

LOGAN'S COMMUNITY GATEWAYS — OPERATING FRAMEWORK





ABOUT LOGAN TOGETHER

Logan Together is a 10 year community campaign to ensure Logan kids grow up as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Australian children.

The Logan Together Roadmap identifies what we need to do so that by 2025, Logan kids will be as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Queensland children. We've aligned our actions according to the life stages – from before birth and through each age and stage of childhood. We know that child, family and community characteristics all influence how our children are now, and in future years.

Breaking down the numbers, we need approximately an extra 5,000 kids to be doing well through their early years.



We respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Logan City area, including the Yuggera and Yugambah language speaking people. We pay respect to the Elders past and present for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Australia's First Peoples. We acknowledge there are also other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live, work in and contribute to the cultural heritage of Logan City.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Gateways occupy a key place in the system of supports for families and communities, contributing basic supports, referral pathways and community development activities which help the community become a better place to live. Logan Together has identified the support for gateways as a key plank for making Logan a better place to live and improving the welfare of its people.

Accordingly, through 2019 we have engaged in a series of workshops, consultations and feedback processes to articulate the role of Gateways, their importance and what they need to thrive.

The Logan Together partners define a Community Gateway as a place or service for the whole community. Through Community Gateways, community members can:

- take part in activities that benefit them and their families; at their own time and in their own way
- get help to navigate the wider service system to meet their needs
- become active as community members and community leaders in building thriving communities.

The work of Community Gateways is underpinned by a common evidence base, which tells us the following:

- prevention and early support are crucial
- building a strong community benefits families and children
- building trust is essential and takes time and skill
- people need a variety of pathways in
- informal participation allows people to build relationships and trust over time
- universal access removes stigma and builds community
- effective formal and informal assessment allows appropriate referral
- improved collaboration and communication improves access
- there is no 'one size fits all' model
- many community members struggle with issues of daily survival
- gateway work is highly skilled work.

Logan's Community Gateways include neighbourhood and community centres, school-based hubs, early-years centres and a number of other types of service. There is no single service model, but different Gateways respond in different ways to the needs of their communities, the ethos of their founders and the circumstances in which they are founded.

While these services are highly valued in their communities and by the people who use them, they often struggle for resources in an environment of scarcity. This framework aims to guide the process of

improving the profile and resourcing of Gateways by:

- more clearly defining the skills and capabilities required for Gateway work
- establishing a shared evaluation framework that Gateways can implement
- identifying basic resourcing requirements
- documenting the current and future need for Community Gateways
- supporting Community Gateways to have more reliable information and linkages into the wider service system.

INTRODUCTION

Logan Together is a long-term, whole-of-community campaign to create the best life opportunities for every child in Logan. We're a diverse group of people from throughout the community who share a passion for our kids' future.

Our vision is that in 2025 Logan kids will be as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Queensland kids. To achieve this vision, we have developed a roadmap to achieve this goal and are engaging in a range of strategies including:

- building a broad-based community movement
- facilitating an empowered local community
- supporting local decision-making about priorities and resources
- building a long-term plan for a thriving Logan.

Community Gateways are a key part of this strategic approach to build a thriving local community and thriving children. They provide families with universal access to build relationships in the community, to learn, to take part in activities that benefit them and their children, and to link in with the wider service system where this is needed. At the same time, many of them also engage in community building activities with the aim of building resilient communities and addressing systemic issues which impact on individuals and families. They help people to develop social capital and contribute to shifting the balance of power in the community by helping people to grow and learn so they are more able to contribute to activities in the community, including assuming leadership roles. However Community Gateways are often under-valued, operating on shoe-string budgets out of run-down facilities.

During the past two years, the Logan Together movement, Backbone team and specifically Logan's Community Gateways focused their efforts on defining and describing what they do, and to present a case for their value.

