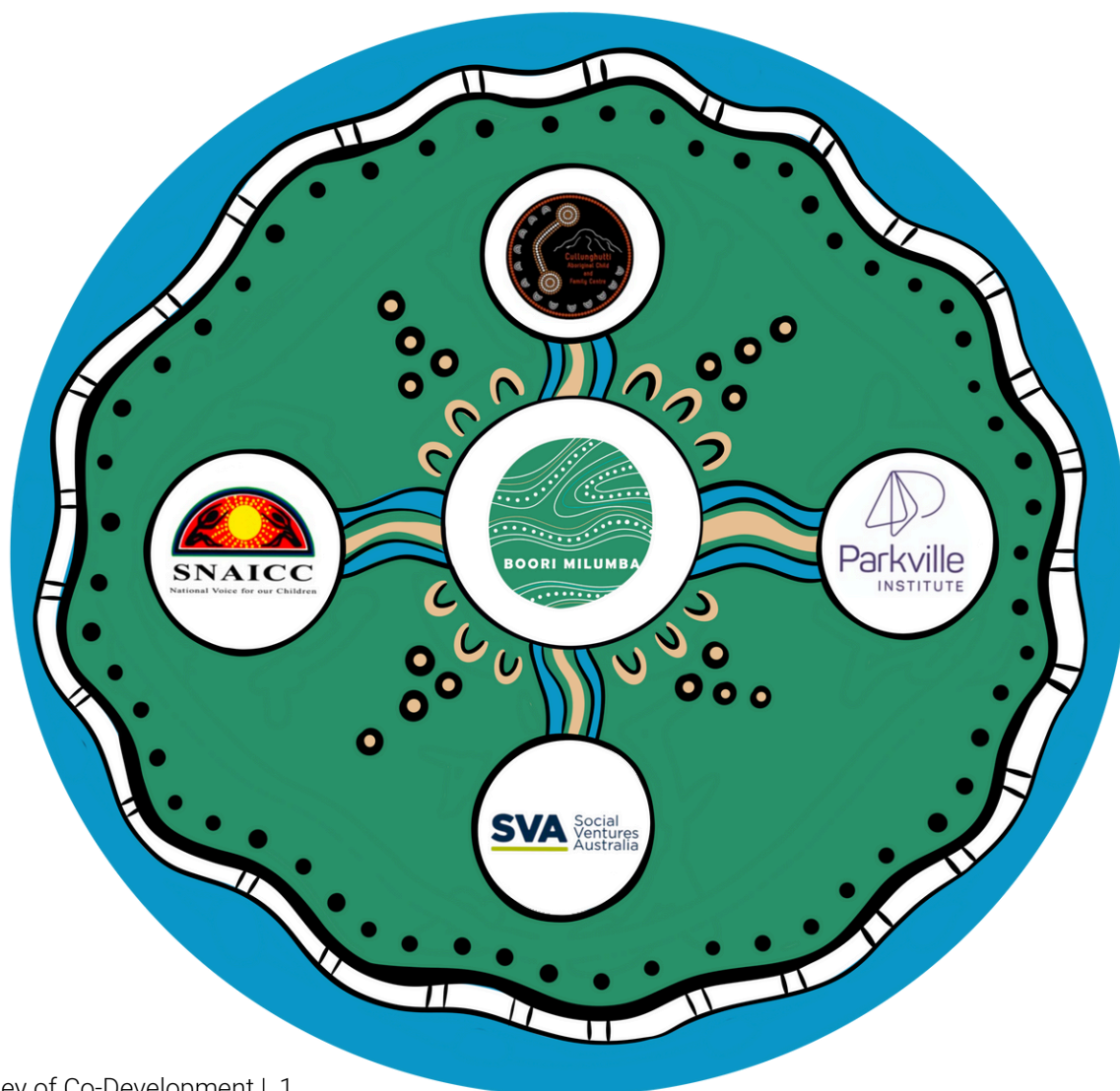
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INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of a collaborative journey to co-develop an intensive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It details how the four project partners collaborated to co-develop the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service-led program that is responsive to community strengths, aspirations and needs (the project).

This document draws on the professional and lived experience of project partners, and we extend our gratitude to all individuals and groups involved. We would like to specifically recognise and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose invaluable contributions have shaped this resource. In particular, the cultural authority of SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the remarkable leadership of Cullunghutti Child and Family Centre Board of Directors, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), service staff and families whose expertise, insights and efforts have played a pivotal role in this project.





INTRODUCTION


Each project partner brings unique skills, knowledge, experience, ways of knowing and being and subject matter expertise, which are interwoven and informed decision making throughout their ongoing journey of co-development.

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Cullunghutti) is a registered public benevolent institution charity that has as its mission to be a significant place of importance for Aboriginal children and families to connect, grow, and learn together, reflecting and strengthening Aboriginal identity within the wider community. Cullunghutti has deep knowledge of their community and significant expertise in delivering evidence-based services to improve outcomes for children and families including a not-for-profit early learning service. Cullunghutti is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) taking part to co-develop a model to trial at their service.

Cullunghutti would like to acknowledge the Wadi Wadi Wandanian People, the traditional custodians of the land on which the service is built and the land on which staff, children and their families work and live upon today. We pay our respects to our Elders both past and present for providing us with guidance and sharing their wisdom. We acknowledge our children for they are our future leaders.

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Operating for nearly 40 years, SNAICC has deep knowledge, networks, and expertise on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood development, safety, and wellbeing. SNAICC has an all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board and Council, comprising of representatives from early childhood, child protection and family support services across all Australian jurisdictions.

Parkville Institute is an innovative research and practice institute established as a not-for-profit organisation in 2021. Parkville Institute's key purpose is to improve the life trajectories of young children experiencing significant social disadvantage and family stress through generating robust and balanced research that will advance evidence-informed policy and practice in the early childhood education and care sector and to grow the capacity and capability of the early childhood workforce. Government and philanthropic funding supports Parkville Institute's work with ECEC service providers and other partners.



Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a social purpose organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage – towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. SVA influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning about what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives and advocating for change.

SVA’s Young Children Thriving (**YCT**) program that strives to transform the early childhood development landscape in Australia. Our vision is for an Australia where all children, regardless of where they live or the challenges their families face, have the opportunities and supports they need to thrive.

Research and evaluation partner

Associate Professor Yi-Ping Tseng from the Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne, will evaluate the Boori Milumba model and the outcomes for children and families in partnership with SNAICC to ensure cultural safety and with Parkville Institute.

Project and program funders

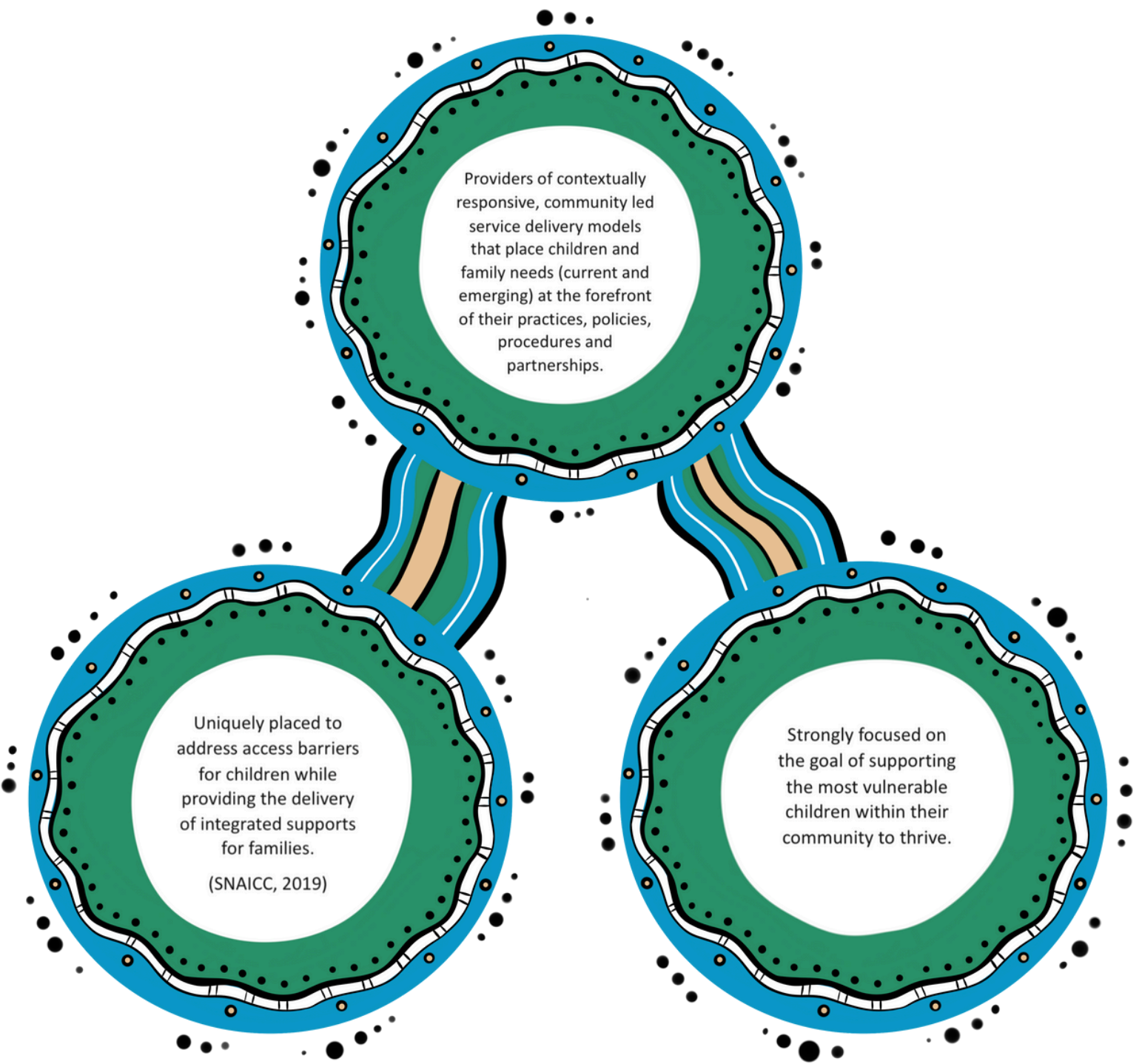
The Australian Government is funding the research trial of the Boori Milumba model. Additional funding is provided from philanthropic funding partners including the Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Wiggs Family Foundation.

Vision and recognition

At the heart of this co-development journey are the key principles outlined in the companion report the *“Co-development Framework: For developing an intensive early childhood education and care program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (2024)”*, including in particular, privileging local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and community-led decision making. This report provides insight into the co-development process with an ACCO (Cullunghutti) and highlights how co-development recognises, demonstrates and celebrates the unique strengths of ACCOs (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Strengths of ACCOs



In writing this report, the partners acknowledge the importance of, and draw inspiration from storytelling undertaken across and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and particularly the importance of storytelling for the transmission of knowledge (Holt & Perry, 2023).

During the co-development journey, the project partners connected with and built strong relationships through sharing stories. These interactions occurred both online and in person, including visits to Cullunghutti and on Country experiences in the Shoalhaven area. Through participating in numerous sessions of story sharing, the project partners shared their concerns and ideas and then revisited, reconstructed and refined them.

Over time, they weaved their combined knowledge, experience and understandings together while building professional and personal relationships. In doing so, the project partners constructed a different approach for knowing, doing and being for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. That approach is the Boori Milumba model.



Respected local Elder Aunty Grace, who was involved in establishing the site for Cullunghutti over ten years ago, referred to the Boori Milumba model as bringing together, 'old and new ways'. At the core of the Boori Milumba model is the embodiment of knowledge systems and practices that provide cultural safety and responsiveness while honouring Country, family, community and culture, and recognising children as future leaders.

Boori Milumba is a new ECEC model with new stories to share. This report is part of that story, focusing specifically on the journey of co-developing the Boori Milumba model. It shares the story of creating transformative change for the learning, development and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and their community. It also contributes to a bigger story, one of community wellbeing, where strong communities support their members to thrive in mind, body and spirit (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022).

Report Structure

This report compliments and acts as a companion document to:

- *Co-development Framework: For developing an intensive early childhood education and care program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (v2, 2024).*
- *The Boori Milumba Model: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific service-led intensive ECEC model (2024).*

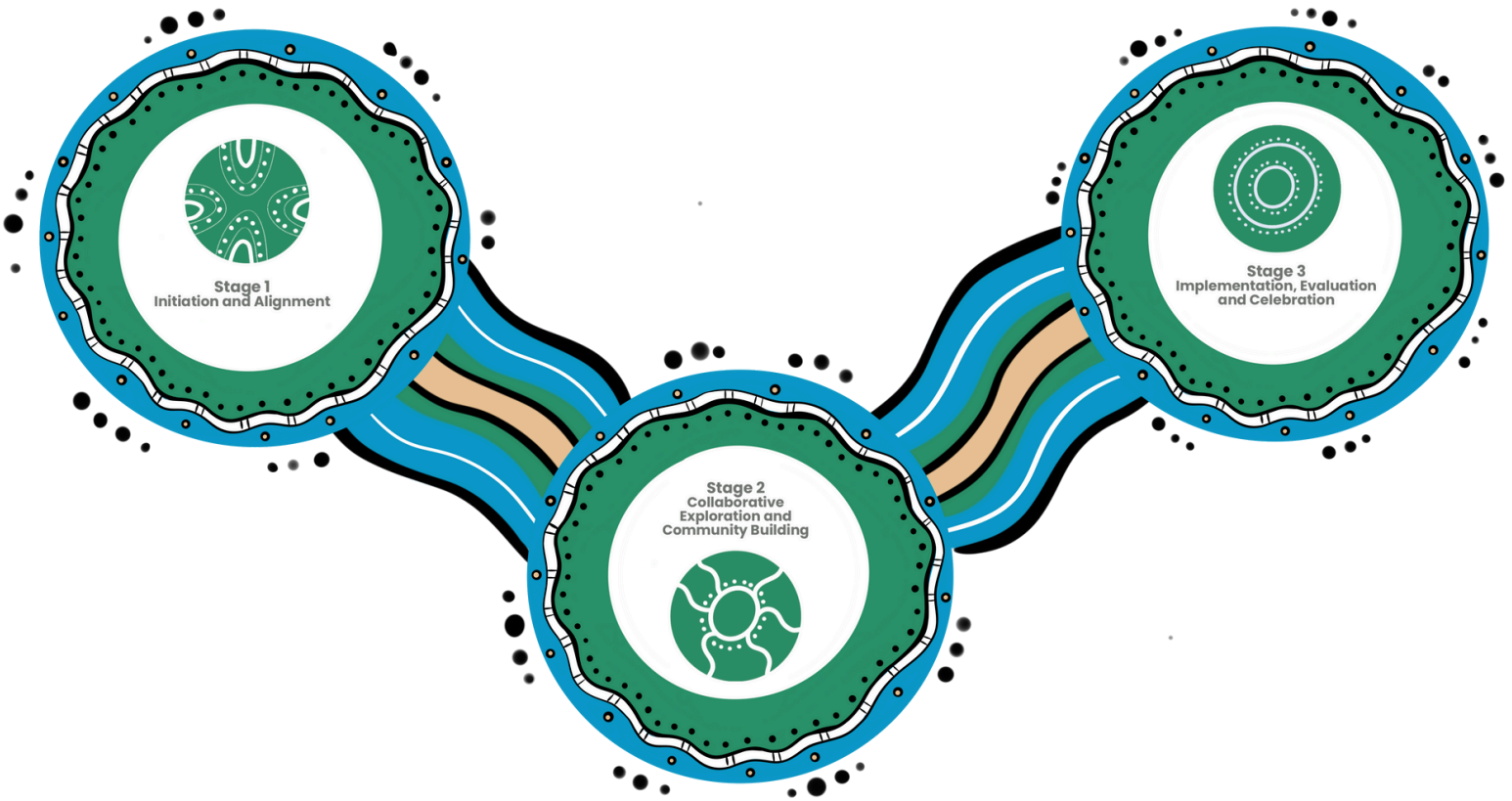
While the Co-development Framework provides a theoretical approach to the co-development process, this report details how the application and process of co-development with Cullunghutti was enacted in practice; it's what Steffensen (2020) refers to as 'praction', where practice is put into action.

