Southern Grampians and Glenelg Coronavirus Pandemic Social Recovery Advice

Kiri's Images

Developed by Southern Grampians Glenelg Collaboration for Community Resilience Network

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The Coronavirus Pandemic has impacted each and every person within the Southern Grampians and Glenelg community. It has changed how we live, work, learn and play in varying degrees across population groups and it is expected the ramifications will be felt for months and years to come. As a community we have also experienced rapid innovation, adaptation and community kindness that we want to learn from, to be even better and stronger community moving forward.

The purpose of this Southern Grampians and Glenelg Social Recovery Advice document is to provide advice to planners, policy makers, funders and to our local community about what is needed to not only recover from the Pandemic but to build back even better. The Pandemic has reinforced the strong interrelationship between economic and social drivers and these impacts are so intertwined they are difficult to unravel. However, this document focuses on the social aspect, recognising that there needs to also be focus on economic recovery that not only complements social recovery but synergises with it.

This document has been prepared by the Collaboration for Community Resilience Network (C4CR) that was formed and is facilitated by the Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (SGGPCP). SGGPCP recognises that the resilience of the Southern Grampians and Glenelg communities can be strengthened by organisations having collective knowledge and advocacy of the impacts and needs of the community caused by the pandemic.

The C4CR Network has met 18 times during the Pandemic and has involved participants from across 33 organisations. The Network participants shared stories of the impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the local community, documenting this complexity visually through Causal Loop Diagrams. Based upon this shared understanding of the impacts, the Network collectively looked forward, planning what was needed to reimagine the future, not only to recover from the Pandemic but to be an even stronger thriving community. This Southern Grampians and Glenelg Social Recovery Advice is the summary of those discussions.

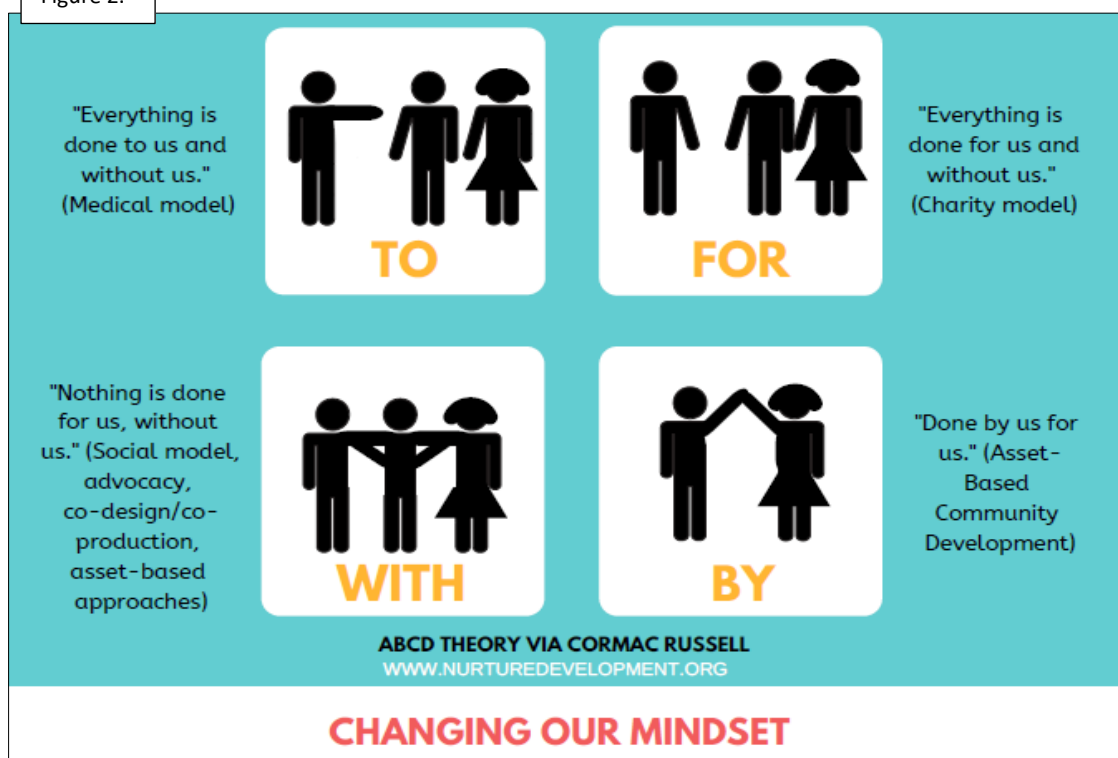Figure 1. Causal loop diagram of impacts of COVID 19 on our community