The first phase of this project involved a review of the evidence for the value of Community Gateways, and resulted in the publication of Logan's Community Gateways: A Discussion Paper in September 2018.

This Operating Framework builds on that evidence. It has been pulled together through a series of workshops, consultations and feedback processes in which the participating Gateways refined the definition of a Community Gateway and used the evidence to describe the way they work.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GATEWAY?

Summary definition of a Community Gateway

A Community Gateway is a place or service for the whole community. Through Community Gateways, community members can:

- take part in activities that benefit them and their families, at their own time and in their own way
- get help to navigate the wider service system to meet their needs
- become active as community members and community leaders in building thriving communities.

Some of the key concepts on this definition are fleshed out below. It is important to understand that different Gateways operate in different ways, and not all elements of this definition will apply equally to all of them. 'Gateway work' describes a particular style and focus of work, not necessarily an organisation – some organisations may specialise in Gateway work exclusively, but for others it may be one of a number of things an organisation does. This definition outlines a form and approach to community services work which various agencies engage with to a greater or lesser extent.

Inclusive, welcoming, open-access

These are spaces and services any community member can use. For most programs no referral is needed, there are few eligibility criteria or requirements to meet certain definitions of need. People are not there because 'something is wrong with them', they are there because something is going on they'd like to join, or because they want to do something.

Anybody who arrives at the door will be welcomed and offered a service that may be appropriate for them whether this be information and referral, involvement in activities taking place in the space, support to start something new, or simply the opportunity to make passive use of the facilities. They aim to build trust with people through respectful, equal treatment. Access is only limited by the capacity of the space or service to host people and activities, and by the need to ensure other users are safe and welcome.

Place or service

Community gateways are most often place-based and community-run with a strong focus on community development, with typical services including community hubs or community and neighbourhood centres. A number of complementary activities typically take place at the same location, and users of the service may move between different activities over time while staying connected to the place, or may dip in and out of use of the space depending on their needs at any particular time.

As an alternative to serving a defined geographical area ('place-based') a Gateway may work with and primarily be used by a specific segment of the population, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refugees or people of a particular cultural background.

Build Community

Many Gateways see their primary role as community development - building strong and resilient communities through strengthening community networks and facilitating community initiative on shared priorities.

This reflects the fact that many of the issues facing families and individuals in Logan and elsewhere are systemic rather than individual, and therefore the issues need to be addressed at a community and systems level. This includes fostering community leadership and shifting the balance of power in community institutions including services.

Many Gateways operate under a framework based around Asset Based Community Development, which aims to build on the strengths and capacities of individuals and communities as a pathway to community strength and resilience.

Research suggests that strong trusting relationships are a key to families engaging with supports, particularly those families who are experiencing the most disadvantage and who may not normally seek assistance. Doing so in a community development context enables them to engage as active participants rather than passive service recipients, and to work at building community responses to the issues they are facing.

Many Gateway workers would frame this in terms of social capital. They think of 'bonding capital' where strong bonds and relationships are built between people in similar groups (for instance, people of the same culture or the same age) and 'bridging capital' where bonds are built and strengthened outside the most comfortable social groupings (for instance, across generations or across cultures).

Such relationships take time to build and require opportunities for families and individuals to engage in ways of their own choosing and that do not place extra pressure on them. 'Soft entry' is key to this process, as well as offering a variety of ways and reasons to engage.

Access more specialised services and supports

In order to function as a Gateway, a place/service will help those who access it to find other more specialised services where they need and want these. The Gateway, in this figurative sense, leads somewhere. These more specialised services may be accessible on site, or they may be accessible elsewhere. In either case, the role of the Gateway is to provide an easy, accessible pathway to these services where people need and want them, giving them access to the right service at the right time. This can include:

- Identifying a potential need and discussing this with the person or family.
- Making referrals to services as needed.
- Keeping and providing information on a range of services and supports.
- Hosting visiting support services on site.



WHY ARE COMMUNITY GATEWAYS IMPORTANT?