The co-development journey is shared across this report through a selection of stories. Like all good stories, the report will include the characters, the themes and the action. The stories shared weave together the highlights, challenges, practicalities and actions of co-development. Reflections from individual members of the co-development project are used throughout this report to highlight personal insights of the journey, its challenges, opportunities and benefits.

"It's going to be amazing...if it really means the educators are going to feel valued, the families are going to feel better supported... if we get this right, then government are going to go this is how every Aboriginal child and family centre should be."

In this report, figures will be used to provide an overview of timelines and processes that supported the project work. Stories will demonstrate key aspects of the project such as governance and operations, partnerships and relationships, the model design and requirements (environmental and staffing), and specifically the Cultural Framework. Each story relates to a stage from the Co-development Framework (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Overview of the three stages of co-development from the Co-development Framework



Circles have been chosen strategically throughout this report to demonstrate the connectedness and unity of the project partners. Partners might have circled around an idea while they collectively unpacked it, or they might have stretched the circle while broadly expanding each other's understandings to then scale down the circle with a refined perspective.

The examples and evidence shared through the stories and how they relate back to the Co-development Framework are not intended to be prescriptive, exclusive or strictly linear. As the Co-development Framework demonstrates, co-development has structure and cohesion, yet the journey of co-development will be unique for all partners and their related project/s and requires responsiveness to cultural and community contexts and flexibility in design and implementation. ACCO partners, the local community and cultural contexts influence and shape each co-development journey.



THE BACKSTORY

In 2021, the Australian government agreed to provide funding to support the replication research trial of an intensive ECEC model over three years at four sites and requested that one site be a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander site. In Parkville Institute's and SVA's discussion with the Australian government, it was agreed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific ECEC program should be led by SNAICC, the National Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and in partnership with an ACCO. Following the government's funding agreement with Parkville Institute for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiative, SVA as a system's catalyst organisation, brokered a meeting with SNAICC-National Voice for our Children and Parkville Institute to seek their involvement and leadership of a project to design, develop, implement and evaluate a new, culturally safe and responsive ECEC program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

During initial project planning, project partners discussed and researched the use of co-development rather than co-design as a process for the project's development and implementation. Burton's, *Opening Doors Through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs (2012)*, provided a key impetus for this shift in thinking. In addition, the shift from co-design to a co-development process responded to concerns that co-design could put the project at risk by perpetuating previous, often tokenistic co-design approaches and potentially not providing service staff, children and their families with a model tailored for their unique contexts. Following discussion, the partners agreed on their preference for co-development, as a process that would further support inclusive and equitable involvement and empowerment of ACCOs throughout the project journey. As a result, the shift in processes was made and the journey of co-development began.



Research Context

The Boori Milumba model trial builds on a previous randomised controlled trial research project undertaken by the University of Melbourne. The multidisciplinary research project established that targeted and intensive, high quality ECEC can lead to large and significant improvements in a child's cognitive and language skills, resilience and socio-emotional development and learning. Additionally, children who received the intervention in the trial had the skills and attributes to transitioned into formal schooling as confident and capable learners.

Associate Professor Brigid Jordan AM and Dr Anne Kennedy from Parkville Institute were members of the multidisciplinary research team at the University of Melbourne who undertook the research and evaluation of the Early Years Education Program (EYEP) model.

EYEP was initiated by Kids First, previously the Children's Protection Society (CPS), an independent not-for-profit child and family services organisation based in the north-east of Melbourne which was founded in 1896. The program was designed and implemented by CPS in collaboration with Associate Professor Brigid Jordan and Dr Anne Kennedy.

The Boori Milumba model is demonstrative of an ACCO service led co-development process that is responsive to the aspirations, strengths and needs of a local community through building on the extensive knowledge, wisdom, understandings and expertise of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Boori Milumba model is also informed by evidence, knowledge and insights drawn from EYEP. Parkville Institute's programs and those of its partners are not affiliated with, endorsed by, or otherwise associated with, CPS (trading as Kids First).

Closing the Gap

While the research trial is not a Closing the Gap initiative, the project funding connects with the Australian Government's investment in targeted measures to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through providing improved access to quality ECEC. As such, the research trial contributes to:

Closing the Gap Priority Reform 1– Formal partnerships and shared decision making. The stakeholders commit to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision making with government to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap. The co-development process and project refers to Place based partnerships, which are partnerships based on a specific region, between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and others by agreement, from those specific areas.

Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3– Transforming Government organisations, Transformational element b: embed and practice meaningful cultural safety, deliver services in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities and people.

Closing the Gap Outcome 3: Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Closing the Gap Outcome 4: Children thrive in their early years.

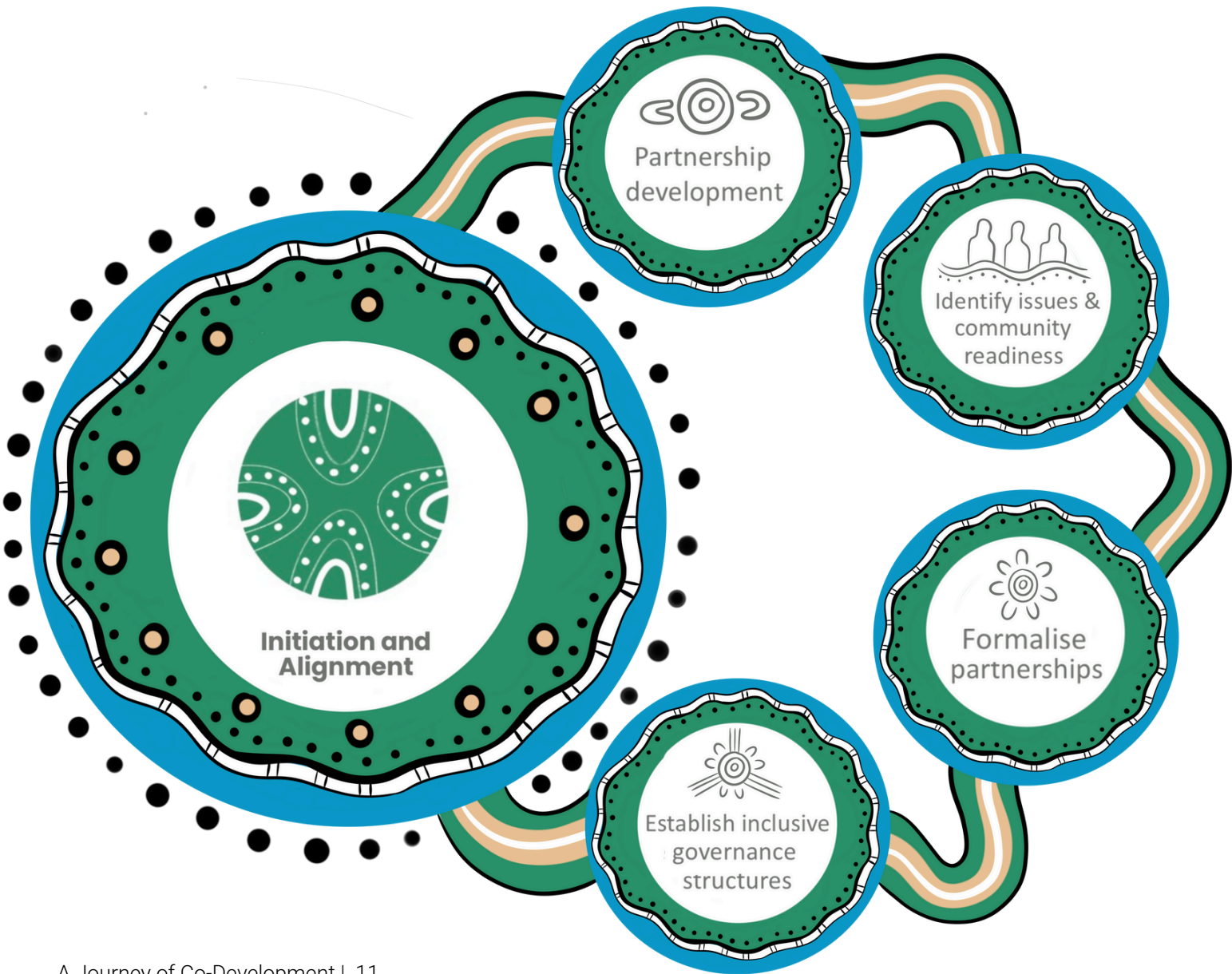


STORIES REFLECTIVE OF STAGE ONE



In this initial stage of co-development, actions and communications are centred on building a project team while collectively identifying and framing the key issue. Identifying community preparedness in addressing the key issue is also imperative for co-development success (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Overview of stage one from The Co-development Framework



STORIES REFLECTIVE OF STAGE ONE

Forming Partnerships

Forming authentic, collaborative partnerships required a commitment to a step by step, considered, informed approach that allowed significant time for core values, aspirations and goals to be identified, discussed and for shared agreement to emerge. The partners ascertained their mutual suitability for undertaking the co-development project together through their alignment of core values. These values are:

- Empowerment of ACCOs.
- Demonstrate and maintain high levels of cultural competency and respect.
- Employ active listening techniques.
- Embed inclusivity as the foundation for all communications and decision-making process.
- Ensure environments utilised in the co-development process were culturally safe and experienced as a safe space for discussion and problem solving.

A core values checklist was created by the partners to assist others in assessing the suitability of potential partners for co-development. This can be accessed in the Co-development Framework (DE, 2024).

Clarity around what was in scope and out of scope for the project was also important in this early stage of co-development. In our co-development journey, this approach included many meetings and workshops where the partners built shared agreement on our purpose, principles, objectives and the processes of the initiative. The co-development partnership was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that identified our agreement on ways of working as well as contracts required as part of the funding agreement.

STORIES REFLECTIVE OF STAGE ONE

ACCO partners

SVA as a systems broker, identified that the partnership needed to include a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner with deep cultural authority, knowledge and respect. Parkville Institute, with the support of SVA, approached SNAICC to join them as a key project partner. SNAICC operated as a cultural broker, providing cultural authority and leadership in the partnership and throughout the co-development process (Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, 2023).

SNAICC provided guidance for an Expression of Interest (EOI) process for ACCOs in NSW using SNAICC Early Years Support (EYS), formerly THRYVE NSW, as the support agency for the process. Importantly, SNAICC EYS had contextual and local knowledge and the respect of the NSW ACCOs. The project partners worked closely with SNAICC EYS to develop and advertise the EOI, as well as during the selection process. SNAICC EYS also supported recruitment of the Early Education Innovation Research Lead position.

In the written EOI, ACCO services were asked to:

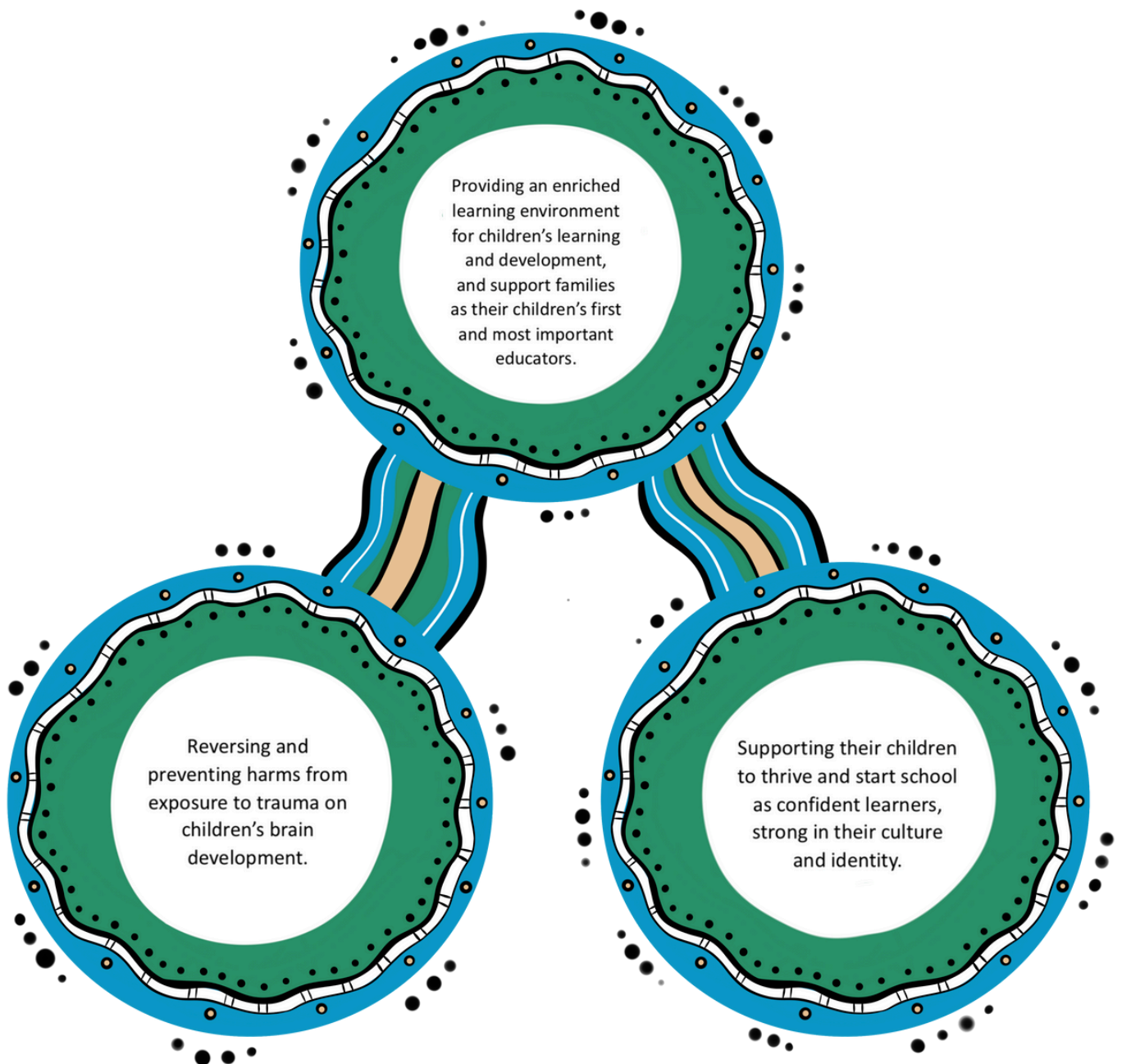
- Outline their organisational interest, capacity, capability and culture.
- Provide a description of the proposed program site.
- Confirm willingness to participate in research and evaluation.
- Provide size and demographics of their community.
- Identify community readiness for the project.
- Provide contact details of two referees (external) that the service has partnered with to deliver positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living with significant family stress and social hardship.

