Promoting Successful Collaboration in the Communities for Children Context

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ABOUT ARACY

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) was founded by a group of eminent experts and organisations in reaction to increasingly worrying trends in the wellbeing of Australia’s young people.

ARACY is a national organisation with members based across Australia.

ARACY asserts that by working together, rather than working in isolation, we are more likely to uncover solutions to the problems affecting children and young people.

ARACY is a broker of collaborations, a disseminator of ideas and an advocate for Australia’s future generation.

ARACY has two primary goals:

1. To promote collaborative research and agenda setting for children and young people
2. To promote the application of research to policy and practice for children and young people.

This paper is one of a series commissioned by ARACY to translate knowledge into action. This series of papers aims to convert research findings into practical key messages for people working in policy and service delivery areas. The ARACY topical papers may also be the focus of workshops or seminars, including electronic mediums. Developed for the Facilitating Partners of the Australian Government Communities for Children initiative, this paper is now being made available to a wider audience via the ARACY website: www.aracy.org.au
INTRODUCTION

This paper, one of a series of reports on collaboration commissioned by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, provides an overview of collaboration approaches within the context of the issues and outcomes faced by Communities for Children Facilitating Partners. Communities for Children project officers need to have a good understanding of successful collaboration—the contexts in which different collaborative approaches are successful; how relationships are built in different contexts; and the strengths and challenges of different approaches. Understanding these complexities and promoting successful collaboration increases the likelihood of achieving shared goals and outcomes [1].

What is collaboration?

Collaboration is the act of working jointly—a joint effort of multiple individuals or work groups to accomplish a task or project. In human services it is the effort made together by two or more agencies or service providers in order to better serve their participants and achieve results they cannot achieve working alone. It may be defined in the following terms:

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve common goals. [2]

While collaboration is often used to mean the same thing as coordination, partnerships and networks, it is useful here to draw some distinctions. Organisations may work together in a continuum of effort, with informal processes of cooperation at one end and more formal processes of collaboration at the other [1]. Collaboration involves linkages of the stronger kind, built around a shared mission to pursue longer-term goals, and as such requires a higher degree of effort, commitment and alignment than some other forms of interaction [3].

Collaboration is an aspiration, not a starting-point. It requires organisational learning, and inter-organisational learning [3].
As a response to complex social and health challenges, collaboration is believed to result in outcomes that are more integrated and holistic, and therefore more sustainable [4-6].

**Approaches to collaboration**

Collaborative, relationship-based service delivery models require ‘new and often innovative structural arrangements, longer time horizons to develop trusting relations and an acceptance of the need for new types of outcomes and measurements’ [7]. Responding to needs in particular contexts, collaborations are therefore often hybrid strategies with varying structures, vision and mission [8]. One way of categorising models of collaboration is to consider them in terms of structure and/or process [9]. From our examination of the literature the approaches presented here are based more on the processes of collaboration. We have identified four ‘types’ of collaborative processes for which there is good support in the literature. We describe them under the following headings:

- The resource broker;
- The team facilitator;
- The learning community; and
- The strategic cooperative approach.

A brokering organisation can play a pivotal role in mediating and fostering relations [10] among diverse groups—non-government organisations, institutions, governments, community groups and businesses—in order to improve provision of service delivery. The resource broker approach focuses on processes that facilitate access to resources that meet community needs. The resource broker organisation acts as a conduit and clearing house for information and resources. The principal advantage [may be] efficiency... [the model] streamlines communications... and simplifies distribution.... [But] to be successful, the broker must both act and be perceived as acting to facilitate access, not control it.[10]

In the Communities for Children model, brokering is a crucial part of the role of Facilitating Partners, who are the nexus for ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ project linkages with government agencies and community organisations [11]. As such this role...
requires a more intentional and directive approach to leadership—enabling, yet at the same time directing the processes required [12, 13]. The model thus aligns with social capital theory’s claim for enhancement of collaborative capacity through the quality and diversity of linkages both within (horizontal linkages) and external (vertical linkages) to the community [14]. Social capital—‘the social reservoir of trust and reciprocity from which we all need to drink’ [15]—sustains relationships between individuals and different groups in society; it also sustains relationships between organisations.