There is a large body of evidence which points to the importance of Community Gateways in a service system supporting families and children. Much of this research is brought together in Logan's Community Gateways: A discussion paper, published by Logan Together in September 2018. This evidence is summarised in the following diagram, and explained in the sections which follow.

The evidence says ...

- prevention and early support are crucial
- building a strong community benefits families and children
- building trust is essential and takes time and skill
- people need a variety of pathways in
- informal participation allows people to build relationships and trust over time
- universal access removes stigma and builds community
- effective formal and informal assessment allows appropriate referral
- improved collaboration and communication improves access
- there is no 'one size fits all' model
- daily survival needs can drown out other issues
- gateway work is highly skilled work



Gateways offer ...

- practical assistance for families and links to support
- community building responses to community issues
- connections with new friends, services and community activities
- a range of easy access, low-intensity activities
- programs in which people can choose their own level and duration of participation
- support and assistance that meets their short and long-term needs in a way that works for them
- many offer longevity in the community and community control
- a pathway to employment
- access to anyone who wants to participate
- a space for people from all walks of life
- opportunities to explore goals, make and celebrate culture, and build knowledge, skills and capacity
- support for people to meet essential survival needs
- trained and experienced staff
- a range of different service models across Logan

In addition to the evidence outlined in the Discussion Paper, there is a strong strand of evidence that points to an important wider social role for place-based community organisations. Cohen and Arato (in *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 1992) articulate the role that community associations can play in civil society. These can be summarised as follows:

- a pro-active role of solving community problems – supporting community members facing disadvantage
- a defensive role that helps people to develop and preserve a sense of communal identity and agency by allowing them to come together to pursue their own interests
- challenging government, the market and society itself, through their organising, campaigning and advocating activities
- building social capital through democratic means for deliberating and trialling innovative or different approaches to issues in society.

This highlights the valuable role many Gateways perform beyond the community service system in building stronger communities and changing the systems that lead to poverty and disadvantage.

Importance of prevention and early support

There is clear evidence that prevention and early support are crucial to improving the life chances of children. Identifying issues early and ensuring families and children have the support they need, in a way that works for them, can help them to build on their existing strengths and skills and reduce the need for more complex support later on.

Community Gateways provide a range of open-access programs and activities which provide an opportunity to support child development and identify issues early.

Building a strong community benefits families and children

Families and individuals benefit when the communities they live in are good places to live – where there are strong networks between people and strong local organisations through which people act to meet their own needs.

Community Gateways have a long history of community development work, building strong social capital and seeding and supporting local initiatives which address issues community members regard as important.

Building trust

Many families who would benefit from support services may not engage because they don't trust the services or the organisations that provide them. Families with the highest needs are often the least likely to seek help ('hard to reach' or 'seldom heard' families). Often this mistrust is well-founded in their personal or cultural history.

People will not engage with a service if they believe it will make their or their family's life worse or that it has nothing to offer them. Ongoing accessibility and open-ended, flexible programs allow people to 'test out' organisations at their own pace and in their own way, as does a sense of place, safety and belonging. By providing a range of such programs, Community Gateways can provide a safe, easy entry point into the service system and support people to make their own informed choices about what supports they engage with. The skill of relating to people informally and facilitating 'soft entry' is crucial to gateway success.

The fact that Community Gateways provide universal access removes stigma and builds community. People are not made to feel they are involved because something is wrong with them, because these programs are there for anyone in the community. These also provide the opportunity for people from all sorts of backgrounds and life situations to meet, make friends and build mutual relationships.

A variety of pathways

There is no 'one size fits all' model for Community Gateways. Instead, each of them operates in a way which fits their community, the ethos of their managing organisation and the role they play in the social ecosystem of their community and service system. Strong Gateways also use a variety of communication and outreach processes to engage with people.