In July 2022, Parkville Institute and SNAICC EYS hosted a webinar to support NSW ACCO service providers and key advisors with information about the EOI and the project including:

- Unpacking their service approach to ECEC. This included:
 - elements of their pedagogy;
 - curriculum and cultural practices; and
 - where they felt there were gaps.
- Unpacking the intensive ECEC model elements. This included:
 - their purpose and application; and
 - identify which elements would fit with their service model.

In response to their EOI submission, an interview was conducted with the Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre CEO and a board member. The EOI document and responses during the interview indicated a strong awareness of how local Aboriginal children were experiencing significant family stress and social hardship, and the challenges in addressing these needs. The service's responses also illustrated a strong willingness and commitment in relation to advocacy, equity, evidence and improving outcomes for children, families and their community (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Intended outcomes from implementation of the model

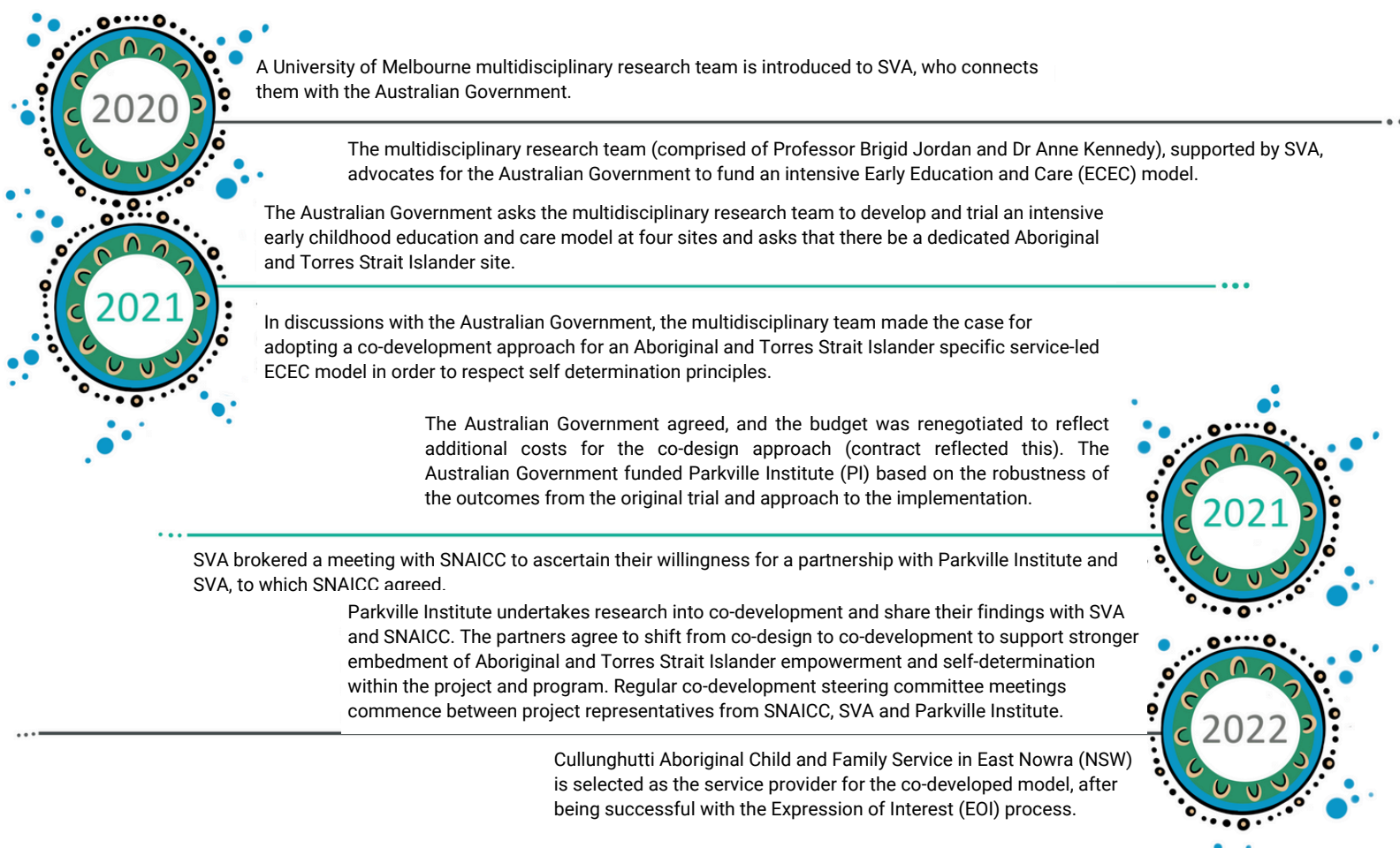


Non-Indigenous partners

SVA played a critical role in brokering the partnership between the Australian Government, SNAICC and Parkville Institute, and in facilitating trusting relationships amongst the project partners. This was a critical aspect to the first phase of the co-development journey.

Parkville Institute brought high-level research, practice experience and skills in early education and care, infant mental health, family systems and project management to the partnership as well as being the conduit for the funding from the Australian government and other funders.

Figure 6: Overview of partnership timeline



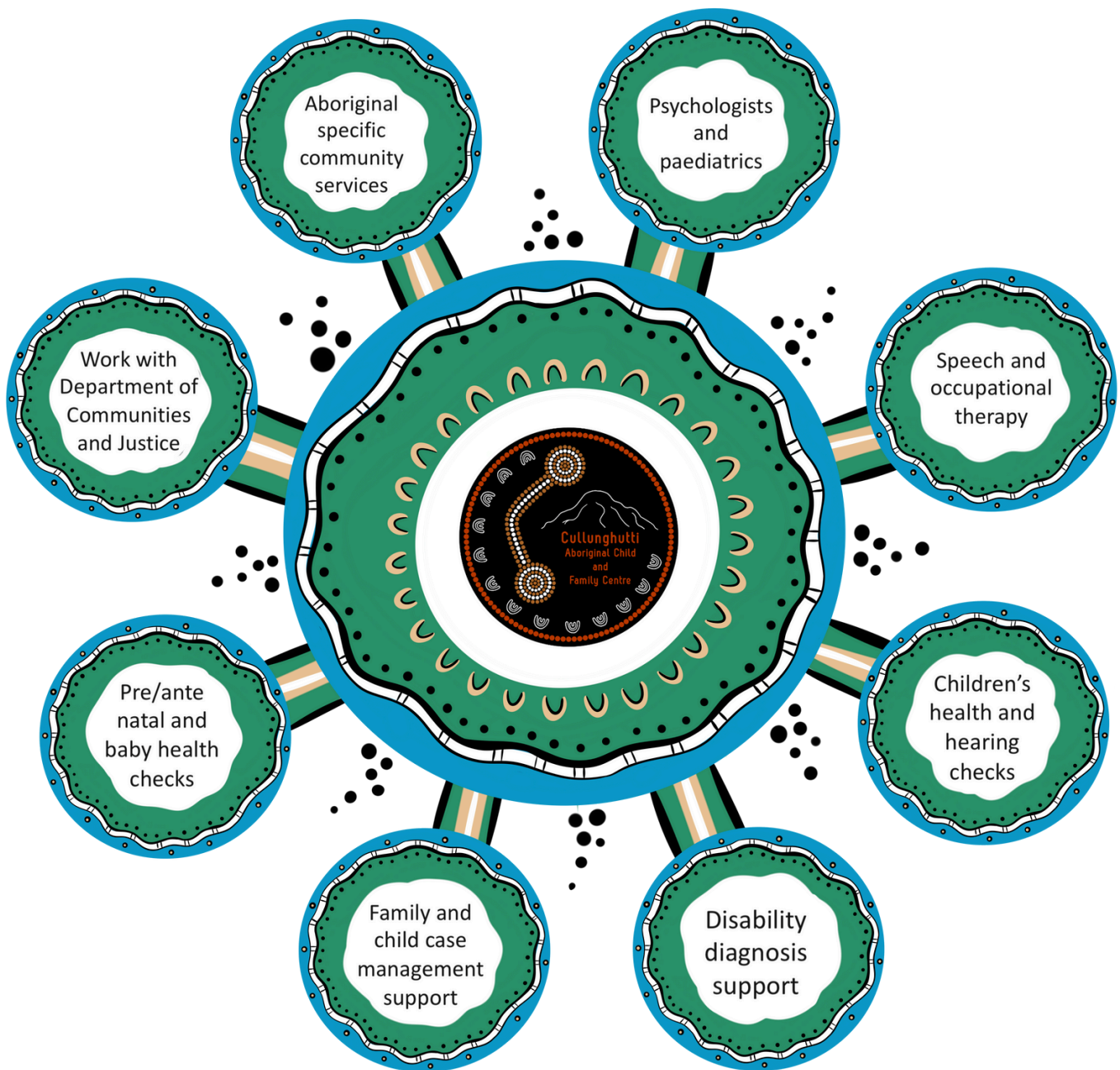
Selection of ACCO

Cullunghutti is an integrated service delivery provider and are an Aboriginal early intervention service targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged birth to eight. They are the only Aboriginal-approved provider in the Shoalhaven area and operate a long day care centre and a community preschool. At the time of the EOI application, Cullunghutti provided health, wellbeing and family support for more than 200 Aboriginal children and families in the Shoalhaven community. The service is located in one of the most disadvantaged regional areas in NSW, according to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) data from 2021. SEIFA utilises disadvantage indicators (e.g. unemployment, low incomes or education levels, single parent families, low skilled occupations) and additional indicators of advantage (e.g. professional occupations, high income, higher education levels, high rent) to measure the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on census characteristics for council areas across Australia.

Cullunghutti is a strong service provider in their community and is deeply attuned to the needs of their service stakeholders and local community members. The service utilises the knowledge and experience of its board members and established community partnerships to reduce access barriers and social hardship that local children and families may be experiencing. Cullunghutti utilises their board members, Elders and already established community partnerships as the way to facilitate community engagement. Often, much of this engagement comes from community members coming onsite at Cullunghutti and their new offices located in Bomaderry for a range of community events or to access available services. Cullunghutti also supports community members with transport to assist in facilitating their active participation. As each service context is unique, community engagement and readiness may look very different and require the service and staff to meet with local community members in various community spaces, rather than only at the service site.

Cullunghutti's policies and programs also illustrated an integrated approach to child and family services and a wrap around model of ECEC in order to meet diversity of families' and children's needs. This was evident through strong collaborations, established relationships and partnerships with various education, health and welfare organisations within their local community (Figure 7). For the project partners, this level of community engagement and support for families and children were strong indicators of Cullunghutti's readiness to undertake co-development.

Figure 7: Cullunghutti health and community services



Cullunghutti's governance, services and commitment to their local community, demonstrated to the project partners their readiness for participation in the research trial. Please refer to Appendix 1 for an overview of the EOI timeline. Community and organisational readiness included being motivated and having the capacity to support a project or intervention and, is a key element in implementation science (Livet, Blanchard and Richard, 2022).

Formalise the Partnership

Formalising the partnership was imperative for embedding clarity, accountability and sustainability within the project. The partners worked together to create a shared vision around the co-development project and an MOU was drafted between the initial partners and then redrafted at a later stage to include Cullunghutti. The MOU is a foundational document, providing an agreed framework for the collaboration between the four project partners. It also outlined the agreements and subcontracts that had been entered into between project partners. The partners acknowledge that having project documents such as MOUs, that provide clarity about all aspects of the project in culturally sensitive ways is essential, particularly in resolving any ambiguity or problems, if they were to arise.

The MOU is where the project partners outlined their ways of working together. It is a rich and detailed document, covering:

- Principles that the parties agreed to.
- Long term outcomes the partners were seeking to progress through their collaboration and what that progression required.
- Confidentiality of information and agreed use of public and media statements.
- Intellectual Property (IP), including defining ownership and use of new materials, publications, project reports and evaluation reports.
- Dispute resolution.
- Liability and insurance.
- Processes for review and evaluation regarding the project deliverables and required reports.
- Roles and responsibilities shared across the partners and of individual partners. This outlined mechanisms such as having a:
 - A project budget prepared by and agreed to by all partners, including allocation of funds and how separate collaboration agreements would be negotiated and agreed to by relevant parties for specific project activities. It also outlined collaboration for additional funding. The partners stressed the importance of agreement on additional funding, which was necessary in this project due to program inclusions (e.g. deciding on a leadership team of six and renovations to accommodate the program) and levels of intensity (e.g. increased number of full time leadership roles).
 - A project workplan that clearly documents the phases of the co-development project with timelines and responsibilities for project deliverables. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a workplan overview of the project phases.
 - A steering committee and project development and implementation team to provide project governance, determine frequency of meetings and to indicate how decision making (reaching consensus) would be achieved.