The pandemic has tested the social fabric of our community at all levels and highlighted how a community can either pull together or crumble in the face of adversity. 'We are in this together' has been a consistent theme throughout as our community has accepted new forms of social responsibility and found new and creative ways to build community spirit. However, the restriction of movement and face to face contact has limited community connection and their ability to share ideas and make decisions, requiring the community to adapt.

This has been further challenged by a dominance of government decision making, necessary in a pandemic but hindering community empowerment.

Public serving organisations have had to grapple with how to engage and work with the broader community in different ways, with varying results. The value of strengthening of relationships and partnering between organisations that support the local community has reinforced during this time.

The strongest and most consistent theme throughout all of our recovery discussion has been the need to build the social capital of our communities to levels even stronger than before to place community empowerment at the heart of everything we do. To assist, we have framed this section using language from Asset Based Community Development (figure 2 below).

Figure 2.

"Everything is done to us and without us." (Medical model)

TO

"Everything is done for us and without us." (Charity model)

FOR

"Nothing is done for us, without us." (Social model, advocacy, co-design/co-production, asset-based approaches)

WITH

"Done by us for us." (Asset-Based Community Development)

BY

ABCD THEORY VIA CORMAC RUSSELL
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CHANGING OUR MINDSET

BY Community; solving problems that they can solve

To build back even better from the Pandemic, we need our community to lead the recovery process, be empowered to develop solutions and undertake the actions that the community can do for themselves. This will require a shift in decision making power to the community from organisations and government. However, this needs to be done in a supported way to build the capacity and diversity of informal and formal community leaders over time and to support the community to connect to share ideas and learn from each other.

To further empower community to take action BY community we need:

- To support and build capacity of a diverse range of community leaders, formal and informal, including marginalised groups and those disproportionately impacted by the Pandemic such as young people, women and older people
- To support opportunities for community collaborative ideas generation and learning

WITH Community; supported by services where community needs help

We need strong and respectful relationships between the community and the community support sector in order to work WITH community better. This means listening and adapting together and engaging with the right people in the right way, at the right time.

To improve community and support organisations working WITH each other we need:

- To have meaningful and respectful relationships between community members and services with a view to further empower community.
- To continually improve understanding of community needs by strengthening community voice and services to adapt delivery accordingly

FOR Community; collaboration between organisations to provide solutions that community needs done for them

We need our sector of organisations supporting the community, to work in partnership to better serve our community where the community needs support or services provided for them. This requires the sector to value and invest in partnering to have the skills, resources and structures for effective partnerships and outcomes.

To improve collaboration between organisations we need:

- To continue to develop partnering skills of services' workforce
- To continue to have open and clear communication
- To further our understanding of the value of partnerships and advocate to others
- To have appropriately resourced backbone support to enable place based collective community led solutions to occur

Community Spirit – We are in this together

We need a kind and inclusive community where everyone feels they can contribute and belong. The Pandemic has renewed our communities' emphasis on kindness and understanding, a focus that needs retaining into the future through sharing of stories, messaging and celebration.