Crucial elements of effective engagement by seldom-heard groups include:

- diverse communication methods
- treating people as equals and valuing their choices (as opposed to professional superiority)
- providing a variety of ways to participate - helping others, learning , socialising
- overcoming cultural barriers
- breaking down the 'us and them' barriers between participation and service delivery.

Effective assessment and referral is a skilled task

Universal access can be combined with simple screening for vulnerability factors to identify when early support is needed. If this is done, either formally or informally, in the context of open-access programs parents can be alerted early to potential challenges their children are dealing with, and supported to seek appropriate help. More widely, Gateway workers will have the skill of listening carefully to what people want and need, advocating for them within the wider system, and where necessary working toward system change alongside service users.

Improved collaboration and integration improves access

Improved collaboration and integration of services can improve the accessibility of services. This collaboration can take many forms and can include geographical and virtual integration. Logan's Community Gateways, despite often working with constrained resources, have invested in collaboration and relationship building across organisations to benefit their clients and communities, but there is still more work that could be done to strengthen and broaden this collaboration.

Daily survival needs

Many families with limited incomes face a struggle to acquire the basics of survival – food, housing, power, transport. These issues can flow on into other aspects of their lives such as education, health and employment. Community Gateways respond to this issue in a variety of ways, from simple practices like ensuring there is food available at activities through to developing more formalised responses such as food pantries, emergency relief, housing and employment programs. They also actively refer people elsewhere when the Gateway itself is unable to meet their needs.

Skilled staff are essential to this work

The various tasks involved in managing a high quality Community Gateway require high level professional skills. While these skills need to be further articulated (see Section 5.0) they include the ability to relate informally to people from a wide range of walks of life, to understand complex service systems, to build community responses to identified issues, and to work independently. This means that while volunteers have an important role to play, there is no substitute for appropriately qualified and experienced personnel.

HOW COMMUNITY GATEWAYS OPERATE

Logan's Community Gateways, and Community Gateways elsewhere, are very diverse. The precise shape of the activities they engage in and the programs they offer varies depending on the needs of their community, the setting they operate from, the ethos of their managing organisation, and the history of their creation and development. For many, Gateway work is only one of the functions they carry out, alongside other more specialised activities. For others, the Gateway service is their only or main activity.

Even within this, Community Gateways need to make choices about where they focus their limited resources. Working from the evidence base described in Section 3 above, each Gateway needs to work to achieve the following:

- describe what it does clearly
- respond to emerging needs
- articulate who it aims to work with and for
- have good governance and management in place
- regularly review and adjust its focus and priorities
- build a community of practice with like-minded organisations.

The diagram below illustrates a pathway which Community Gateways may use to decide how to respond to their specific local needs within the Community Gateway framework.



In setting their priorities, Community Gateway managers need to be clear about their own organisational ethos, and then also be clear about the issues they are dealing with: How are these issues identified? Most profitably, they will be a response to local needs and locally identified priorities.