Project and Operational Governance

Prior to the establishment of the operational groups, the project partners had held various advocacy and planning meetings. These initial meetings provided the opportunity to learn about each other and develop ways of working together to achieve the best outcomes throughout the project and for program delivery. A formal process for capturing reflections on the co-development process from members of the partnership group was established in this stage. The aim of this strategy was to 'capture' partners' perspectives on the challenges, benefits, opportunities, surprises and learning from their involvement in the co-development project. SVA identified a skilled facilitator to operationalise this process and document the outcomes. The facilitator undertook a regular interview with each member of the partnership group using a series of reflective questions as provocations for the conversation. The first written report from these conversations or interviews, indicated that the partners in this initial stage of the co-development process agreed that all parties:

- Were open and eager to hear from one another and listened deeply.
- Acknowledged and respected the diverse voices and perspectives presented during initial meetings by different partner representatives.
- Welcomed any opportunity to share knowledge, skills and expertise to support the capacity building of all partners and the staff at Cullunghutti.
- Were committed to enhancing understandings of the centre and local community context.
- Were flexible and adaptable with evolving project scope based on what was needed.

The partners also acknowledge that their embedded openness to learning and ability to stretch their thinking was critical to building the foundations for the success of the partnership and for defining systems and documentation to support project and operational governance.

In the initial stages of the co-development journey, there was a Project Establishment Committee with members reflecting the key representatives of the project partners from SNAICC, Parkville Institute and SVA. This group discussed and defined the governance structures required for a project. Project partners agreed on the wisdom and benefits of having two groups to guide the decision-making processes for the project:

- Steering Committee
- Project Development and Implementation Team

Figures 8 and 9 include maps of the governance structure, providing an overview and insights into the different roles and responsibilities of the two groups.

Figure 8: Steering Committee overview

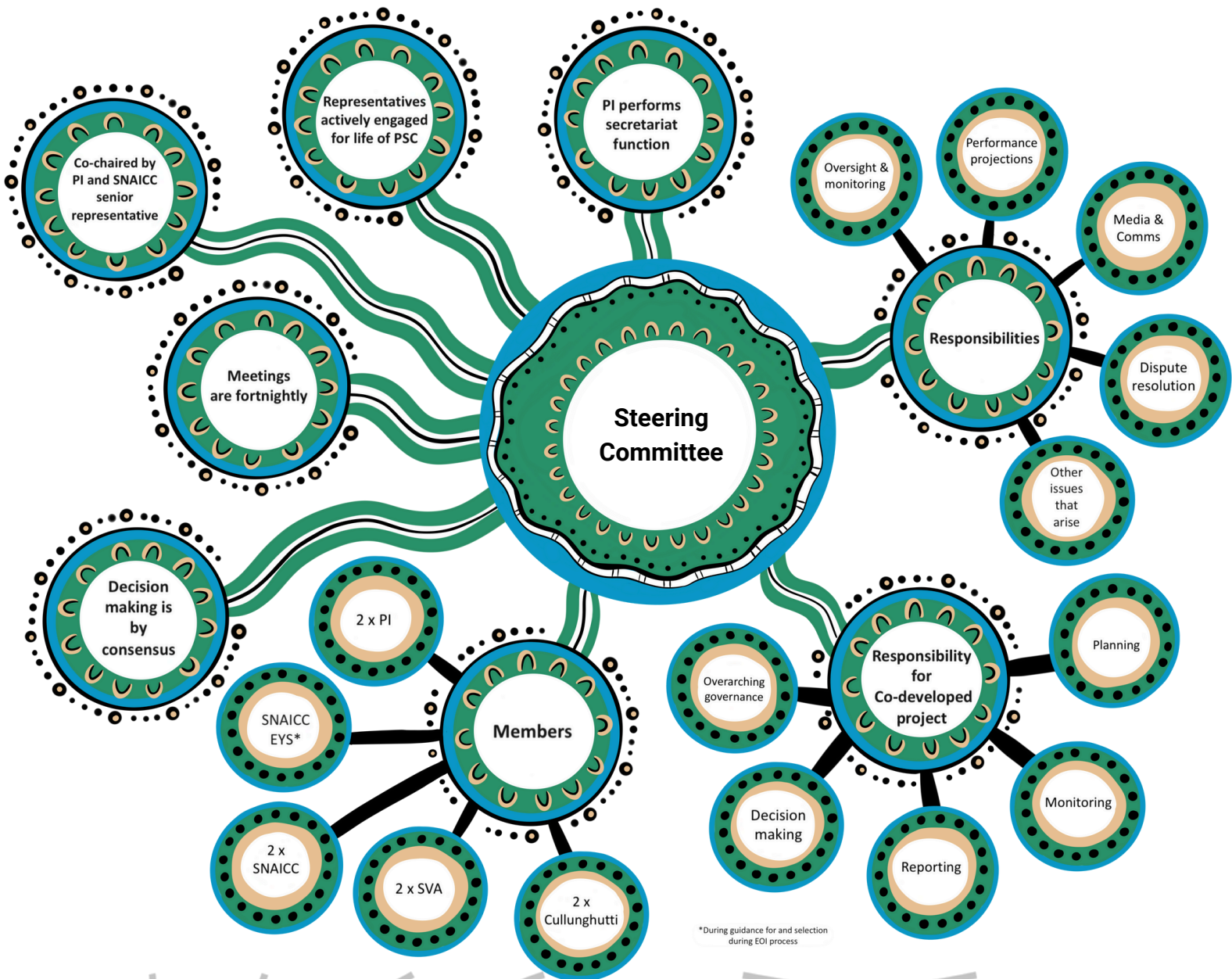
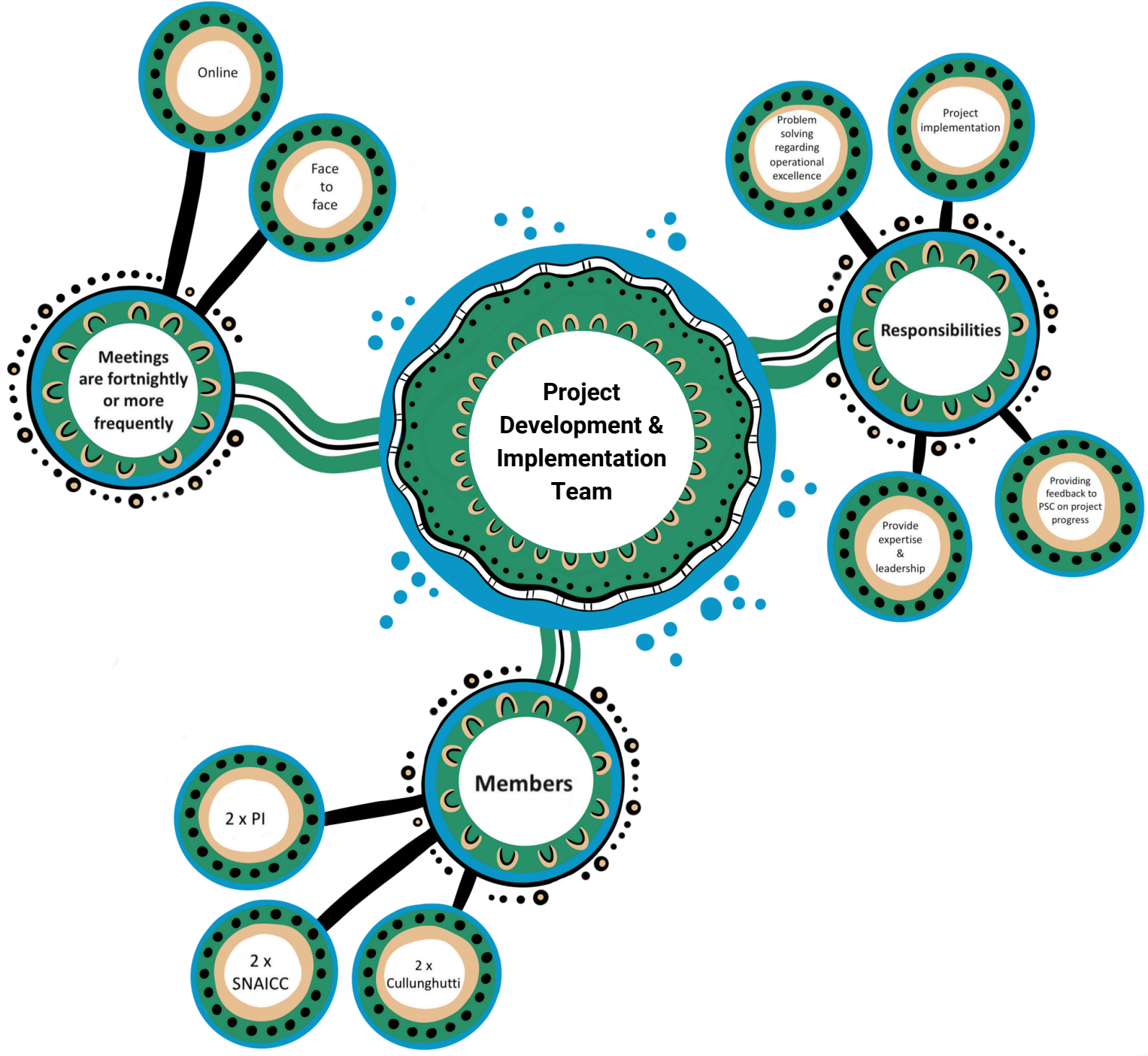


Figure 9: Project Development and Implementation Team overview

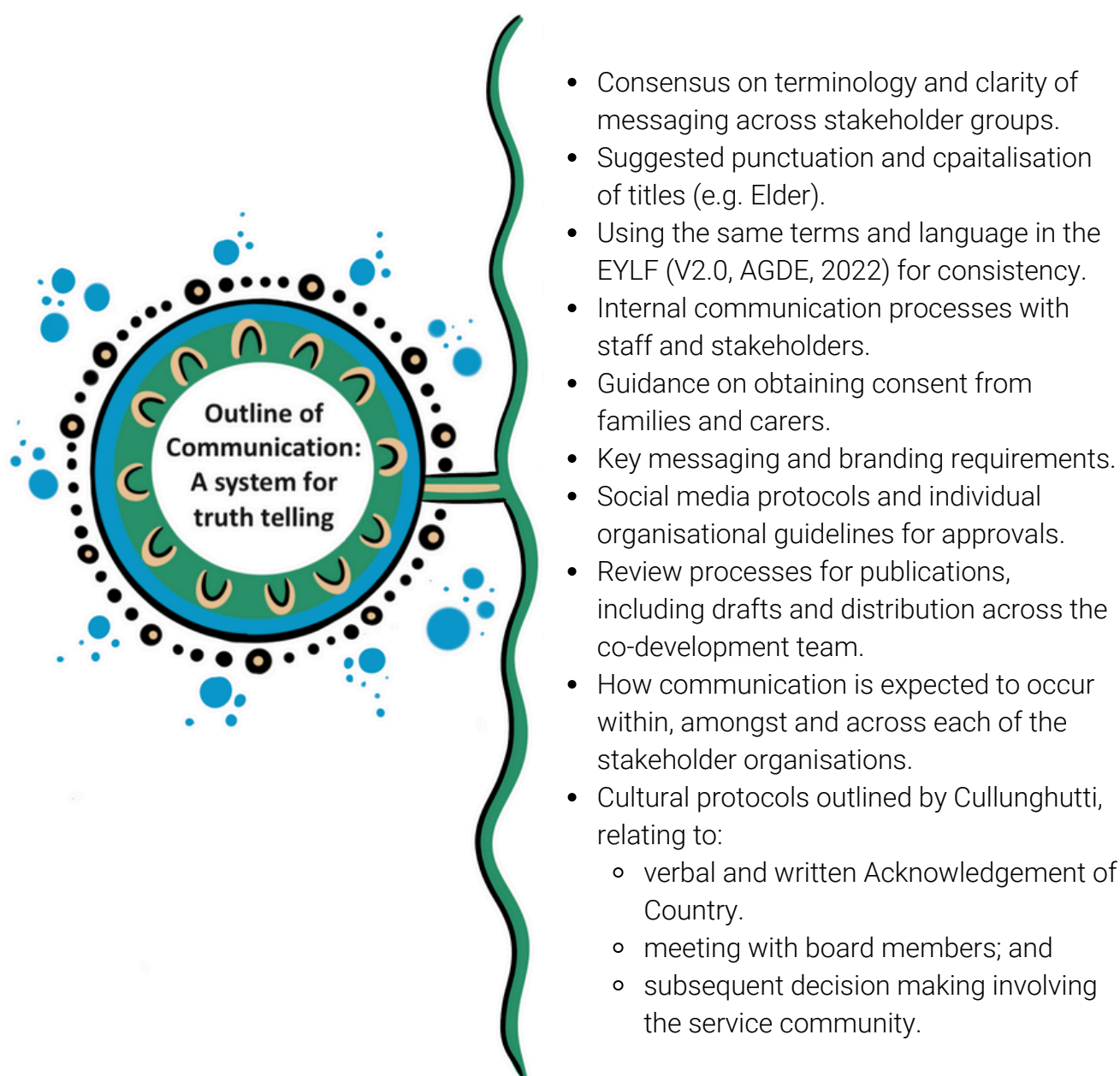


Communication Strategy

All project partners worked together to create a communication strategy document. This was titled, Outline of Communication: A system for truth telling.

The communication strategy guides communications within the co-development project by outlining the how and why of communication within and between the project partners (Figure 10), stakeholder organisations.

Figure 10: Communications strategies: Inclusions



The communication strategy outlined a strengths-based approach through culturally safe and responsive communication underpinned by understanding, care and respect for locally identified needs. For the project to be successful, the partners required strong and clear communication with one another and clarity on what was involved. A range of communication strategies was adopted in response to shared understanding about the importance of clear communication, especially as there were multiple partners located in different states. For example, snapshots were used to keep everyone briefed and collectively kept up to date. A SNAICC representative regularly presented to the Cullunghutti Board on behalf of all partners. This provided cultural safety and responsiveness for sharing project opportunities with the board members and in gaining their honest feedback regarding aspirations and inclusions for the model that honour local knowledge, perspectives and understandings. Other communication strategies included documenting meeting discussions or yarning, and circulating them to participants for feedback to ensure key matters or key decisions were accurately recorded along with identifying achievements, items not yet finalised or matters which were still 'work in progress'. Appointing one of the partners as the nominated documenter of the co-development workshops was a practical and helpful strategy for ensuring a reliable, consistent method of documentation.



