



# LighthouseProject

## Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project

*One Thousand Conversations Project Report  
August 2015*

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### **Project Aim:**

The aim of this Collective Impact initiative by Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (GSLP) is to mobilise people in Shepparton to work in a concerted, strategic way across all levels of the community, sectors and conventional boundaries, to improve the wellbeing and educational engagement and performance of each child.

### **Project Purpose:**

- To engage the Shepparton community by listening, inspiring, persuading and debating the change process required to create a shared vision for Shepparton's children and hence a new narrative for its future.
- To enable GSLP to share its vision for change while identifying and mobilising organisations and individuals across the Greater Shepparton community willing to support our collective impact initiative
- To provide community comment and insight to support the development of a cohesive, whole of community plan.

### **Project Process:**

In order to achieve both the project aims and purpose, people must be heard and engaged at all levels and across all demographics of the community. With this in mind the consultation project team will aim to speak with one thousand residents of Greater Shepparton.

This consultation and engagement project will endeavor to engage the whole community, allowing as many people as possible to learn about collective impact and the GSLP, provide input and potentially offer their support and assistance.

The consultation project team will ensure that at least 25% of the total number of community members engaged in the consultation process fall within the category of being identified as 'young people' – that is; they are people aged under 25years.

*The process of community consultation and engagement is critical and should be regarded as part of the outcome, so that the process itself, improves Greater Shepparton's social capital.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Consultation process:**

- Each consultation conversation will be facilitated by one member of the consultation project team
- In order to provide optimal opportunity for individual voices to be heard, ideas to be shared and conversations to be as valuable as possible, each consultation event will have a maximum of 10 participants
- Each conversation will run for a maximum of 1 hour. Time limited consultations ensures focused conversation and ensure a level of respect for participants giving of their time
- Facilitators will ask four standard questions during each consultation. Questions have been designed to gain maximum input, sharing of thoughts and views and allow for free conversation and flow of ideas
- At each consultation event participants will be asked to complete a simple 'demographics form'<sup>2</sup>. This was designed to enable the project lead to capture relevant data to assist in ensuring the project met its aim of 'breadth and depth of community' consultation
- Consultation events begin with the facilitator giving a short overview of what GSLP is and is aiming to achieve through this project and more broadly with its 20 year plan
- Advertising of the consultation project will occur through word-of-mouth promotion, distribution of a consultation flyer<sup>3</sup>, media opportunities undertaken by GSLP Executive officer and/or Project Lead Facilitator.

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<sup>1</sup> One Thousand Conversations Project Brief

<sup>2</sup> Demographics form example appendices 1

<sup>3</sup> Consultation Flyer appendices 2

### **Consultation Questions (Provocations):**

1. Tell me what you know to be important for raising happy, healthy children who do well at school and go on to study, work and lead productive lives.
2. What is out there in our community already that helps this to happen?
3. What do you think gets in the way?
4. What would it take for every kid to thrive in the Shepparton community, what do we need or need to do?

### **Consultation project team:**

Lead Facilitator & Report Author: Ann Sexton, *Sexton Consulting*

Project Facilitators: Fiona Smolenaars, *Innovative Outcomes*;  
Michelle Dunscombe, *Mad Consulting*

### **Statistical Overview of Consultation Events:**

- 85 separate consultation events held
- 1012 community members participated
- 21 consultations where only young people<sup>4</sup> attended
- 361 people under the age of 25years participated
- Consultation events held across the Greater Shepparton local government area including, Tatura, Murchison, Tallygaroopna, Dookie, Kialla, Mooroopna, Toolamba and Congupna

### **Demographic Summary Information**

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this report, young people are considered to be those 25years of age and below.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	672
	Male	340
<b>Age</b>	14-17	185
	18-25	176
	26-35	159
	36-45	171
	46-55	207
	55+	114
<b>Parent</b>	Yes	533
	0-5	141
	6-12	183
	13-18	171
	Adult	222
<b>Grandparent</b>	Yes	92
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	483
	Married	316
	Defacto	178
	Widow	35
<b>Education level</b>	Primary School	13
	Sec School	174
	Incomplete Sec	187
	Tertiary (incl TAFE)	442
	Still at School	196
<b>Aboriginal</b>	Yes	165
<b>Aust Resident &lt;10 yrs</b>	Yes	107