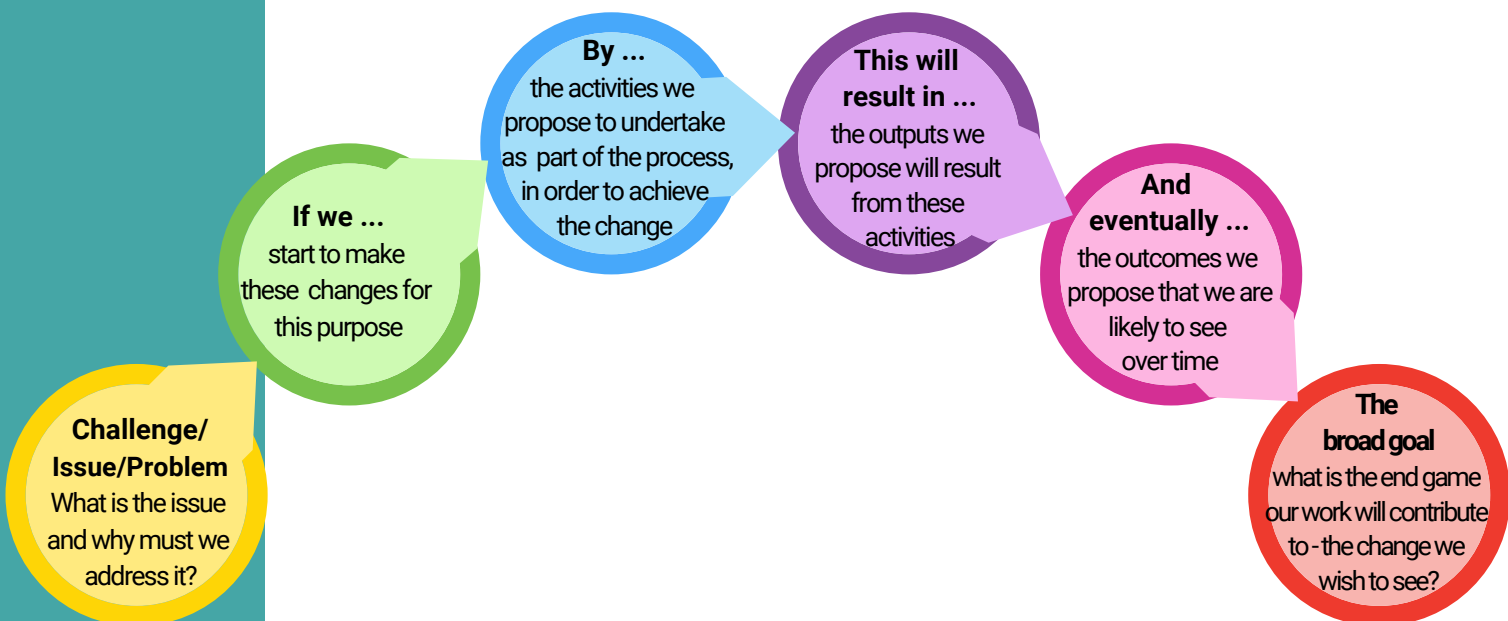
- How are they best addressed? This could include a service delivery or service development response, or a community building/community development response, or both.
- How does the Gateway work with others – community members, other organisations, stakeholders beyond the community – in addressing the issue or issues?
- How does it attract and deploy various kinds of resources to address the issue or set of issues?

This approach will result in different responses at different times and places, resulting from work within a common framework.

WHAT DO COMMUNITY GATEWAYS NEED TO SUCCEED?

There are a number of challenges facing Logan's Community Gateways. The following pages use a Program Logic model (described below) to describe these challenges and summarise a program of work aimed at responding to them over time. While the issues differ on each page, they are all heading toward the same broad goal.

That is - Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.



**Issue
#1**

Gateway work can be undervalued by funders, resulting in employees being underpaid relative to the skills of the work and making it difficult to attract and retain skilled, experienced staff.

Gateway work is highly skilled work, requiring knowledge and capacity in a range of areas including individual support, service navigation and community development.

A decreasing focus upon community development and community building has resulted in de-skilling of the Gateways workforce in this field.

**Change
we'd like
to see**

A well-recognised Community Gateways profession where staff are remunerated in accordance with their skills and experience.

A Community Gateways workforce that is skilled in community development and community building work, service navigation and individual support.

Activities

Document the tasks, skills and qualifications which underpin a skilled Community Gateway professional, and map these to the structure of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award and other relevant Awards.

Identify pathways and opportunities to support Gateways staff to build their skills in community development and community building, through professional development training, mentoring, coaching and other methods.

Outputs

A generic role description and pay structure for Gateway professionals.

A co-ordinated training and development strategy.

Outcomes

A well-recognised, well trained and appropriately paid Gateways workforce.

Broad Goal

Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.