The team facilitator approach focuses on processes designed to create an environment where cooperation can develop naturally. This ‘holding environment’ provides a ‘safe container...that helps a group work together in ways that lead to agreement’ [16]. The model encourages shared leadership [17]. The facilitating organisation enables others to develop effectiveness, by equipping them with tools, techniques and skills, and by helping them to identify ways in which they can apply these to make improvements in their own activities or to work together with others to make improvements. Working across organisational boundaries is one of the most difficult activities that managers in any type of organisation have to accomplish [18], because collaboration is affected by reciprocal influences between person or group factors and environmental factors [19].

The learning community approach has a learning together process focus, with collaborations profiting from synergies within the group [20]. Members of a learning community develop a shared repertoire of resources through their sustained interaction over time [21]. Learning communities are characterised by three features:

- mutual engagement: members have in common their work and they define their working practices themselves
- formed around a joint enterprise: members share a common mission or objectives, which are continually negotiated
- a shared repertoire, a shared set of words, tools, ways of doing things, which are part of their practice.
Members fit into several categories and assume various roles: a coordinator, who organises events and connects community members; a core group of active participants in forums and meetings who assume some leadership roles; an active group of frequent, but not regular participants; and peripheral participants, members who occasional take part and others who learn from observation [22]. Learning may occur though a mix of formal and informal modes, which can be particularly attractive to people seeking upskilling [23]. Learning interactions, which draw on identity resources as well as knowledge resources, are one way in which social capital is formed and used [14]. There is some evidence to suggest that learning communities promote innovation, risk taking, trying new approaches, and knowledge creation, particularly in business settings [22].

The strategic cooperative approach has a primary focus on processes related to development of long-term shared goals, objectives and outcomes [24]. In this type, the success of the collaboration is determined by its outcomes more than the strength of the relationship and is consistent with models of collaboration drawn from the health field [25]. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy program logic model to some extent demands this kind of focus because of the evaluation framework with its emphasis on outcomes [26].

Successful collaboration

What is ‘successful’?

There is no ‘one size fits all’ process for developing effective collaborations. The process is situational [27]. Evidence for whether collaboration is being successfully promoted can be related to not only to underpinning generic factors (see below) and underpinning site specific factors, but also to indicators of success related to process and structures [28], around which an evaluative framework may be developed [29].
Underpinning generic factors in success

For collaborative success, there are key areas that require ongoing attention. These can be grouped according to six categories: factors associated with 1) the working environment; 2) membership characteristics; 3) process and structure; 4) communication; 5) purpose; and 6) resources [2].

In terms of the environment, research suggests that a key factor for successful collaboration is the history of collaboration within the community. This ‘offers the potential collaborative partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in collaboration and enables them to trust the process’ [2].

In terms of membership characteristics, identifying the right people for the collaboration is essential [30]. This then forms the basis of right relationships that underpin collaboration [25]. Stability and continuity of personnel are necessary components for successful collaboration [31]. Trust between potential collaborators is also essential [32]. The ability to build trust among other organisations requires personal skills and attributes. ‘Staff capacity and competence are critical components at this level. Informal relationships among individuals are often the principal mechanisms through which such relations are maintained’ [10].

In terms of process and structure, the following are important: developing a shared governance structure, agreeing on roles/responsibilities for planning, implementation and funding [33], having a clear workplan with outcomes, timelines and milestones [34] and a learning orientation for adjusting and improving joint programs [33]. A willingness to take some risk may be useful [18, 35]. Evaluating progress and results and building in opportunities for review, reflection and celebration is necessary [34].