<b>Employment Status</b>		
	Employed	552
	Unemployed	79
	Self Employed	73
	Student	213
	Parent/Career FT	59
	Retired	36

<b>Community Involvement</b>		
	Yes	698
	Sport	403
	Social	288
	Church	118
	Service	99
	Fairley Fellow	78
	Other	174
<b>Internet Access</b>		
	Yes	903
	No	109
<b>Own Transport</b>		
	Yes	893
	No	119
<b>Reliable Housing</b>		
	Yes	917
	No	95

## Consultation Process Feedback – Key Themes:

**Tell me what you know to be important for raising happy, healthy children who do well at school, go on to study, work and lead productive lives.**

This provocation was the one that produced the greatest level of consistency of answer across all four provocations and all consultation events.

There was a very clear and definite view that in order to achieve an outcome that delivers healthy, happy children who go on to lead productive lives within our community, fundamentally what is required is for those same children to have a stable family environment.

Stable family environment was determined to be one where children and young people were considered to be loved, cared for, could feel safe, were protected and were adequately fed, clothed and housed.

It was identified as part of the notion of ‘family stability’ that this also requires the adults of the unit to place the raising of their children as a priority for their family. This included the decision whether to or when to have children, the importance of being able to provide varied opportunities to children as they grow and develop and the need for adults to engage in the activities of their children throughout their childhood-adulthood journey.

Young people identified this component, adults/parents being actively involved with them, particularly during their adolescent years, as a significant contributing factor to how the young people perceived themselves, their worth and their ability to choose appropriate educational and career pathways.

*“Adults need to realise that having kids is a long term thing. You can’t just be excited and play with them when they’re new and little and then as they grow, lose interest. It doesn’t work like that, we need them (parents/adults) later on, probably more than we did when we were little. They just can’t forget about you, they don’t throw you away like an old toy, but it’s like they just put you away, and you’re not played with anymore.” (young male)*

Significant conversation evolved around the importance of strong communication skills, both in terms of ability and desire to communicate, needing to also occur within the family unit. It was noted widely that effective communication within the family unit must be driven, modeled and initiated by the adult/s within the unit.

*“They (parents) can’t expect me to talk to them, discuss my feelings and problems and even the good stuff, when they never come talk to me. They don’t even talk to each other – great example hey, aren’t they meant to be the teachers of this stuff?” (17yo female)*

There was little support for the notion of an effective family unit needing to consist of two male/female parents. Most people believe and stated that family units are now a multitude of variations and as long as the key components, as noted above, are operating within that unit then this is descriptive of ‘stable’. *“Families are families, whether there’s two of you, or two mums or a single dad, it doesn’t matter. As long as you love and care for them and things are pretty reliable, that’s what makes great kids.” (Indigenous elder)*

The final key theme identified as being important for this provocation was friendships. Participants noted this as a critical component within all areas of life. An opportunity for people from every life stage to have successful friendships was noted as a factor that ultimately determines overall wellbeing. It was particularly noted that for adolescents, the notion of positive friendships was even more important for creating personal wellbeing and supporting positive life development including that of appropriate risk taking opportunities and making positive choices/decisions.

*“If kids have good friends then they seem to make better decisions. They have someone looking out for them and keeping them on track.” (female, year 10)*

*“Without my bookclub friends I don’t know that I would get out of the house each week. They keep me going. I feel better after our weekly catch-up” (elderly woman)*

## What is out there in our community already that helps this to happen?

This provocation was designed to capture awareness levels within the community to the range of services, community groups, opportunities etc that already exist within Greater Shepparton that can assist families in their endeavours to provide the optimal environment for raising children as identified in provocation 1.

Three clear themes were noted in responses;

1. Shepparton has a significant number of services, service agencies, community groups and organisations that target all aspects of family, young people, health and education etc
2. Awareness levels of service providers and/or agencies was limited. It appears that people with a need for, and the ability to engage with, a particular service/s, organisation or club, know what is offered and if not, then broadly the community is unaware of what is available. This lack of broad awareness may also be related to 'time of life experience', for example, as a young person I may not be aware, because I don't need to know, what services are available to support elderly people within our community. However, this concept of awareness raising/advertising is worth further discussion.<sup>5</sup>
3. Cost of participation<sup>6</sup>

Sporting clubs and their role, which was broadly considered very important in helping to nurture young people, was noted consistently throughout consultation events. Sporting clubs were spoken of with confidence, gratitude and concern.