Issue #2

The complexity and multi-faceted nature of Community Gateway work makes it difficult to evaluate and this means Community Gateways struggle to evaluate their work in a way that justifies resourcing to sceptical funders. Some have found ways to overcome this issue, but others are still searching for ways to do this.

Issue #3

Community building work can often be squeezed out of Community Gateways by the pressures of individual service delivery.

Change we'd like to see

A clear evidence base for the value of Logan's Community Gateways.

A clear valuing and focus on community building as part of the Gateways operations and resourcing.

Activities

Identify the criteria and process for evaluating Gateway work, drawing on a number of existing sources. Identify resources to carry out this evaluation work.

Articulation of the evidence base for, and value of, community building work to support the work of individual Gateways in this area.

Advocacy with governments and other funders to ensure that community building is a major focus of the KPIs of Gateways in the commissioning, contracts and reporting frameworks.

Outputs

An evaluation framework that can be implemented across Logan's Gateways.

A Community Gateways Community Building Resource.

Outcomes

Clear objective evidence of Gateway value, and signposts for improved practice.

A strong and well-supported place for community building work within the overall suite of Gateway activities.

Broad Goal

Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.

Issue #4

Families and individuals can struggle to navigate a complex support system:

- criteria and boundaries
- 'hard to reach/seldom heard' families include those who don't perceive themselves as 'needy enough' to receive services
- issues of stigma.

Change we'd like to see

A more navigable service system with clearer entry points and pathways.

Activities

Develop a strong community of practice among Gateway workers and others who share information and have relationships across the community.

Provide clear touch-points for information and updates about changes in the service landscape.

Develop mechanisms for hearing client voices in this system in order to drive improvements to accessibility and usefulness of services.

Outputs

A system for ensuring Gateway workers and service users are well connected and have the best possible information about service availability.

Outcomes

A more navigable service system.

Broad Goal

Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.

Issue #5

Some communities lack a local/regional Community Gateway. There may be a physical space in their community that can be used for this purpose but no resources for the service, or there may be neither. The rapid growth of Logan over the coming decades will create increased need/demand.

Issue #6

Most Gateways operate on low levels of core funding and often this funding is insecure. This makes it difficult to recruit and retain skilled, experienced staff and to build long-term relationships in their communities.

Change we'd like to see

Planning and action to fill current and future gaps in the network of Community Gateways.

A secure base level of funding for each Community Gateway.

Activities

Analyse the current network of Gateways in Logan against current and future demographics and need indicators, and identify current and future gaps/shortfalls.

Develop an analysis of the resources needed for basic operation of a Community Gateway.

Outputs

A detailed Gateway Needs Analysis and investment strategy to inform future planning and coordination and distribution of current resources.

A basic funding standard for Community Gateways.

Outcomes

A system of Community Gateways that covers the entirety of Logan.

Secure, ongoing funding for key Gateways means families can rely on the presence and professionalism of the Community Gateway in their community.

Broad Goal

Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.

Issue #7

Many Gateways lack appropriate, well-located physical spaces out of which to operate, with issues including spaces which are run-down, poorly located, overcrowded or otherwise unfit for purpose.

Change we'd like to see

Gateway is located in an adequate physical space.

Activities

Develop a set of specifications for Gateway space, drawing on existing work by Logan City Council and Department of State Development.

Build on Council's existing community facilities strategy to identify appropriate Gateway locations.

Outputs

A list of priority improvements for Logan's physical Gateways spaces.

Outcomes

Gateways are visible, accessible and inviting places for families to visit.

Broad Goal

Families in Logan are thriving because they are better connected to community, information, opportunity and effective supports through local and trusted gateway services.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

The Logan Together Backbone Team were proud to work alongside many project partners and participants in co-designing this framework. The journey has been ably facilitated by Jon Eastgate from 99 Consulting and we thank him for his efforts and expertise.

Our thanks go to the following people both from our Community Gateway Organisations and beyond:

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