Figure 11: Communication flow across the partners

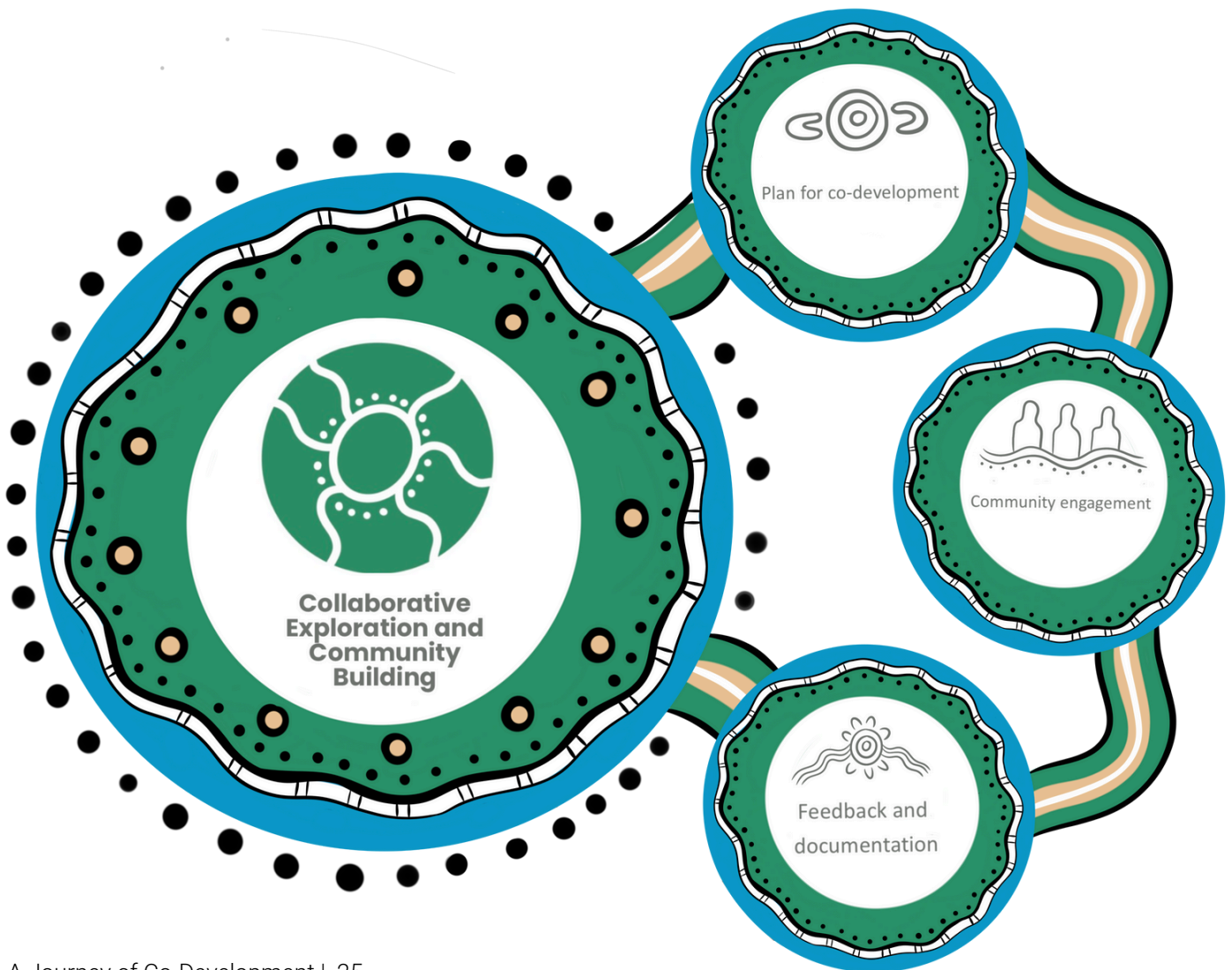


STORIES REFLECTIVE OF STAGE TWO



In this stage of co-development, partners ascertain how they can best work collaboratively as they develop a shared understanding of the previously identified issue and prospective solutions. Building relationships and trust across the partners and key stakeholders is paramount for ongoing and effective collaboration (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Overview of stage two from the Co-development Framework



From co-design to co-development

Co-development seeks to overcome power imbalances and support equal and shared decision-making. It goes beyond consultation, creating an empowering environment for genuine collaboration (DE, 2024, p. 9).

Shifting from a co-design to adopting a co-development approach was a significant decision in this stage of the partnership and was the result of thoughtful and informed decision making by the partners. The following points summarise why the partners agreed to use a co-development approach.

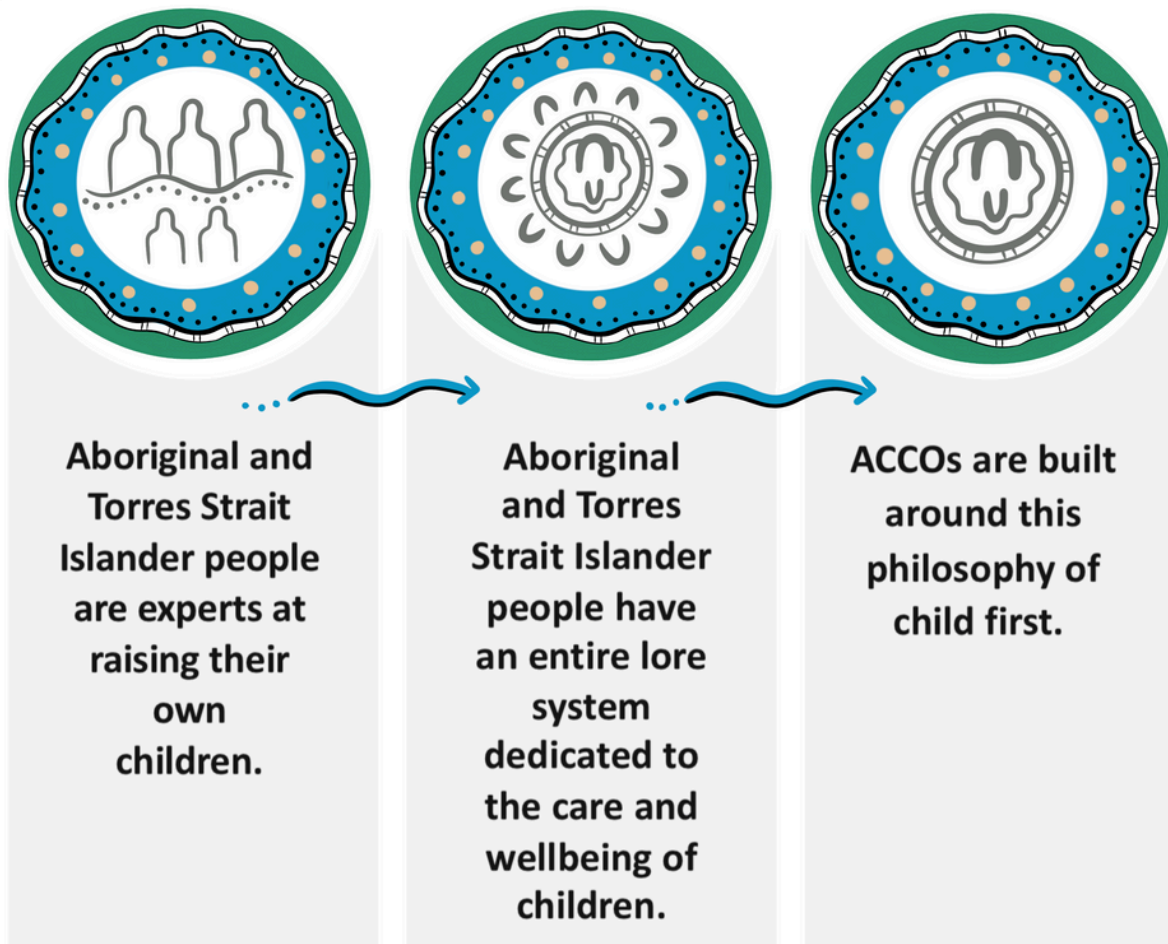
- Co-development is distinct from co-design through requiring active participation by community throughout the entire process, commencing with idea generation and later, implementation and dissemination (DE, 2024).
- Approaches and languages around project continue to evolve. To reflect this, the partners use the language of community leadership. This is inherent in co-development much more than in co-design.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities know what they need and want, and as such a program needs to be built from this foundation including the challenges they face and looking for solutions. This offers a more sustainable and successful way of working.
- When co-design frameworks are provided, cultural nuances and the context of specific communities are sometimes missing or overlooked. Alternatively, co-development approaches 'transform ideas and theoretical frameworks into impactful actions that embrace participatory, strengths-based approaches where Aboriginal knowledge, expertise, and priorities are valued' (DE, 2024, p.9).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children travel a unique cultural, developmental and learning journey. Colonisation, and policies and programs removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and ownership are part of that journey. Co-development can be effectively used to create a program where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a different journey (Figure 13).
- Co-development more effectively acknowledges the contexts related to the child first philosophy within ACCOs.
- Co-development can highlight inadequacies and barriers related to funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services, and the process can also be an effective means to:
 - name structural challenges and highlight the experiences of ACCOs.
 - demonstrate the impact of ACCO programs for their communities; and
 - provide an opportunity to showcase those programs more broadly.

“

“It’s an exciting opportunity to really shape the way for Aboriginal early years, and then for other high-quality education and care services... Hopefully we can make change and it becomes a nationally recognised project for other Aboriginal early years services.”

”

Figure 13: Recognition of child first philosophy within ACCOs



Ultimately, at the heart of the co-development process is the enabling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control, leadership and self-determination.

Different committees or groups, working across multiple levels and in different time frames were involved in the co-development journey. The Steering Committee for example, considered IP issues using co-development principles, and similarly for unpacking data sovereignty matters and identifying what was in or out of scope. The Project Development and Implementation Team spent many months using a co-development approach to design the model for the children. Some of the partners were actively working across the different committees or working groups, which supported maintaining the shared values and goals foundational for using a co-development approach. Cullunghutti appointed an Early Childhood Project Officer, whose focus was to support progressing the project at the service level and to ensure decisions made by the Project Development and Implementation Team were actioned and if they were possible given time, regulation requirements and other constraints.

Face to Face

The 'co' in co-development is inherent to all interactions, communications, deliberations and decision making that occurred among the partners as they innovatively designed a new model. Establishing joint actions, mutual understandings and consensus required comprehensive relationship building throughout all aspects of the co-development process. As emphasised in the Co-development Framework (DE, 2024), allocating substantial time, space and resources to building trust is critical. This required regular and dedicated fortnightly yarning sessions and discussions online through the steering committee, co-development and evaluation meetings. The Project Development and Implementation Team also met in person approximately every six weeks at Cullunghutti and other opportunities have arisen where individual partners have attended Cullunghutti to provide specific support. Figure 14 provides examples of how face to face opportunities were utilised.

“It’s about listening and sharing perspectives and being able to think in the other person’s shoes.”

Figure 14: In-person opportunities supporting the co-development project

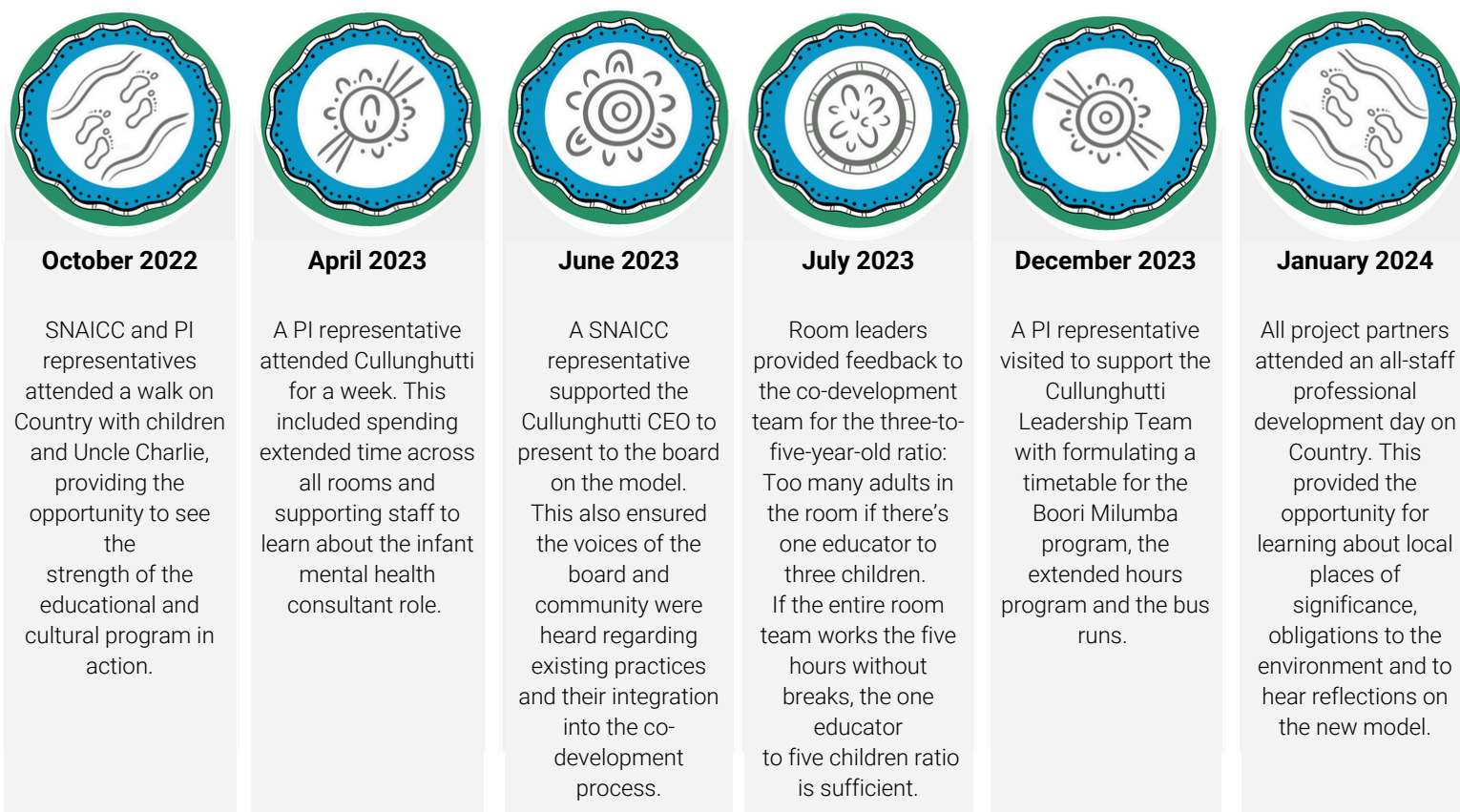


Figure 14 provides a brief overview through sharing various examples, but it is important not to underestimate how impactful face to face meetings or visits were for all parties. For example, the Parkville Institute representative who spent a week in the centre in 2023, found the face-to-face experience highly valuable. Spending time immersed across the centre rooms facilitated a stronger, clearer understanding of Cullunghutti’s needs in relation to the infant mental health consultant role. Interacting informally with children, educators and other staff, over a week provided deep insights into the strengths that were evident as well as the challenges. These insights, combined with Cullunghutti’s expressed needs, were highly useful in co-writing the job advertisement and job description for the Infant Mental Health Consultant position. Educators and staff continue to talk about how valuable this face-to-face experience was in learning about the emotional life of infants and toddlers and practical strategies to support their education and care.