Effective communication goes hand in hand with strong relationships. Good communication is essential for negotiating through disagreements and to gain trust, commitment, support and resources from each organisation [18].
In terms of purpose, shared vision provides a basis for working together for mutually beneficial outcomes. It is important to have a clear and agreed set of goals. These are on three levels [18]:

- ‘meta-goals’ for the collaboration as a whole;
- goals that each of the participating organisations is likely to want to achieve for itself through the collaboration;
- goals which individual members of participating organisations may wish to achieve through the collaboration.

What makes these organisational and individual goals so difficult to deal with is that they often form part of hidden agendas which are not brought out into the open. They therefore often cause confusion and tension. However, these organisation- and individual-specific goals often provide the incentive for organisations to participate in the collaboration [18].

The implications are that potential returns from collaboration must be clearly identified ‘and we need to create incentives for collaboration rather than competition’ [15]. Members will then be more willing to compromise on their organisational and individual priorities for the sake of the meta-goals of the collaboration as a whole [18].

Leadership underpins the process of collaborative work and is a foundational resource. Successful collaborative leaders are ‘enabling leaders’ [13], taking a holistic view, sharing power rather than imposing hierarchy. They focus on facilitation and process versus decision making. These leaders are flexible, decentralised, inclusive, proactive. They are able to resolve conflicts constructively, communicate clearly and honestly, facilitate and energise group interaction, nurture leadership in others, and foster sustained commitment [35]. Enabling leadership promotes effective teamwork, which is a product of successful collaboration [33].
**Sustainability**

Sustainability can be defined simply as ‘a state or process which can be maintained indefinitely’ [36]. In the context of community services programs, sustainability refers to the enduring viability of outcomes. Characteristics which maintain outcomes involve [37]:

- integrated approaches
- maximising use of resources (including attracting outside resources)
- merging social and economic goals
- building local capacity
- mobilising the community around priorities.

Sustainability is also associated with ‘resilience of communities in maintaining and enhancing wellbeing in the future’ [38]. Processes also can be sustainable, as much of the knowledge, skill and confidence accumulated through collaborations on one project will be transferable to others [39]. Sustainability of programs then, is not just about the ability of an organisation to maintain a program beyond the life of a funding period, but rather about the maintenance of a number of program, community and organisational attributes. These include the human, social, natural, identity and economic capital attributes associated with the program [40].

**METHODOLOGY**

The research questions posed by this project are as follows:

1. What are the collaboration approaches in Communities for Children sites in rural, regional, remote (including with Indigenous population), and urban metropolitan areas (including with migrant population) across Australia, and the different types of relationships that underpin these?

2. What does the international literature tell us about promoting successful collaboration? What is the role of promoting successful
collaboration within the Communities for Children context with Facilitating Partners as intermediary agencies?

3. In which contexts are the different approaches successful? How are relationships built in different contexts? What are the strengths and challenges of different approaches. What works, and why?

4. What suggestions, recommendations and strategies can be offered for the Communities for Children situation?

A literature search was conducted in order to review recent international research on collaboration.

This project relied primarily on qualitative research methods using a semi-structured interview instrument to elicit responses related to the research questions [41]. A ‘purposeful’ sample was selected based on a representative mix of urban, regional and remote Communities for Children sites [42] with a mix of Indigenous, non-Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse demographic profiles. Project managers from 15 Communities for Children sites were interviewed. Each Australian jurisdiction (except the Australian Capital Territory) was represented in the sample.

Eight interviews were conducted face to face at the sites and a further seven were conducted by telephone. Interviews were transcribed and the texts were placed into an NVIVO™ project for analysis. Key themes that emerged from the data were identified and coded using standard narrative and text analysis techniques [43, 44].