To strengthen our community spirit we need,

- To celebrate and share stories of community supporting each other

Accessible activities and services

The Pandemic and its resulting movement restrictions resulted in dramatic changes in the way services and activities were undertaken. Many services and activities had to cease or greatly reduce face-to-face contact. Some adapted quickly to provide alternate on-line/phone options for services and activities to keep their clients, members and participants engaged. In some cases face-to-face service remained but modified to be COVID-safe; others paused operating services and activities, creating gaps.

This sudden increase in virtual services has fully exposed the inequities in digital access, or what is termed the digital divide. Many people can't afford access to the internet or the multiple devices necessary in a household to work and learn virtually and access services. The reliability of the internet varies significantly across the region, and the closure of libraries, community houses and other public access points again reduced access for many within the community. Many still do not have the skills or confidence to participate virtually, reducing their access to learning, services, activities and the ability to socially connect with others during restrictions.

The rapid adaptation highlighted some gaps in knowledge about what services and activities were operating and how to access them. Partnerships between organisations strengthened during the early response months, as organisations shared information and ideas on how to adapt and support the community.

Many of the community adapted quickly to using new online services such as telehealth for medical appointments, virtual online gym classes and online musical and arts opportunities. For some this enabled an increase to services and recreational opportunities that they hadn't been able to access previously. For some services, for example drug and alcohol services, appointments via virtual technology have resulted in much higher attendance rates, as feelings of stigma and judgement are reduced. However, other services have been difficult to deliver online due to either the nature of the service or the home environment that has not been conducive to a quality service (including issues of confidentiality). The quality of the service is also very dependent on the practitioners' skills to be able to deliver an online service.

Reduce the digital divide

We want equitable and reliable access to the digital environment within our homes, workplaces and community settings and investment in platforms and technology infrastructure throughout the community, to be able to easily connect through the digital environment individually and within groups. We want our community and organisations to be skilled, confident and supported in using virtual technology to connect.

To reduce the digital divide, we need:

- To have reliable, affordable internet access and digital infrastructure for all
- To have the skills and confidence to participate virtually across our community

Accessible and diverse activities

We want a broad range of activities and events for our community to connect socially whilst enjoying their recreational preferences. This will involve adapting existing community group and club activities and also creating new activities that may be better suited and sustainable with our new ways of life.

To have accessible and diverse activities we need:

- To provide a range of activities that meet the needs of our diverse community
- To support volunteers and groups to adapt and ensure sustainability in the long term

Accessible support services

We need to make sure services are more accessible through retaining the rapid advancements in virtual services provisions where appropriate and restoring safe in person services where preferred by the client. We need to understand the changes of our community's support needs due to COVID 19 and ensure that the services are meeting these needs with high quality services.

To have accessible support services we need:

- To have a range of high quality services that are focussed on client needs and are accessible to all
- To provide options of virtual and face-to-face services that are appropriate to the client's needs and of high quality

The Coronavirus Pandemic is having a significant impact on our community's physical and mental health. There are many layers of additional stress on people, such as rapid change, financial issues, loss of control and independence, fear of catching or spreading the virus and uncertainty of how long it will be with us. Restrictions have reduced the face-to-face interactions between people resulting in less social connection and structured physical activity such as sports and the use of gyms. The restrictions have also had a positive effect in that generally people have less commitments and travelling and therefore more time, which is being used in part to exercise in unstructured forms and connect virtually with others. The restrictions and government messaging have always supported and promoted exercise to improve mental and physical health throughout the pandemic and this has led many people to experience the benefits that being physically active has on their health, particularly mental health.

An Equitable community

This Pandemic has affected different groups within our local communities in different ways. Women and young people have been disproportionally impacted with respect to employment. Movement restrictions have impacted greatly on single adult households and those most vulnerable to the COVID 19, the elderly, people with disabilities, people suffering from chronic conditions and our indigenous community

We want a community that builds back to support everyone and ensure everyone feels that they are supported and belong within our community, not just majority groups of the population. This needs to be actively addressed in everything we do, in accessible and inclusive activities, services, employment and learning and in providing voice, support and connection to marginalised groups.