Confidence and gratitude in the context of sporting clubs being considered a safe place for young people to be involved with, parents felt comfortable with their children participating. Also that sporting clubs were considered excellent places to support the positive development of young people. Many comments regarding the mentoring provided, a place that provides significant life lessons, such as teamwork, cooperation and communication.

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<sup>5</sup> Further discussion noted in 'Considerations' section of this report

<sup>6</sup> Further discussed in Provocation 3

The concerns raised were predominantly around two factors;

Cost, how do families with limited funds access the positives that are provided by involvement within sporting clubs; and

Decreasing numbers of adults prepared to give of their time to be involved, particularly with junior sport.

*"I am so grateful for the work done by everyone here at the footy club. As a single mum it's really good for my boy to be around such good blokes."*

*"I know it would be a good thing for our kids to play sport, but we have 5 and just can't afford for one, let-alone all of them, to join in, it costs too much!"*

As would be expected, schools were mentioned consistently as being a place of support for families. Schools were seen as hubs within their respective communities and the providers of a lot more than just education. However, it must also be noted that the community perception of schools was not always positive and at times may contribute to some of the barriers.<sup>7</sup> *"We don't question what we want from education, what does success look like."*

*(educator)*

In terms of agencies and/or service providers within Greater Shepparton it is worth noting the following agencies were consistently mentioned during conversations;

Berry Street, Headspace and Family Care. It would seem that these three agencies, irrespective of 'service need' or 'time of life', are doing something that others may not be in terms of successful advertising or marketing of their agencies and services. All three were spoken of in very positive terms and seen to be excellent providers of well utilised and professional services.

*"Headspace is amazing. I told my friend she should go see them. They were great. Heaps of people I know have been in there, you can just go use the lpads if you want."* (15yo female student)

*"Doesn't Family Care provide a whole bunch of things that help support families, particularly when families might be doing it tough? I hear they have good people there and really care about people, not that I've been there myself, but it's what I hear."*

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<sup>7</sup> Further discussion under provocation 3.

Green spaces within the Greater Shepparton community were also highlighted. Consultation participants made comments such as *“we are very lucky here to have such lovely garden areas. The walking track around the lake is great, and these are things that are free”* (retired male farmer), and *“you don’t always have to pay to do things with your kids, we have a number of free activities like Kidstown and the skate park”* (grandparent).

### **What do you think gets in the way?**

This provocation raised a number of key themes throughout the consultation process.

Each theme area is identified under a specific heading for ease of reading.

#### **1. Education**

The most significant theme identified from this provocation was that of the disconnect between secondary school education, careers advice and support provided by schools and the options for pathways provided to students.

Careers teachers/advisors were, generally speaking, perceived poorly with many people noting that they believed careers teachers were too focused on assisting students with university placements. *“I don’t want to go to uni, the careers teacher says I should apply anyway! She’s not helping me look for trade apprenticeships.”* (17yo male, year 11)

*“My daughter wanted to go to beauty school here in Shepp, she didn’t get any help at all from the school. No-one thought that was a useful career choice for her!”*

This correlated strongly with a supporting issue raised which also identified that our secondary schools are not well connected or engaged with the broader employment sector and vice versa.

Many, many participants, including young people, noted that students were not given enough options and access to alternative educational opportunities early enough (in their secondary education journey) to both support their further education and career choices as well as actually keeping them

engaged in full-time, mainstream secondary education. *“Kids need to be exposed to possibilities in order to raise their expectations.”*

Considering our higher than state average numbers of disengaged school aged students<sup>8</sup>, it would seem that this one single factor requires considerable thinking and attention. *“We need to create life/world ready kids.”*

Within the business sector and agricultural community participants noted that ‘we’ (Shepparton education providers) don’t appear to be providing the educational opportunities and curriculum to support what the business and agriculture sector are requiring in terms of employment skills, trades and qualifications.

