Area Partnerships representatives travelled to Canberra to share their work, and learn from other collective impact initiatives across Australia during the Collaboration for Impact conference this July.

Organised by Collaboration for Impact, the event looked to bring people from all sectors together who are leading collaborative change to achieve better outcomes for their communities.

Focusing on learning, the conference allowed attendees to gain insights into what works in a diverse range of cross-sector collective impact initiatives on a national scale. It tapped into a rich network of practitioners working to achieve large-scale social change.

Representatives from across the Area Partnerships took part in panel discussions and workshops, including:

- Two Area Partnership chairs, Anthony Raitman, Education Area Executive Director for Outer Eastern Melbourne, Department of Education and Training and Nicola Jeffers, Area Director for Central Highlands, Department of Health and Human Services, presented about their experience and involvement in the work as government leaders and champions of the local work.

- Robert Kennedy and Mila Waise from the VCRU Central Team presented on “navigating the middle”: how the Area Partnerships’, backbone, the VCRU, is playing a dual role in supporting the 8 Area Partnership sites and government in scaling the learnings from the work to implement large-scale system change and the experience of procuring a Developmental Evaluation for a collective impact initiative within government.

- Ovens Murray Principal Advisor, Colin McClounan, presented on the experience of Ovens Murray Area Partnership taking part in the Developmental Evaluation process and how that gave his stakeholders a greater understanding of what is needed to progress the work of their partnership to achieve better outcomes for children in the early years.

The Collaboration for Impact conference provided insights into the way a diverse range of collective impact initiatives are working, and how they are managing diverse people around the table from different communities.

Case studies of established collective impact initiatives were presented from Burnie Works, Maranguka, Hands Up Mallee, Go Goldfields, Growing Lachlan and Together SA, to name a few.

Groups of attendees were placed into streams according to the maturity of their initiative - the foundational stage, those beginning to get into early work, and those who have successfully gone about collective impact work and are looking to scale their efforts.

The sessions that were focused on community engagement demonstrated how community participation has the potential to create long-lasting, meaningful impact.

These sessions also demonstrated how community leadership and participation are essential in collaborative processes. The conference highlighted the trends and developments in community-based work, where a panel of citizen leaders shared community perspectives and learnings about...
what works and what doesn’t.

Key lessons from these sessions included:

- it is never too early or too late to involve community members and develop a genuine partnership with community.
- community has great assets and it is important to provide multiple opportunities for involvement in the work in different capacities based on levels of readiness.
- community needs to be valued as part of the solution.
- impact will stick only if community is involved.

Other sessions focused on how government is leading social complex change initiatives, looking at the different roles within that process from leadership through to backbone support.

Collaboration across culture, a session co-presented by two of the authors from The Lost Conversations Grant Paulson and Liz Skelton, looked at learnings from working with cross-cultural collaborations around Australia, in particular government working with Aboriginal communities, and the way in which different style of leaderships can influence community outcomes.

The conference sent a strong message to attendees that it is important to pay attention to the building blocks of a collective impact initiative early on, so that it becomes clear what the community’s priorities are, which helps build a clear understanding of the community’s common purpose.

Useful links/resources from the conference:

**Collaborative Change Cycle**

The Collaborative Change Cycle has been developed by the Collaboration for Impact to provide a framework that encapsulates the different phases of collective impact and strategic questions that could be raised to at each phase.

**CHAT**

The Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) is a simple yet powerful online resource for measuring how collaborators are working together. CHAT gives users the option of either interacting with the tool on a “one off” basis or by setting up an account with (or without) their collaborators. Both options generate a series of component scores and an overall “health score” for collaboration.

**Stepping out from the trenches**

A presentation by Collaboration for Impact Director Liz Skelton and World Vision Faith and Development Advisor Grant Paulson on finding new ways for Australians from all cultural backgrounds to lead together.

**Culture of learning**

A presentation from Jenny Riley, Associate, Collaboration for Impact, on creating a learning culture where innovation can flourish.

**Developing and monitoring a monitoring and measurement system**

A presentation from Jenny Riley, Associate, Collaboration for Impact, on setting up a measurement
framework that enables tracking of progress and fuels learning.

**Testing and trying through human centred design.pdf**

A presentation from Ingrid Burkett, Associate, Collaboration for Impact, on design thinking for implementation.