Parkville Institute's individual and shared experiences of being in the centre and on Country on many different visits to Cullunghutti deepened their understanding and respect for local cultural traditions and history as well as a greater sense of place and community contexts. Through ongoing opportunities for informal conversations, yarning, capacity building workshops and socialising with the Cullunghutti team during their visits, Parkville Institute partners experienced a strong sense of belonging and trusting relationships were established with the Cullunghutti staff team. Cullunghutti's warm welcome, their willingness to be open to new ideas, and to make brave and innovative decisions inspired the partners and supported the co-development journey.

“Most importantly, don't ever come into an Aboriginal service and say from a white person's perspective, oh I think would be best if we do it this way... it's not going to work... I think the most valuable thing is that, right from the very start, Parkville have said we're not here to do that, we're here to work with your service.”

Cultural Framework

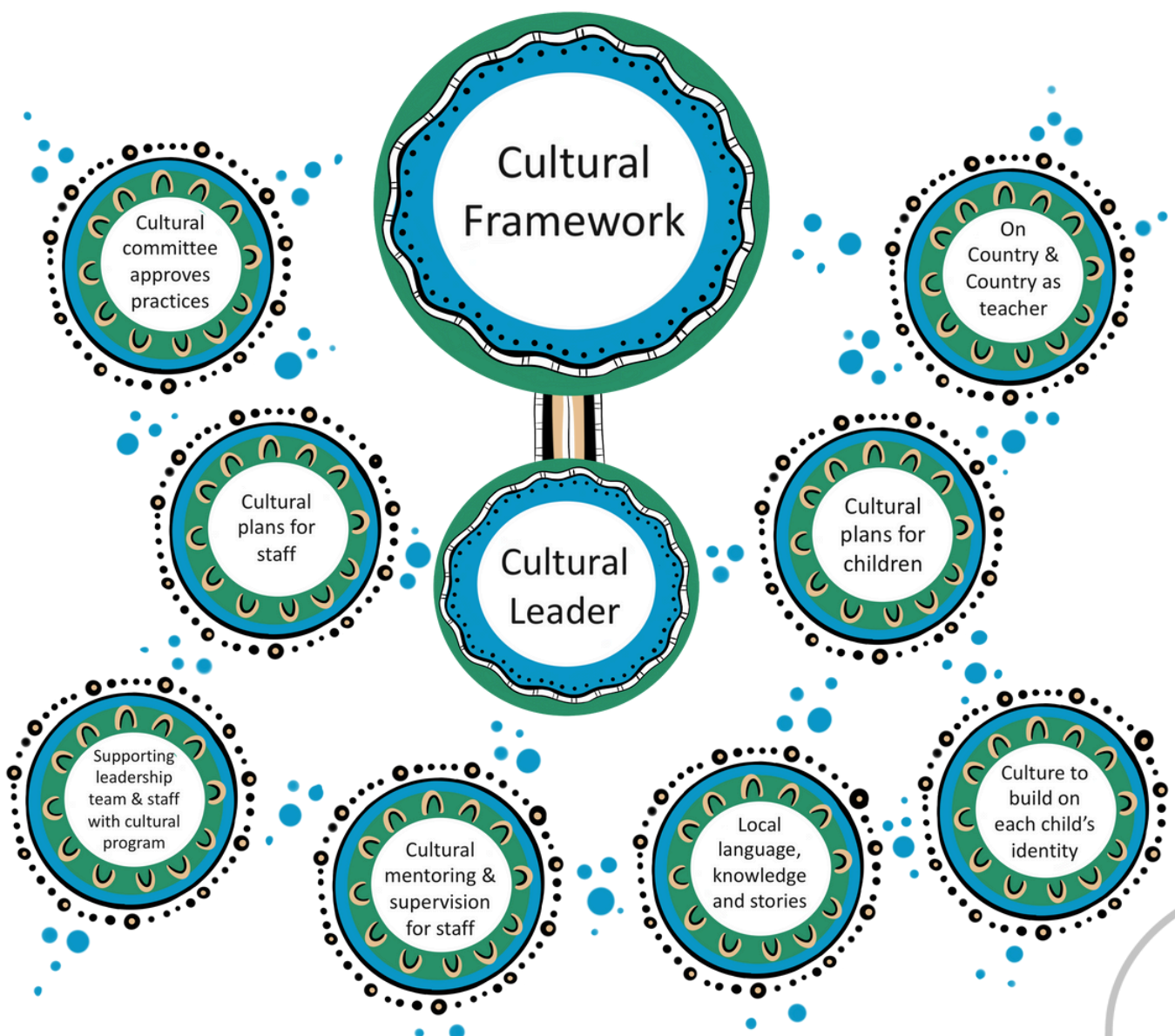
Through discussions online, face to face yarning, storytelling and during time with Cullunghutti staff members on Country, the centrality of culture to everything about the project and to everyone at the centre, the partners and the local community became evident. How culture could be included and embedded through the model was an evolving process. This section aims to provide insights into the thinking, expertise and ideas that went into building the Cultural Framework a crucial aspect of the model. In May 2023, Cullunghutti staff shared their belief in the need for a Cultural Framework to underpin the model (Figure 15), which would include:

- Cultural plans for individual staff members.
- All staff being provided with cultural mentoring and supervision.
- Cultural plans for children which sit alongside their educational plans.
- Children and staff spending time on Country to experience Country as teacher in recognition that Country provides healing, wellbeing and a sense of belonging.
- Experiences based on learning local language, on Country knowledge and stories.
- Utilising culture to build on each child's sense of identity.

To enact the Cultural Framework, Cullunghutti recommended that a dedicated cultural leader role would be required. Further conversations ensued, indicating that the role would be fundamental with supporting teachers and educators to embed Aboriginal perspectives into the program, providing clarity around protocols and building confidence of staff in delivering cultural aspects of the program.

Cultural plans were identified as important in supporting staff in building their knowledge sharing skills. For children and families, cultural plans were referenced as a means to build on each child's culture and identity and to support families with sharing their strengths and overcoming knowledge gaps.

Figure 15: Overview of Cultural Framework and the Cultural Leader position

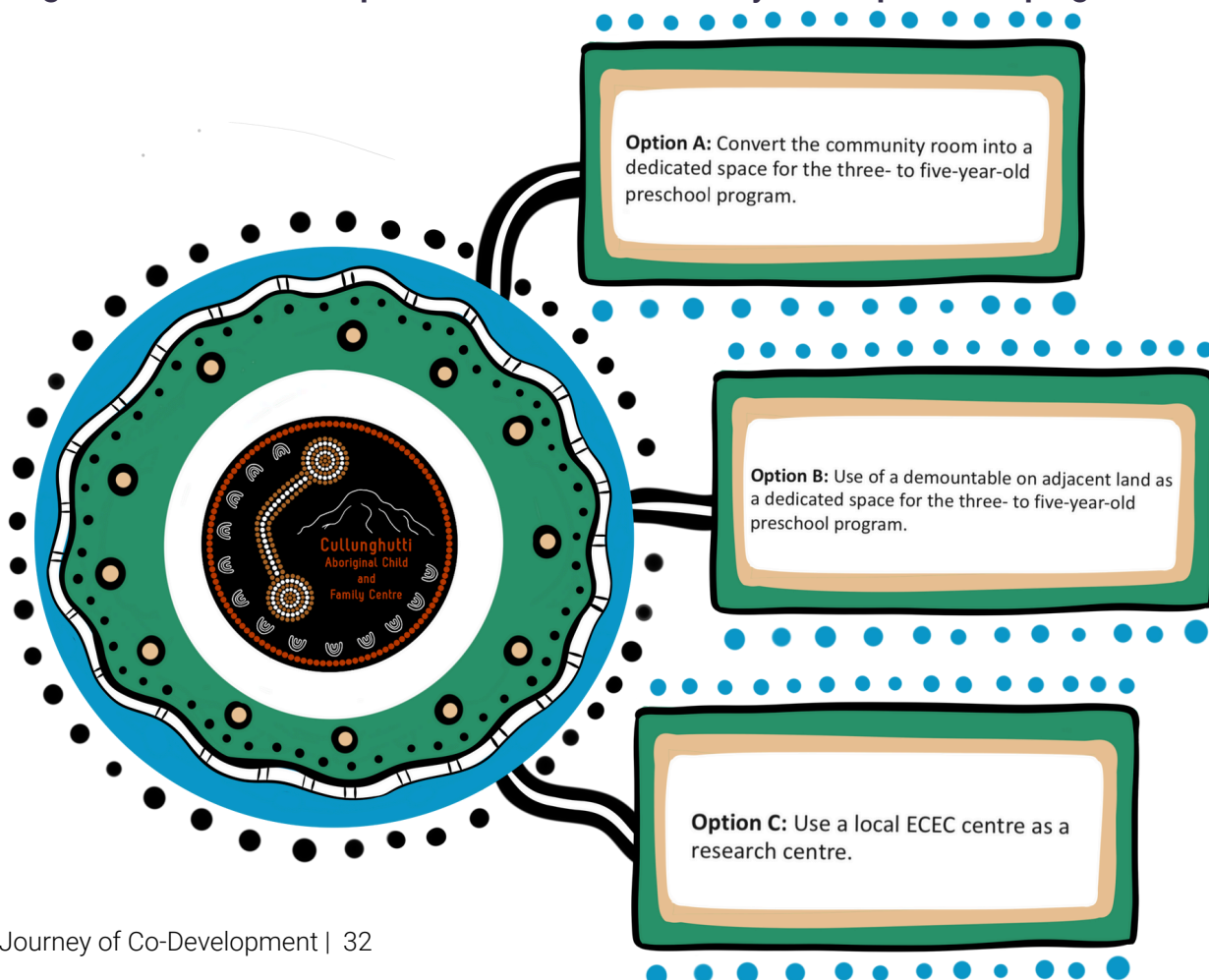



Bricks and Mortar

There are various elements to the arc of a story narrative. Different perspectives, priorities and expectations are evident, and challenges and problems arise which can leave the reader questioning whether the story is going to end in success or failure. This story features those messy complexities and accurately reflects the challenges faced by services when managing deliverables, budget constraints and tight timeframes for projects.

A quality ECEC program requires purposefully designed learning spaces and environments that meet regulatory requirements, as well as child, family and community rights, expectations and needs. Over time, the partners in the co-development process realised that the current site would need extensive alterations and additions in order to accommodate existing programs and the new, Boori Milumba model, which meant delaying the opening of the new model until January 2024. Co-development was utilised to identify options, possible solutions and to plan for the agreed amendments. One of the challenges was the issue of where the preschool program could be relocated in order to accommodate the new Boori Milumba model for infants and toddlers.

Figure 16: Overview of options for the three- to five-year-old preschool program





The options were taken to the Cullunghutti Board and option A was endorsed. This entailed the relocation of the community room offsite at a temporary location and to convert the space with alterations to include additional toilets for children. In July 2023, it was decided that current families with children aged three to five would remain onsite in the re-developed community room.

The following opportunities for environment changes were also raised, discussed and actioned by the project partners in order to support environmental requirements of the model:

- Moving the front fence line to expand the outdoor learning space.
- Moving a segment of the green space within the car park into the children's space.
- Securing land on a neighbouring block for a purpose-built children's centre*.

Cullunghutti sought ongoing guidance from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and the NSW regulatory authority to ensure proposed changes reflected current regulations and requirements. Funding was also sought to purchase new furniture and resources. The importance of centre design, environments and spaces is referred to in more detail in *The Boori Milumba Model: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific service-led intensive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) model* (DE, 2024).

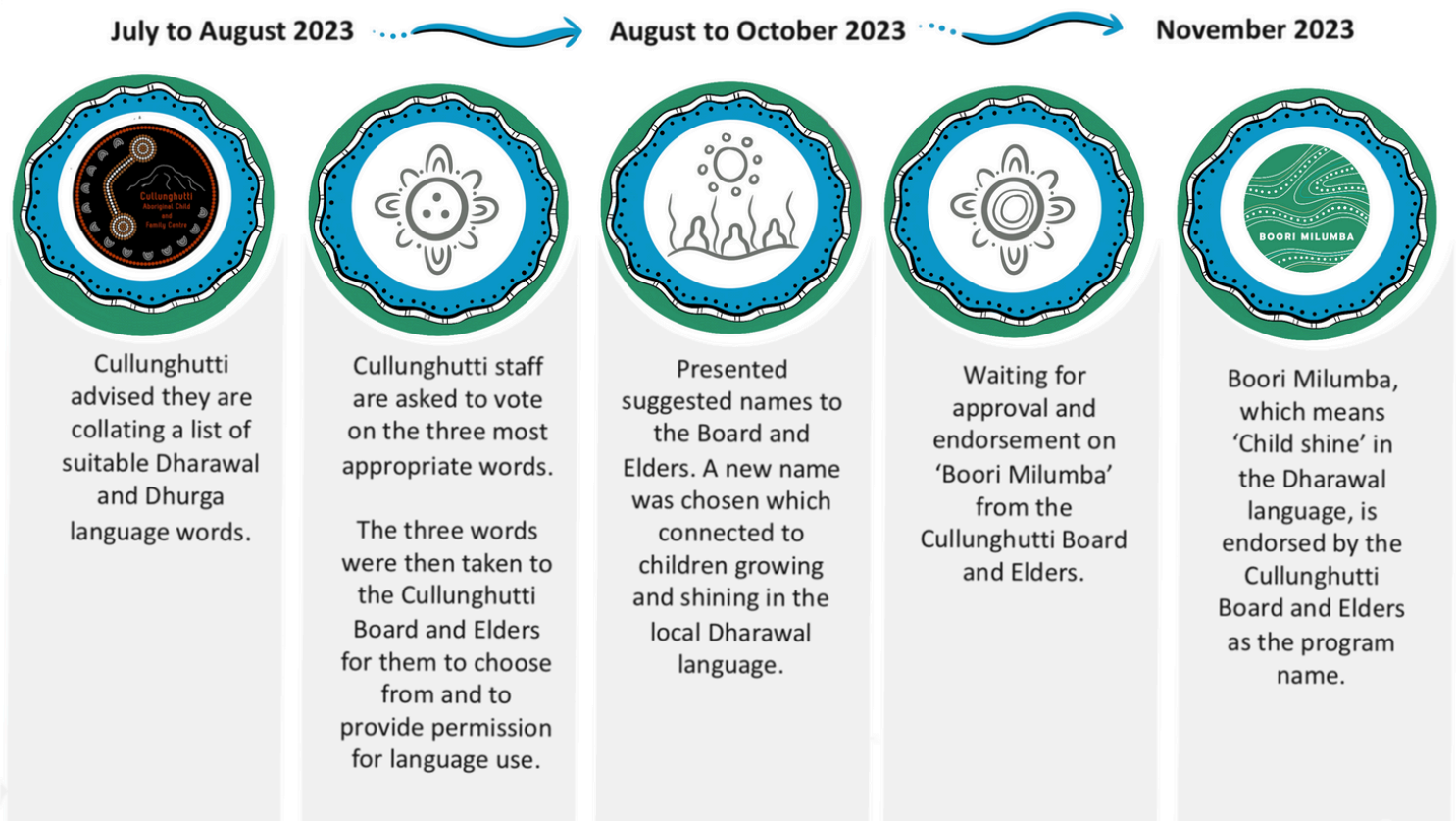
*Cullunghutti has been successful with a capital works grant which will be used towards building a three- to five-year-old preschool building on an adjacent block of land. Once this is completed, the current three to five learning space will be converted back to a dedicated community room and space.