Business leaders also noted that responsibility for this sits, not just with the education providers, but with them as well and that this is an area that they need to improve in and may need assistance with. *“Shepp runs on connections, we need to keep building these.” (female, parent)*

The second aspect of the education experience that was highlighted throughout the consultation process was the one of alternative education pathways and access to these at an earlier stage in the education system. For example, many people (and significant numbers of young people) noted that the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is offered as an alternative to a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) – the considered University pathway – often for those students who prefer a ‘hands-on’ learning model, at year 11. It was noted that this is often too late for these students, many have already disengaged from school at year 9.<sup>9</sup> A suggestion to shift access to VCAL from year 11 down to year 9 was identified as a viable option for a number of students.<sup>10</sup> It was also noted that VCAL is often seen as a ‘lesser pathway’ than VCE and so is perceived as not a viable alternative by schools, teachers and students. This in itself often creates a barrier for some students who may wish to take the VCAL pathway but are ‘convinced’ to try VCE instead, often with limited success. *“I wanted to go to VCAL in year 11,*

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<sup>8</sup> The State of Greater Shepparton’s Children Report 2014

<sup>9</sup> The State of Greater Shepparton’s Children Report 2014

<sup>10</sup> This will be discussed further in the ‘Considerations’ section of this report

*but my mates said VCAL was for idiots, so I started VCE instead. I dropped out after first semester, it wasn't what I wanted to do and didn't help me get where I want to be, a mechanic. I dropped out totally, but now I'm doing TAFE.” (19yo male)*

## 2. Role models

The significant lack of positive role models available to support families and work with young people was identified broadly during the consultation events. It was noted that role models can and do play a crucial role in providing support on a number of levels.

This support and assistance was identified primarily within two areas; firstly positive role models to support families with the task of raising happy, healthy, well engaged children and secondly; in the context of being an additional positive adult person in the lives of young people. This was particularly noted within the context of variable family unit structures. It was felt that many young people may not have access to extended families, that is, aunts, uncles and grandparents.

In addition many participants commented that with large numbers of single parent families within our community that many children and young people may have generally limited access to positive role models, particularly positive male role models. *“I really like my L2P<sup>11</sup> driving lesson, not just for the driving practice, but because I get to spend an hour with ‘John’. We talk about other stuff as well as driving and he’s a great listener and has good advice.” (16yo male)*

## 3. Money

The community consultation process enabled the facilitators to engage in conversations with many families who were either unemployed or suffering financial hardship on a daily basis.

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<sup>11</sup> L2P driving program provided by Berry Street

These consultations provided significant insights in to both perception and the realities facing these families every day.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Shepparton community has many, many service agencies, clubs, sporting facilities, activities and general opportunities and that families that engage themselves and their children and young people in these opportunities generally are more likely to feel supported and that engaging with these opportunities is a key factor in raising happy, healthy, productive young people, for many of these families the financial cost of participation is prohibitive.

Sporting opportunities and alternatives such as music classes, swimming lessons, access to arts etc. were all highlighted as being *“just totally out of reach for us, it’s impossible” (parent)*.

It was also acknowledged that the community provides some free activities and events, many participants noted that these were not always things young people saw as fun or cool to be involved in, therefore reducing their participation and reducing the ability of parents to engage their children/young people in these activities.

#### 4. Negative community perception

Overwhelmingly the general negative community perception was considered the biggest and most challenging issue facing the Greater Shepparton community.

This notion was raised at almost every consultation event.

Participants stated that there is a perception within our own community that Shepparton has a number of significant issues, including drug use, violence, crime and racism. Most participants don’t believe this to be the case, but do believe that this is the way Shepparton is portrayed and that this belief then infiltrates personal belief, particularly the beliefs of young people.

It was also noted that this negative perception has become quite pervasive and other communities also believe Shepparton to be a place with a number

of issues and certainly not a place where you might want to live, work, get educated or raise a family. *“Everybody thinks Shepp has drug dealers on every corner, that’s just crap, drugs are no worse here than Bendigo!” (30yo male)*

*“Lots of people think our school is ‘shit’ – It’s not, we have lots of choice here and do some really good stuff. Other kids parents don’t want them to come here though.” (18yo secondary student)*

When questioned further regarding some of the sub-issues identified within this context, eg; drug use, violence, racism etc. the general feeling was one of acceptance that our community does face these challenges, but that these issues are no more significant here than they are in other communities.

It was also noted, positively, that with a number of these aspects, eg; racism and family violence etc, there are some excellent things already occurring within Greater Shepparton to address these issues on an ongoing basis.