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in this section in response to Research questions 2 and 3 as detailed in the Methodology. A summary of the site types is given first. Subsequent sections present findings as ‘Contextual challenges’, ‘Contextual strengths’, ‘Relationship building in context’; ‘What works and why; and ‘Approaches to collaboration’. 
Site types

Table 1 summarises the types of sites, demographic features and locations where interviews were conducted. Urban Communities for Children sites were based in suburbs of larger metropolitan centres. Rural/regional sites were based in one or multiple regional locations in centres with a population less than about 20,000 people. The remote sites were based in locations with a population less than 10,000 people but with activities scattered across a large geographic area with a diverse mix of Indigenous communities included.

Table 1. Site types, interviews and features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site type</th>
<th>Number of interviews conducted</th>
<th>Demographic features</th>
<th>Site locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Culturally diverse urban communities</td>
<td>Queensland, Victoria, South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changing demographic, limited services for children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/regional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dispersed population in rural and regional centres</td>
<td>Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited cultural diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Large proportion of Indigenous people</td>
<td>Northern Territory, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small and isolated communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited access to services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contextual challenges

To some extent the challenges experienced by project managers were related to the type of site in which they were working. For example, in the remote sites, issues around remoteness came to the fore. In urban sites, the challenges were often described in terms of the cultural diversity or rapidly changing demographic within the site and within the rural sites, the issues related to the dispersed nature of the population.
Challenges associated with remoteness

All four remote project managers reported specific challenges associated with being in a remote context, which were not issues for urban or regional sites. At the fore were issues associated with transport and accessibility. The dispersed nature of small communities within the site meant that costs associated with transport were not adequately covered by funding. For example in some cases accessing a site meant chartering a light aeroplane. In other cases, bringing together a committee for meetings was both costly and strategically difficult to organise. One remote site project manager described the issues:

It's physically difficult to get to the Community Partners for a start because most of our Community Partners are based in [Location] which takes a big chunk of the funding which we provide to them—their travel cost.

To some extent, issues of travel and logistics were also discussed by those in rural/regional sites. However, one of the distinguishing features of all the remote sites was the complexities generated, not just by distance but by the language and cultural diversities within the site. Respondents identified a number of unique issues associated with working among Indigenous communities. These included language barriers, observing cultural protocols, dealing with different work ethic values, and achieving outcomes for children with significant health and education barriers.

Beyond these specific challenges, a number of others associated with the Communities for Children model itself, service provision and working with other stakeholders were described in common with rural/regional and urban sites.

Challenges associated with the Communities for Children model

Some respondents reported specific challenges associated with the Communities for Children model itself. In particular the initial ‘selling’ of the model posed a challenge for Facilitating Partners trying to engage with their communities. For example, one project manager described the challenges of selling the conceptual framework to the community:
The challenge was selling the story for Communities for Children because it was a conceptual framework and we weren’t holding tangible examples of how this might work in the community...

Most respondents reported that following the initial phase, their communities have embraced the model and are working with it reasonably comfortably. However, some in remote sites felt that the model needed to be adapted to suit a particular context. In one case for example the project manager felt that the lack of potential service providers made the model difficult to work with:

But to try to take a model which may work in the city and the plonk it out in the middle of nowhere and expect it to have the same outcomes is incredibly difficult and incredibly different, we do not have the service providers.

Challenges associated with reporting were also described by a number of project managers. The issue was not only reporting to the funding body, but rather gathering in the various reports and matching them to the reporting template:

We are getting reports from so many different people that they have to follow a basic formula so that I can read them all and they also have to take into account that they are doing something unique and training and the numbers are all a little bit different. Sometimes we have trouble actually matching… the headings, [they] don’t always fit.