Naming and Designing the Artwork of the Model

Boori Milumba: Naming the model

The partners recognised the wisdom, experience and knowledge of the local Aboriginal traditions, history, stories and language held by the Cullunghutti Board and Elders. They wanted to honour and respect the Board's strong cultural leadership by asking them to decide on an appropriate name for the new model. The Board's deliberations on this significant request took place over many meetings as different options using two local languages were presented and discussed. Three options were provided by the Board to the Cullunghutti staff team for their input. There was agreement by the staff that the word 'child' was essential in the model's name. In November 2023, the Board endorsed the name 'Boori Milumba' which means 'child shine' in the local Dharawal language.

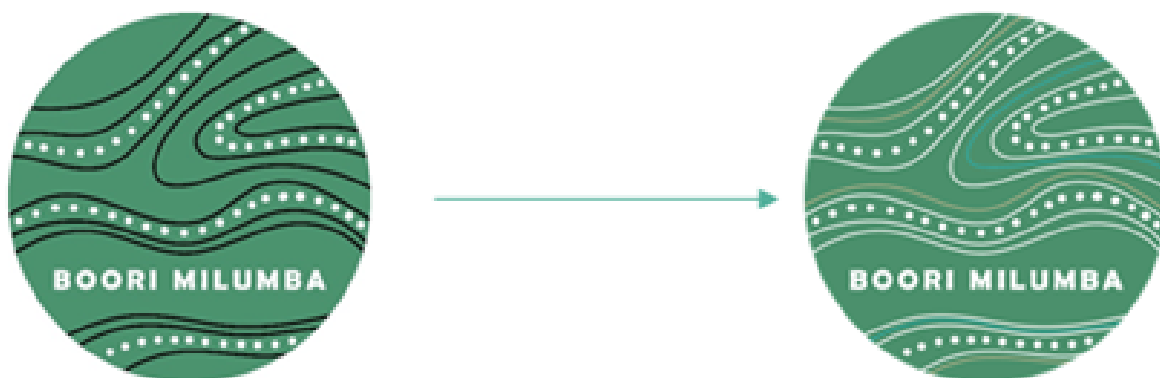
Figure 17: Overview of the model naming process



The deeper meaning of the Boori Milumba logo

Co-development is an approach designed to ensure communications, building trust and relationships, knowledge sharing and decision making are not hurried. Co-development requires respect for the process and deep thinking. A deep dive is required, nothing is done at a surface level. The creation and meaning of the Boori Milumba logo epitomises that deep thinking. Careful thought and consideration has gone into the logo's design. The selection of colours and the inclusion and placement of continuous journey lines are thoughtful, deliberate, intentional and inherently meaningful. Green symbolises Country and the continuous white journey lines symbolise the children as they move through the program over three years.

Based on guidance from the Cullunghutti Board, blue and tan lines were added to represent the partners and the togetherness of all partners on their interwoven journey of creating and implementing the Boori Milumba model.



Creating the Leadership Structure

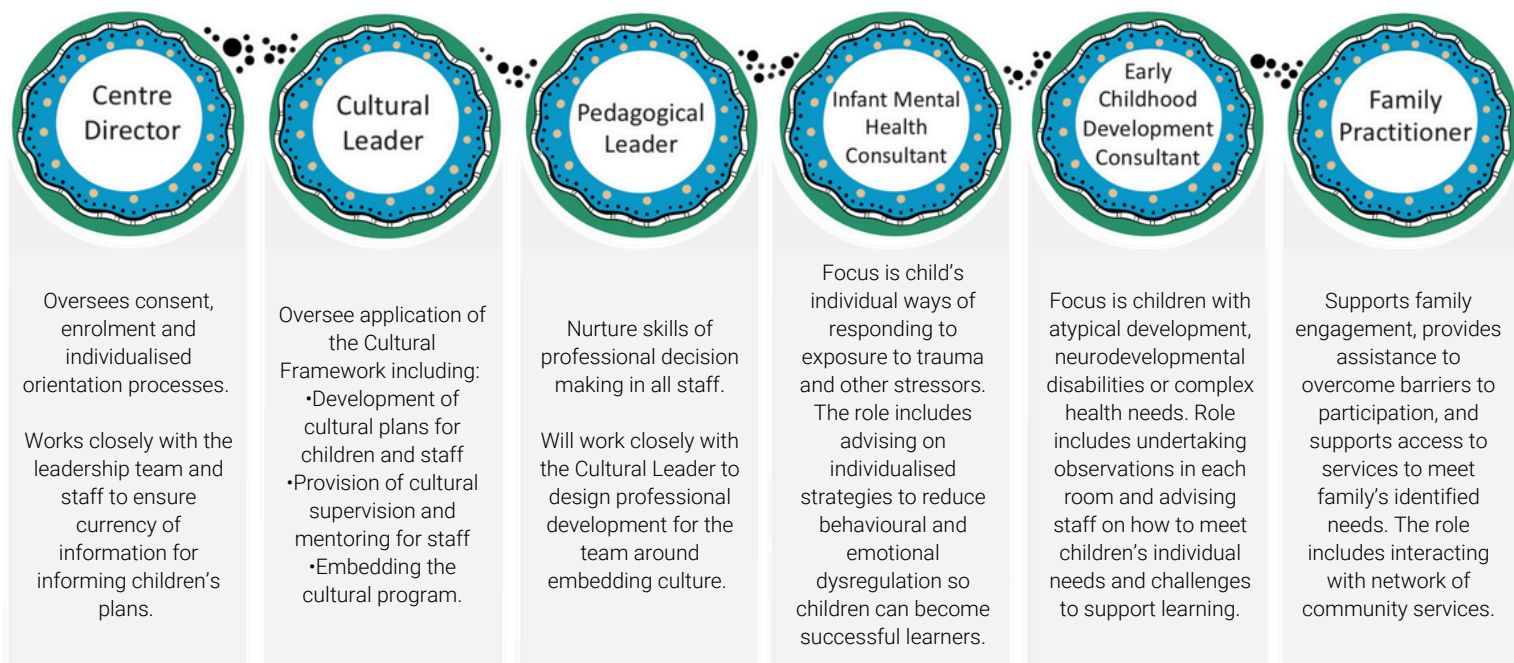
Many discussions were held about the leadership team and leadership structure for the Boori Milumba model. These occurred through online and face to face meetings over a period of 18 months. Ongoing discussions with the project partners supported Cullunghutti and their staff to identify and refine their leadership wants, needs, role, responsibilities and ways of working. Members of the Cullunghutti project team also visited a Parkville Institute replication site for the intensive ECEC model, to see their leadership team in action, hear about their practices and to ask questions. This visit helped to consolidate the Cullunghutti team's thinking and aspirations.

Leadership is an integral aspect to the operations and provision of quality within ECEC services (Gibbs, 2020). This is recognised in the Boori Milumba model, which includes the following as key elements:

- Multidisciplinary leadership team using an adaptive leadership approach to guide operations and decision making with:
 - full-time Centre Director, Pedagogical Leader, Cultural Leader and Family Practitioner.
 - employment of an Infant Mental Health Consultant and an Early Childhood Development Consultant (each employed for three days a week).
- Program implementation by qualified teachers and educators.

Figure 18 illustrates the leadership team structure in the Boori Milumba model, which is a culmination and reflection of those discussions and the decision on the inclusions.

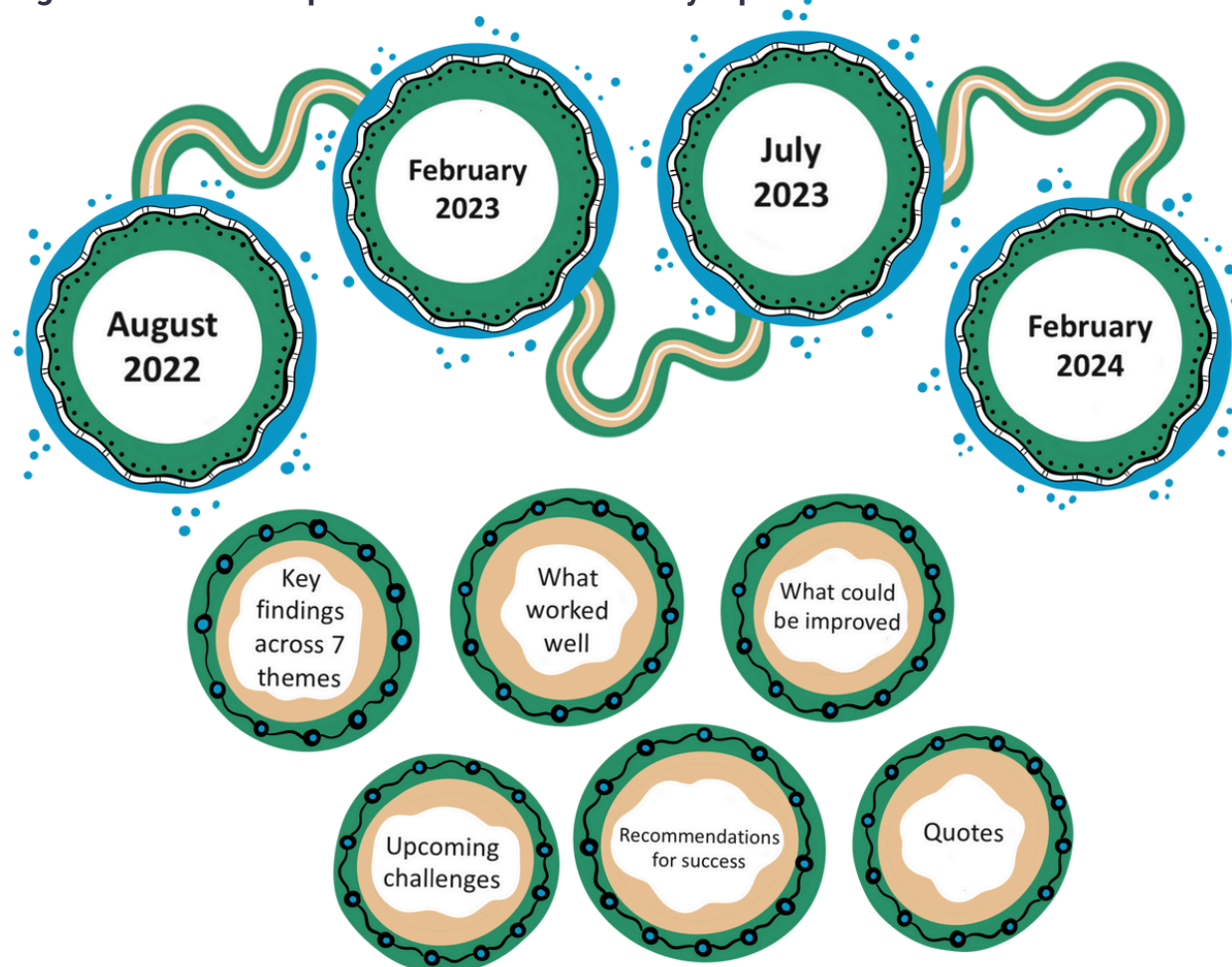
Figure 18: Cullunghutti leadership team development and roles



Documenting the co-development journey

The co-development journey has been captured across specific points in time in a series of co-development reflections summary reports undertaken by a skilled facilitator from SVA. Individual reflection interviews were held with representatives from the project partners. Representatives were asked a range of questions on the co-development process. These focused around key learnings, challenges, successes, surprises and the importance of the co-development process. For each interview, responses were analysed and then formally shared within co-development reflections summary report (Figure 19). As the Co-development Framework identifies, there is a need to capture actions and outcomes resulting from community consultations to support transparency and continuous improvement (DE, 2024). The summary reports are shared with the Australian Government in Parkville Institute's six-monthly reports.

Figure 19: Co-development reflections summary reports timeline and inclusions



Challenges and learnings

The partners identified some key learnings and challenges in the co-development journey, which are shared in summary form for others committed to using a co-development approach. The partners note that the learning and challenges overlap and that they may be unique to this project.


Time factors: Partners with the right mix of commitment, readiness, skills and experience are likely to be 'time pressured' which requires management of meeting schedules; being strategic with agendas and establishing effective leadership for each committee or working group set up to develop, implement and evaluate the new model.

Partners learnt that while online meetings were practical and time efficient for some purposes, for other purposes, in person meetings were essential. These required logistical planning, coordination and advanced scheduling as well as additional costs related to travel and accommodation for some of the participants. We were also flexible in determining meeting frequency, shifting from weekly for some meetings particularly in the early stages and adjusting to fortnightly or longer as the project developed.

The other challenge connected with time, is the fact that co-development is a slow process and where decisions are not made on the run or very quickly. As the Co-development Framework explains, partners embarking on co-development need to allow for longer time frames across all aspects of the project and the budgetary impacts of this requirement (DE, 2024). In this co-development journey, additional funds were secured to support the approach, workloads were shared across different groups and individuals and new roles were created to sustain and maintain the project over short and longer time frames.

Bricks and mortar factors: While the partners agreed to the project at the theoretical level, the realities of finding appropriate spaces to encompass existing programs, causing the least disruption to these programs and finding suitable spaces for the new model and how they would operate were challenging in many ways.