This negative community perception appears to be a broader question of community culture. Many consultation participants shared similar views to one participant who said, *“how do we address community culture, influence it and change it to a more optimistic culture, surely this is something we need to think more about?”<sup>12</sup>*

## 5. Agency silos

The final key theme to be identified for this provocation was the notion of agency silos. Basically this was spoken about, in quite a negative way, that whilst our community has a large number of agencies providing a variety and significant number of services, each of the agencies do this in isolation of each other.

Participants felt that what was offered in the community in this regard was excellent, but that many of our families and individual community members

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<sup>12</sup> Further discussion noted in ‘Considerations’ section of this report

may need to engage with, or certainly would benefit from, engaging with more than one service provider.

This is then where the frustration for people is occurring. Many people spoke about having to tell their story every time they accessed a different service or agency and that this was not only frustrating, but made them feel worthless, not able to cope and more likely to result in them disengaging totally from further agency and/or service support. *“It’s really tough when you have to go to so many places and each one expects you to tell them your whole story over and over. I feel like people are judging me and don’t think I’m doing a very good job of raising my son. Sometimes it’s just easier to not go there at all, certainly easier not to ask for help.” (parent of disabled child)*

*“Why can’t there just be one place to go to find out about all the services that people might need? A bit like how they triage people in the emergency department.” (male)*

### **What would it take for every kid to thrive in the Shepparton community, what do we need or need to do?**

In order to capture aspects of this provocation the author will list suggestions/ideas that were raised to enable the reader to gain a sense of what the consultation participants were saying. Each point listed represents an idea/suggestion that was raised frequently throughout the consultation events.

A number of the ideas will be discussed in greater depth in the Considerations section of this report (page 20).

- Community Hub – a place for all agencies/service providers to share space and enable community members to have a one-stop-shop
- Youth Space/hub specifically for young people. A place where young people can just spend time, engage in music/art activities. A place where youth related services would also have regular times for people to access them. The place needs to be a place for all, it shouldn’t target any particular type/interest level/age of young people. Needs to be staffed permanently and full-time
- VCAL program offered earlier in secondary education ie; at year 8 or 9

- A cultural centre focusing on young people. A place for indigenous and Multicultural community to come together, share, teach and learn about each others' cultures
- Regular Youth groups providing free activities
- Increased free, or very low cost, activities including music, art, sports
- Careers teachers that come from business/industry ie; not just teachers in these positions
- Community mentoring program
- Stronger network/relationship between education, business & industry
- Increased opportunities for quality work placements for school students
- Increased opportunities for volunteering roles for young people
- Less one-off funding cycles to agencies/organisations etc
- Increased variety of courses offered by tertiary institutions that match local industry/business need
- Every year 9 student has a 2-4 week-long placement at Dookie Ag campus. Live-in, engage in all aspects of agriculture, develop personal skills, cook and care for each other
- Positive marketing campaign for Shepparton community / change of negative perceptions
- Parenting programs for ALL parents-to-be (similar to how antenatal programs run) where everyone just accepts that they go to a parenting class prior to becoming a parent, or very early on – ie; first year of child's life
- Increase opportunities schools offer, ie; IT classes for grandparents, fee/low cost before and afterschool care, open access for community to library etc, use of facilities and grounds during non-school times

### **Unexpected Outcomes from Consultation Process:**

The consultation process delivered a number of unexpected outcomes that are worth noting.

1. This community consultation process is the biggest of its kind ever undertaken within the Shepparton community. The process has

engaged a breadth and depth of participation enabling the GSLP to accurately say; they have consulted with all people, covering all demographics and have a sample that is truly representative of the Greater Shepparton community.

2. Community understanding of GSLP has increased significantly. Whilst many people had heard about Lighthouse, very few actually understood who they were or what they did. The consultation process has enabled this to be changed in a very positive way. I believe this process has helped raise people's perceptions and expectations of what the GSLP is and is capable of achieving
3. Community feedback to the consultation process has been overwhelmingly positive. People have been truly grateful to be given the opportunity to participate, have their voices heard and feel like they are contributing to something significant that has the potential to change lives
4. Participants from low socio-economic status have engaged very well with the process and have been eager to contribute *"nobody ever asks us about anything. They always just do stuff to us and never actually ask us what we want or think would be helpful, so thank you for this opportunity." (female)* *"I look after my grandkids, it's great to have the chance to say what I think and have people actually listen."* (grandparent)
5. The consultation process has created an increased sense of community buy-in. This will be advantageous to GSLP as it moves in to the next phase of deciding on next steps, determining strategies and moving to implementation.