**Challenges associated with service provision**

A number of project managers reported challenges associated with service provision. These challenges broadly related to two concerns: availability of suitable service providers and community infrastructure; and challenges associated with staff retention and turnover. While each community’s challenges were different, comments like the following, from an urban Facilitating Partner, give an indication of the nature of the service provision problems:

It’s because it’s a public housing community with no local infrastructure, business and industry. And transport is very poor so you have to own a car to get to work and there is no employment in the community.
For project managers in culturally and linguistically diverse sites, finding the right service providers for collaborations was vital. One had worked closely with peer educators in a newly arrived migrant group right from the consultation phase. She also said:

_Right through our consultation process and our planning process we’ve made sure that we’re linking with [Migrant organisation 1] and [Migrant organisation 2] and key core community organisations._

Another said:

_We’ve been developing a collaboration with [place name] Health Centre which has a Vietnamese worker who’s been working there for quite a time, and we met with her and it looks like she will be linking in with our mobile supported playgroup strategy, and we will through that develop a playgroup which targets Vietnamese._

As noted earlier, those working in remote sites also had difficulty accessing service providers who had the capacity to work in remote contexts. The second challenge relating to human resources was noted by all site types. For some sites, maintaining continuity in staffing was an ongoing challenge. For others, finding the right person to fill a role was the challenge.

**Challenges of working together**

The last challenge relates directly to collaboration. Many respondents reported some difficulties associated with trying to work together collaboratively, particularly with Community Partners. These difficulties can be related to key underpinning factors for collaborative success (see page 7) and possibly especially to differing agendas that may exist below the surface, and which may account for what some respondents termed personality issues.

Some respondents described how they worked hard at building relationships only to face a competitive tendering process which tended to break down those relationships. For one respondent, this resulted in some community resentment:
We spent the implementation phase building partnerships and relationships and we had come great strides and then we hit the sub-contracting phase where we had to pit the community against each other for funding and that took a lot of relationship mending and I think some of those were still feeling the after effects and there were some feelings of resentment in the community.

Beyond this initial phase, some respondents reported a range of other challenges. One of these related to building accountability processes into the Facilitating Partner-Community Partner relationship. That is, some project managers had to spend considerable energy ensuring that agreed outcomes were being achieved in accordance with contracts, that funds were being spent appropriately and that basic administrative requirements were being met. A second challenge related to the organisational culture and values differences between Community Partners and Facilitating Partners. In one site which included Indigenous communities, the project manager said:

We are dealing with a lot of councils who are based in the community and that has its own issues in that they aren’t necessarily the people who have the knowledge of the early childhood. Their priorities are more about community services as far as roads and those sorts of things.

This project manager addressed the issue by drawing representatives of communities together for learning sessions:

We’ve had all the Community Partners... and representatives from each community come together and listen and learn, look at what we’ve been doing, some of the resources ... They don’t often get to talk to each other and see what other communities are doing. This is a way that everyone learns from each other.

For others, reconciling the differences in the ways that different organisations work together took considerable effort.

**Contextual strengths**

It is important to acknowledge that while project managers readily described the challenges faced at their sites, they also were able to identify some of the contextual strengths of their Communities for Children project. These strengths are
presented in this section in terms of sustainability and Facilitating Partners having an established presence in their communities. Both of these strengths have links to factors that contribute to the way relationships are built (see page 7) and ‘what works’ in collaborative endeavours (see page 7).

**Sustainability**

It was evident from several of the interviews conducted, that sustainability was a concern to project managers. They were concerned that when Communities for Children as a program concluded, that activities, structures and community strategies for ensuring ongoing outcomes for children would remain. Many spoke about the underpinning nature of the local Communities for Children structure to help achieve this. For some, such as the following Facilitating Partner, it meant ensuring that those who were going to be there beyond the Communities for Children funding, would be there to carry the strategies developed onward.

_We have agreed, in the interests of sustainability, that the [Local Council] will be the lead agency, because long term, they’re the ones that are going to be around when we’re not._

For others, sustainability was being achieved through the collaborative efforts of service providers (both Facilitating Partners and Community Partners) coming together. Some felt that these collaborative networks provided ongoing sustainability for their site.