To be an equitable community we need:

- to increase understanding across the whole community, on how COVID 19 has exacerbated inequity and ensure all recovery strategies are focussed on increasing inclusion and diversity and that everyone has a sense of belonging

A COVID Safe community

We need to protect our community from Coronavirus and when cases occur, manage and control them quickly. This will require everyone in our community to abide by coronavirus advice and rules and have a culture of early testing and isolating.

We want to be able to connect socially in spaces and places that are promoting activity, creativity and relaxation and with practices that are COVID safe, which is minimising the risk of contracting or spreading the coronavirus.

To be a COVID safe community we need:

- to ensure that all of our public facilities as well as businesses and services have a high standard of public health hygiene and that our practices, individually and within clubs, groups and social networks are COVID safe.
- to have co-ordinated local communication and advice that is timely, credible, consistent and clear
- to have incident control systems in place and resourced to quickly detect and control clusters of cases and support sufferers with their recovery

A healthy and well community

We want our community to continue to value the benefits of exercise for mental and physical health experienced during restrictions and retain these behaviours beyond the pandemic.

Social interaction is a vital component of human health and the pandemic restrictions has resulted in fast tracking new ways to connect whilst being apart. For many households, the slower lifestyle with less commitments outside the home, has resulted in more time to connect together. However, for those who live alone, reconnection socially within the community is vital and urgent. The pandemic restrictions and regulations have tested everyone's resilience and mental health at

times. This has created a much wider and compassionate conversation about mental health within our community and how to support each other.

To be a healthy and well community we need:

- to continue to undertake and promote exercise, good diet and sleep as important in self-care for physical and mental health
- to have skills to build individual resilience, be aware of our own, family and friends' mental and emotional wellbeing, to know where to get help and to provide support with compassion
- to strengthen social connections across the community especially with the isolated and lonely and continue to value and prioritise spending quality time with family and friends

The way we learn and work has a direct impact on the health, wellbeing and resilience of our community. The Pandemic and the restrictions put in place to slow its spread, resulted in rapid and dramatic changes to the way we learn and work. For periods of time, all students that could, learnt from home from primary school through to tertiary level. Any workers who could undertake their work at home have done so since mid-March 2020. The success of these alternative ways of learning and working have varied, dependent upon personal circumstances, nature of work and personal learning styles.

Education and work provide important social connection opportunities that are essential for human development and well-being.   However, for some young people, reducing some of the social interactions through remote learning, has enabled better engagement in school. In a similar nature, reducing some of the social distractions at work, has increased productivity of the home worker. Others have really struggled with this reduction of social connection and it has heightened the appreciation of social connection in education and work.

Remote learning and work has saved personal time for students and workers through reduced travel and this time has been able to be redirected to self-care and family care. It has also made learning from beyond our local area far more accessible without travelling. However, overuse of virtual connections has also resulted in 'screen fatigue', where after work people have disconnected totally from screens limiting their virtual social connections with family and friends or participation in virtual recreation or community volunteering roles.

The Pandemic has created a lot more care about the health and wellbeing of employees within and across workplaces. Remote working and virtual connection has taken employees into each other's homes and reduced hierarchical expressions such as formal clothing and uniforms, creating a more personable and mutually respectful environment.

A learning community

To maximise our learning potential students need options that best meet their learning styles and personal situations. The Pandemic has provided our students with the experience of remote and online learning. By expanding the use of virtual learning opportunities across schools within the region, we can increase access to specialised subjects that individual schools are unable to offer. Potentially this could open our strong education sector to students beyond our local region.

To be a learning community we need:

- to offer flexible learning options (remote and face-to-face) and accessible subject opportunities to all students by building partnerships between schools to develop a regional remote learning structure

A satisfied and fulfilled workforce

To enhance workforce satisfaction, workplaces need to care for their employees and invest in their health and wellbeing. Provision of more options to work remotely that are supported by policy, practices and skilled managers to support teams, can contribute to improved work-life balance. In 2020, all workplaces have had to embrace disruption, innovate and adapt, with creative solutions leading to new products, services and activities. The speed and the level of innovation harnessed in these rapid changes has been inspiring for the workforce and created a greater courage and confidence for future innovation.