### **Considerations:**

This section of the report will raise topics for the GSLP to consider as it begins to strategically plan its next steps. The considerations identified are those that have been noted throughout the consultation process and are in response to overall views.

The considerations will be set out utilising the six Core Functions of GSLP Backbone<sup>13</sup>, this will enable ease of adaptation for GSLP into its current strategic framework.

### **Inspire**

It was clearly evident from the analysis of the consultation process feedback that the overall negative community perception that pervades within Greater Shepparton needs to be addressed. It would seem appropriate that this may, indeed, need to be the first step undertaken by GSLP.

Addressing this will create a ripple affect and will in-turn address the same negative views perceived by others outside of our community. "It is difficult to change an external perception without firstly changing internal perceptions."<sup>14</sup>

### **Facilitate**

Given the considerable feedback from the community regarding the apparent disconnect between the education sector, business and industry, addressing this may need to be a key consideration for GSLP.

It would be prudent to consider how the sectors can link together better and work with each other to achieve our desired outcomes, that is more young people engaging with a breadth of career opportunities within our region as well as ensuring that the skills required by business and industry are actually being taught and applied within the education sectors.

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<sup>13</sup> GSLP Draft Strategic Plan

<sup>14</sup> Peter Drucker – The Five Most Important Questions...for organisations.

This may create opportunities for GSLP to engage in areas such as;

- a) supporting business and industry experts to engage with, participate in, or to become careers advisors in schools
- b) providing the opportunity for a round-table discussion regarding the issue with the three sectors
- c) creating a model of business support that assists secondary students with real-life interview experience, how to prepare a CV, how to obtain other relevant industry certificates/tickets etc
- d) working with business and industry to provide quality work placement opportunities for young people

An additional consideration under this core function may be, what role can/does GSLP have in endeavouring to address the overall lack of awareness by the community around what agencies and services we have available within our community and what each provides?

It would seem that some type of consistent advertising or marketing approach may be required by agencies and services, this may however need to be facilitated by an organisation such as GSLP.

It is worth noting, as stated earlier in the report, that we have a couple of agencies who are well known and respected. These organisations may prove useful and appropriate partners for GSLP if an approach here is to be considered.

### **Measure**

GSLP will need to consider how and by what means it undertakes to measure the impact of any of its determined approaches and/or strategies.

As evaluation is now considered a key component of 21<sup>st</sup> century strategic development it is important that this aspect is developed from the outset alongside each of the strategic implementation processes.

In addition it is the author's belief that this One Thousand Conversations Project should and does form the basis for GSLP's evaluation model. The

extensive consultation process has provided both qualitative and quantitative data and is an excellent starting point.

## Engage

This core function looks at building public will. It would seem appropriate that the considerations provided here focus on engaging with the community, leveraging off the goodwill already created and the sense of community buy-in for the GSLP's work to date.

The first consideration for the GSLP is one of feedback. This community consultation process engaged all demographics, as previously noted, of our community and in significant numbers. The facilitators, at each consultation event, assured participants that the information they were providing and the final outcomes would be reported back to the community in some form.

It is my recommendation that GSLP consider this as a top priority. In order to maintain the momentum and to further create buy-in for the, yet to be determined, approaches/strategies moving forward then a community feedback event would seem crucial.

It would create an excellent forum to share with the community what we have learnt to date as well as taking the opportunity for public acknowledgement of the community's role in the consultation process, and indeed, thank them for engaging so enthusiastically.

The second consideration under this core function is the idea of a Community Space for young people. One that is open to all, provides activities etc. that meet the needs of a diverse range of young people. The feedback regarding this also highlighted the need for the space to be in a prime, central location and that it would require appropriate full-time staffing.

Where possible the facility should also enable, and offer, youth related service providers time and space to provide their service to the young people in attendance.

There was a general belief that a facility of this type would assist with reducing the stigma many young people feel when they may wish to access a particular service. As well as ensuring that all young people felt there was a place for them to feel welcome and connected, a place to engage with others in a positive light without community bias.

### **Advocate**

The issue of the disconnect between current educational opportunities and pathways and what is required by our community will require a level of political advocacy.