The partners learnt from these challenges, about the importance of thinking outside the box and being innovative in finding solutions. Networking and advocating with local, State and National authorities in resolving issues related to new or renovating buildings or spaces was essential in overcoming this challenge. Identifying new or additional funding sources was also necessary for meeting the bricks and mortar challenges.



Workforce factors: This project is being undertaken in a time of a critical workforce shortage for the ECEC sector. This is a major challenge for the project, as the intervention and prevention work at the heart of the model requires experienced, qualified and skilled staff from a range of disciplines as well as EC teachers and educators.

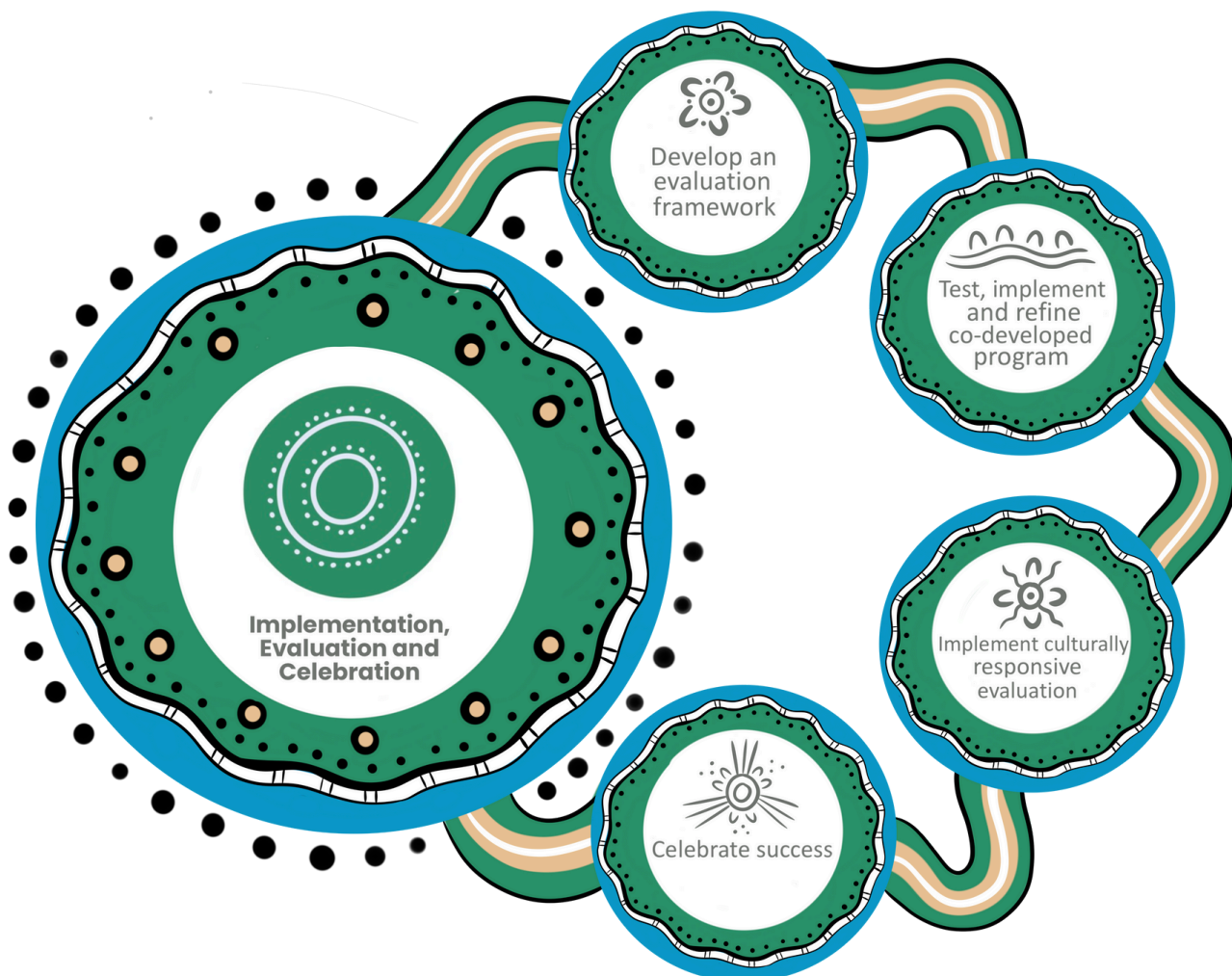
The partners learnt from the challenge of the need to develop position descriptions and advertisements for recruitment that would capture potential new staff interest and that would tap into their motivation to make a difference for children and families. Developing videos promoting and explaining the new model supported recruitment. The partners also saw the importance of extending personal invitations to potential new staff members who had been identified by the centre as a good fit for the project. The partners also focused on staff who were already working at the centre, by keeping them informed about the project via workshops, training sessions and meetings so that they could make informed decisions about the role they might play in the new program or whether they preferred to work in the other ECEC programs offered by the centre.

STORIES REFLECTIVE OF STAGE THREE



In this final stage of co-development, the partners unite to test, implement, refine, evaluate and share successes from the co-development process (Figure 20). Evaluation is a dominant focus as is fine tuning aspects of the program.

Figure 20: Overview of stage three from the Co-development Framework



Evaluation Framework

The co-development process was essential in determining respectful and culturally safe evaluation strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children participating in the Boori Milumba model.

To create an evaluation framework responsive to the children's rights, and reflecting Cullunghutti's centre philosophy and values, the evaluation framework adopted a co-development approach with a range of specific strategies, including:

- Initiating discussions early in the project with the ACCOs regarding program evaluation.
- Drawing heavily on research guidelines and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream ethics, outlining how the evaluation framework will be enacted/followed.
- Adhering to an appropriate University Human Ethics Research approvals process, with endorsement by appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.
- Clearly identifying ownership of data and IP.
- Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.
- Selecting and defining measures and indicators of the success of co-development.

Co-developing the evaluation component of the project gave voice and authority to Cullunghutti to reflect on and determine what research questions they wanted answered, and how evidence could be:

- Gathered in a culturally safe and respectful way.
- Presented to the Government to improve understanding of needs at a contextual and community level.
- Used or inform advocacy to improve policy and funding options that would support and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- A base to build on that translates into improved policy and funding options that support and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Cullunghutti also discussed their previous experiences with formal research projects and studies and outlined their expectations and aims for the evaluation of this project.

Cullunghutti's two key expectations included:

- Culturally safe and respectful processes.
- Not placing any additional workload on staff.

As outlined in the Co-development Framework, funding partners may require evaluation of specific aspects of the project, the impact of the project on defined outcomes for participating children and families and carers and use of a particular methodology (DE, 2024, p.55). The partners acknowledge co-developing the evaluation had to fit within the contract requirements with the funding partners. Aspects that were non-negotiable included the measurement of children's outcomes, using standardised measures of cognitive and language outcomes and use of quantitative rather than qualitative evaluation.

The partners recognised that the inclusion of data sovereignty principles was central to ensuring that development and implementation of evaluation strategies are culturally responsive and safe. Cullunghutti, and the Project Development and Implementation Team and/or the Steering Committee checked particular details in the project's ethics approval documents to ensure cultural appropriateness. Evaluation measures were discussed by all partners during the regular Steering Committee meetings online and face to face at Cullunghutti. Families and carers provide their consent to the measures through the informed consent process. The partners highlighted that the consent process should be seen as empowering for families and carers. The partners developed a plain language statement (PLS) for families and carers to explain the research aims, the program and funding requirements, the benefits and risks, and confidentiality of information. Language used in the PLS reflected cultural sensitivity and respect based on the advice of Cullunghutti staff and as advised by SNAICC.

The impact of the Boori Milumba model on outcomes for children is being evaluated through the Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne (UOM). To support consistency and continuity, members of the research team involved in the EYEP research trial are also involved in the research evaluation of the Boori Milumba model. A research evaluation group comprising representatives from SNAICC, Cullunghutti, Parkville Institute and the Melbourne Institute has been established to monitor the evaluation of the model and to address any fidelity issues that arise.

The Steering Committee generated the data sovereignty principles underpinning the evaluation framework that would in turn inform the evaluation in action. Parkville Institute and the UOM evaluator were also cognisant of and responded to the rigorous requirements in relation to research being undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and children under the UOM Human Research Ethics Committee approval process.

““
“When you're in a bureaucracy and you've got a contract and deliverables, you can't be as flexible or as open to change and stuff as you'd like to be.”
””

Boori Milumba Launch

On 21 February 2024, the Boori Milumba model was officially launched at Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre. The celebratory event, hosted by the Cullunghutti Board, provided the opportunity for the Cullunghutti Board, staff, families and children, project partners and other stakeholders to:

- Celebrate and recognise the contributions of all parties involved in the co-development project and in shaping the model design.
- Meet face to face and acknowledge co-development and the program model achievements to date.
- Recognise and validate the co-developed project, with local, State and Federal Members of Parliament.
- Share partner insights* into the co-development process to support reflection, refinement and inspire others to undertake co-development with an ACCO.
- Be welcomed to Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre through experiencing a smoking ceremony, and observing children, educators and local community members performing traditional dances and songs.

As the Co-Development Framework references, a celebratory event is an opportunity to acknowledge shared successes achieved through co-development (DE, 2024, p. 64).

*These insights have been recorded to support and facilitate documentation of the co-development journey by the partners. The intention is to use the insights to create promotional resources to assist others with their journey of co-development and to showcase this particular partnership journey.



CONCLUSION

As highlighted throughout this report, the co-development process is often centred on navigating challenges, both planned and unexpected. Timelines for tasks have been shifted yet balanced against key deliverables. Dedicated time for yarning and establishing relationships with Cullunghutti staff was prioritised while juggling building and regulatory requirements with centre renovations. The partners also utilised their individual relationships with various organisations and contacts to expedite processes, reduce recruitment issues associated with state level workforce shortages and to provide clarity of information regarding building codes and service approval requirements at a state and federal level. Such networking and resourcefulness ultimately enabled the project to keep moving forward. Obstacles were jointly overcome through the co-development process, making the process a fulfilling and rewarding experience for all.

“It's just been really great to know that co-development can exist and be a journey, and we're on that right now and I'm really excited to see what these next few years look like for all of us. And when we evaluate it and report back to the Government, and then they'll fund all of us!”



The story of the co-development journey is not finished. The story has moved onto the next chapter, which is focused on implementation and evaluation. The partner 'characters' in this story will continue to work collaboratively and respectfully in this phase of the project. The partners anticipate that new stories and interesting insights into co-development and the model as it is implemented will emerge in this chapter of the co-development story. The children, families and the Cullunghutti staff team are key characters in the implementation phase. The partners are excited by the promise of learning from their stories and experiences as the model is implemented. The hope is that we can continue to share valuable insights from this journey of co-development and inspire others to start their own journey and create their own stories of co-development.

"It's an exciting opportunity to really shape the way for Aboriginal early years, and then for other high-quality education and care services... Hopefully we can make change and it becomes a nationally recognised project for other Aboriginal early years services."



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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: 2022 EOI Timeline

August

September



EOI submissions
open



EOI submissions
close



Interviews with
short listed
applicant held

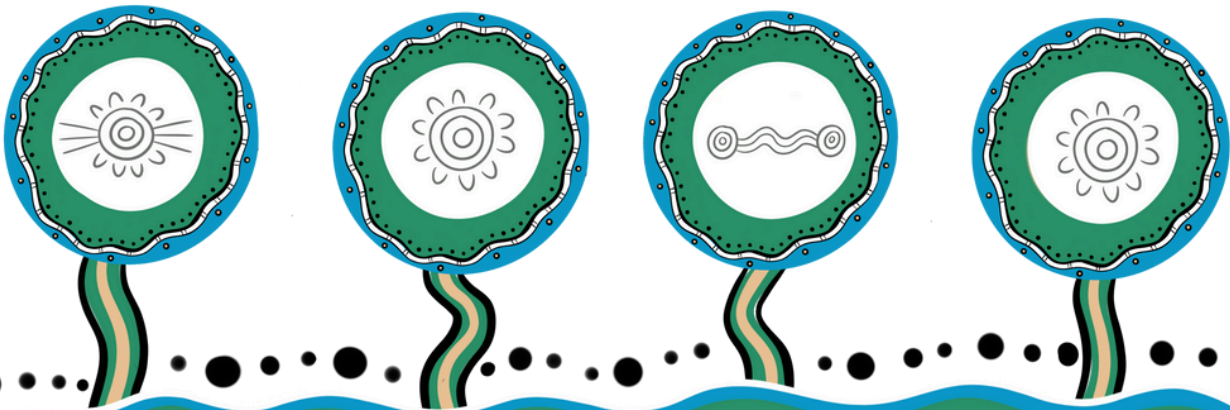


EOI outcome
shared
with applicants



Successful service
(Cullunghutti)
signs a legal
agreement
With PI

Appendix 2: Workplan Overview



● First Phase

Project set up.

● Second Phase

Complete the co-development process + set up service for implementation of co-developed model.

● Third Phase

Commencement and rollout of the program model for the 3-year period.

● Fourth Phase

Recommendations made based on the research evidence and outcomes of the implementation of the model.

Appendix 3: Key Stakeholders

Staff and community members with previous and continued involvement in the co-development and delivery of the Boori Milumba model and the research trial.

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre:

Bianca Ardler
Christopher Ardler
Charlie Ashby
Lisa Baker
Pauline Banfield
Fiona Beale
Hana-Grace Berryman
Kaysha Carlson
Tallarah Carpenter
Clarence Gibbs
Kylie Joyce
Tracey Kirk-Downey
Marti Lancaster
Tara Leslie
Aunty Pat Lester
Aunty Yvonne Lester
Jacinta McMahon
Colin Moore
Natalie Nelson
Rosana Nemet
Kym Pearson
Christina Rainford
Anita Richards
Holly Sanders
Aunty Ruth Simms
Summer Sines
Manola Rocchi-Schembri

Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre:

Anne Maree Stewart
Aunty Lyn Stewart
Aunty Lois Sutherland
Marg Sutherland
Roslynn Webb
Tracey Wellington
Maria Wells
Cristina Yuste-Wishart

Parkville Institute:

Nichola Coombs
Casey Hazlett
Associate Professor
Brigid Jordan AM
Dr Anne Kennedy
Madeleine Saffigna

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children

Ria Cleary
Adele Cox
Miranda Edwards
Jo Goulding
Joel Keen
Renee Moore
Nicole Simone

Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne:

Associate Professor Yi-Ping Tseng

Social Ventures Australia

Brianna Handcock
Emma Sydenham