Using virtual connection platforms, can increase productivity through reducing significant unnecessary travel saving personal or work time and saving costs. For rural communities, using virtual platforms to connect for partnering, learning or access up to date information, whether it is within the region or in Melbourne, will save significant amounts of travel and associated costs

To have a satisfied and fulfilled workforce we need:

- To offer greater flexibility in where and when we work to complement productivity and workers' lifestyles through sharing policies, practices and spaces across organisations.
- To continue to have workplaces caring and valuing the health and wellbeing of their staff through prioritising and ensuring managers have the role and skills to support staff's wellbeing.
- To continue to adapt and innovate for the creation of improved products and services through sharing innovation practices and ideas.
- To increase productivity through accessing information and training online, partnering and sharing with other organisations and saving time through reducing unnecessary travel

Summary of Southern Grampians and Glenelg Coronavirus Pandemic Social Recovery Advice

Resourceful, connected and resilient community

BY Community; solving problems that they can solve
- To support and build capacity of a diverse range of community leaders, formal and informal, including marginalised groups and those disproportionately impacted by the Pandemic such as young people, women and older people
- To support opportunities for community collaboration

WITH Community; supported by services where community needs help
- To have meaningful and respectful relationships between community members and services with a view to further empower community.
- To continually improve understanding of what community needs by strengthening community voice and services to adapt delivery accordingly

FOR Community; Collaboration between organisations to provide solutions that community needs done for them
- To continue to develop partnering skills of services' workforce
- To continue to have open and clear communication
- To further our understanding of the value of partnerships and advocate to others
- To have appropriately resourced backbone support to enable place based collective community led solutions to occur

Community Spirit – We are in this together
- To celebrate and share stories of community supporting each other

Safe and well community

An equitable community
- To increase understanding across the whole community, on how COVID 19 has exacerbated inequity and ensure all recovery strategies are focussed on increasing inclusion and diversity and that everyone has a sense of belonging

A COVID Safe community
- To ensure that all of our public facilities as well as businesses and services have a high standard of public health hygiene and that our practices, individually and within clubs, groups and social networks are COVID safe
- To have co-ordinated local communication and advice that is timely, credible, consistent and clear
- To have incident control systems in place and resourced to quickly detect and control clusters of cases and support sufferers with their recovery

A healthy and well community
- To continue to undertake and promote exercise, good diet and sleep as important in self-care for physical and mental health
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- To strengthen social connections across the community especially the isolated and lonely and continue to value and prioritise spending quality time with family and friends

Accessible activities and services

Reduce the digital divide
- To have reliable, affordable internet access and digital infrastructure for all
- To have the skills and confidence to participate virtually across our community

Accessible and diverse activities
- To provide a range of activities that meet the needs of our diverse community
- To support volunteers and groups to adapt and ensure sustainability in the long term

Accessible support services
- To have a range of high quality services that are focussed on client needs and are accessible to all
- To provide options of virtual and face-to-face services that are appropriate to the client's needs and of high quality

Reaching our fullest potential

A learning community
- To offer learning options (remote and face-face) and accessible subject opportunities to all students by building partnerships between schools to develop a regional remote learning structure.

A satisfied and fulfilled workforce
- To offer greater flexibility in where and when we work to complement productivity and workers lifestyles through sharing policies, practices and spaces across organisations.
- To continue to have workplaces caring and valuing the health and wellbeing of their staff through prioritising and ensuring managers have the role and skills to support staff's wellbeing.
- To continue to adapt and innovate for the creation of improved products and services through sharing innovation practices and ideas.
- To increase productivity through accessing information and training online, partnering and sharing with other organisations and saving time through reducing unnecessary travel