It is an area that the consultation process would suggest is a high priority.

The overwhelming feedback regarding the benefits of the VCAL program being offered to students as an alternative pathway, both to keep them engaged in full-time secondary education as well as providing a more 'hands-on' experience for students, particularly those not wishing to go on to further university education, would indicate it is an area worth considerable weight. Currently the VCAL program is only offered as part of a secondary curriculum beginning at year 11.

An opportunity to advocate to State Government regarding the potential to trial an initiative which would see our secondary schools having the ability to offer a VCAL program to year 9 students would go a long way to addressing many areas identified during the consultation process.

The concept of increasing awareness within our young people regarding the potential breadth of opportunities that agriculture now provides within our region also requires consideration under the heading of advocacy.

This consideration would support the view of the consultation process that it is difficult to engage young people in agriculture as a career option currently.

There is a strong belief from industry that education providers are unaware of the breadth of career choices available under the agricultural banner. This was evident when speaking with young people who determine agriculture in

our community to be either milking cows or picking fruit. Neither of which most young people were keen to do!

The idea raised regarding utilising current resources, in this instance Melbourne University's Dookie Campus, to provide an immersion program for all secondary students in our community – at a year 9 or 10 level is worth consideration.

This would require initial dialogue with Melbourne University as well as State Government (Education) agreement to ensure all schools were able to support the concept, including non-government secondary providers.

An additional area worth consideration under the advocate function would be for GSLP to engage in discussions at a government level, State and Federal, to advocate for longer-term funding models within the sector. Many participants (representing a large number of varied organisations) noted their frustrations of having to continually operate some great programs, projects and service delivery models from funding models that are very time limited, often only funded on an annual basis. This obviously creates issues for these organisations in a) achieving their targets and b) in actually making sustainable change for those individuals and families they engage with. *“If we could be guaranteed longer-term funding, then our ability to access more families who need our support would increase. At times it feels like we are just a stop gap – not actually changing anything. I know that you (Lighthouse) can't fix that, but none-the-less, it is very frustrating and not best practice by any means.” (male, community sector worker)*

## **Sustain**

The concept of increasing mentoring capacity within the community is worth considering. It was noted throughout the consultations that mentoring, both for broad family support and mentoring that specifically targets young people, is a worthwhile, practical strategy that has proven results in a variety of areas.

The development of a community wide mentoring network may be considered too big and GSLP may wish to focus on a particular aspect of increasing mentoring opportunities. If this is the case, it is my recommendation that the focus be on providing positive role models for young people.

A mentoring program aimed at young people needs to be developed utilising an outcomes based model. That is, begin with asking the question, what are we wanting to achieve from this mentoring arrangement? And then follow with, how are we going to do that?

Any mentoring program developed will require a number of aspects undertaken prior to implementation. These may include; identification protocols and processes for potential mentors and mentees, training for mentors, relevant police and working with children checks, frameworks for operation etc.

There may be opportunities to link with other agencies/service providers already involved in mentoring programs of differing types.

The value of mentoring programs in the context of sustainability is that, when developed utilising a sound framework, they have the ability to live beyond any one organisation. They are also considered, once established, to be low-cost to maintain.

### **Concluding comment:**

On behalf of the three facilitators engaged in the One Thousand Conversations project can I thank GSLP for their inspired vision to undertake such an endeavour.

It has been an absolute pleasure for all us to work on this project. Facilitating the conversations has given us all a greater insight in to our local community and its people as well as the opportunity to share what GSLP is all about.

As noted earlier this consultation process has indeed consulted broadly. I doubt there is a demographic within our community that has not been involved in a conversation at some time throughout these past few months.

In addition to this the overwhelming positivity afforded to us as facilitators, and for the process itself, throughout the conversation events was incredible.

Whilst there was some publicity to promote the consultation process most of the events were arranged by word-of-mouth. People actively contacted us to be a part of the process and offer to host an event. We had to refuse a number of consultation opportunities in the past month purely because our 'end date' was upon us, I have a sense we may still be conducting further conversations otherwise!

This is testament to our community's commitment, desire and readiness to make a change and to help make a difference.

GSLP set-out to conduct the consultation process in a way that would support a Collective Impact model. I believe the process has achieved this outcome and the feedback gained throughout the One Thousand Conversations project supports that our community is indeed ready for a Collective Impact approach.