_In those relationships we see ourselves as one of many stakeholders in those activities and especially when we are talking about sustainability we want to build those partnerships and collaborative arrangements around the activities with other Community Partners, agencies, councils and government agencies._

These comments reflect a view that one of the project manager’s roles is to facilitate the networks and structures that allow for long-lasting and sustainable partnerships to take root within the community.
The advantage of having an established presence

Some respondents made comment about the significance of having a pre-existing relationship with their community—either as an organisation or as an individual. Where an organisation had an established credibility, or the project manager had pre-existing established relationships, respondents felt that this placed the Communities for Children site in a strong position to facilitate the kinds of connections described above. One comment exemplifies this view:

...recognising that I used to work out here so the issue for me—someone who was reasonably well known in this area—was that you couldn’t come back and think that you could do this and not make sure that everyone knows what’s going on and not consult properly because you’d be in big trouble.

Conversely, others saw a challenge for those organisations that came in new to a site. For them, building up ‘brand recognition’ or respect within the community was a major hurdle. The following comment reflects the view of a project manager of an organisation in that position:

They are very distrusting of the whole process and this again comes back to individuals... So I guess what I have been trying to do on another level is to boost the profile of [Facilitating Partner]... I’m not sure how we can go ahead.

Relationship building in context

Respondents reported a number of reasons for establishing and building relationships within their contexts. The purpose for relationship development arises from the context. Respondents described the function of relationship formation in several, overlapping ways. The following headings should not be taken as discrete functions of relationship building but rather as part of the matrix which contributes to collaborations.

Working together to generate solutions

It was evident from responses that regardless of the site location or demographic factors associated with the site, one of the key reasons for building relationships was to overcome problems and concurrently to generate solutions.
One Facilitating Partner recognised that within her context the work of community capacity building is impossible without ‘establishing good relationships’.

Without establishing good relationships we can’t do anything in this community. …we saw this as an opportunity to work together and work differently.

**Working together to access resources**

One of the outcomes of ‘generating solutions’ is accessing resources. In this context, the solutions generated may lead to release of resources to the community that were not previously available. Alternatively the resources released may arise as a direct consequence of the relationships formed and the engagement of other community stakeholders in the process of community building—as suggested by the following respondent.

…I can probably solve a lot of the problems and I will try and find those resources and it will be through [community service club] or schools or chambers of commerce—I will source out what’s out there in the community. And I think that’s why we’ve got good relationships because we have used them.

**Creating a trusting, cooperative environment**

Some respondents described how building a trusting, cooperative environment was a prerequisite for capacity building within their site. Strong relationships with community stakeholders were seen as foundational for this to occur—something that one Facilitating Partner described in terms of intentional ‘nurturing’.

There is a lot of nurturing and then we had to almost put in… and that’s been a big challenge to see Communities for Children not as a competition for funding but getting the baseline and provide that integrated response.

Another respondent described this ‘environment’ arising out of the engagement that occurs as a result of relationships formed—a ‘hook’ that gives stakeholders a reason to work together:

…but by using local people without [bachelor] degrees we have created an environment where the community can trust us so that’s a real hook that we’ve tried to build on.
This environment allows seeds of sustainability to be sown, as stakeholders who are going to be there beyond the Communities for Children funding acquire the skills and experience to carry the strategies developed onward.

**Building sustainability**

A fourth function of the relationship building process identified in the data relates to sustainability. That is, the ‘partnerships and collaborative arrangements’ that are formed out of relationships with stakeholders are not only developed for the immediate outcomes of activities created under Communities for Children, they are developed in part because of a desire to see the partnerships produce outcomes into the longer term.

Many project managers spoke of the important role their committees play in the relationship building process and the connection with sustainability. One said:

> It’s improved communication within the town’s early childhood services. Everyone has said that even if Communities for Children finishes, [people on the committee] at the local level are committed to working together and maintaining that collaboration.

Another said:

> As the project moves forward it’s very much the communities are developing their own drive. Some more so than others. [For example] I know without a doubt that the [place name] early childhood committee will go on now even if am not involved.

One respondent saw his role as a ‘facilitator’ of this process:

> When we are talking about sustainability we want to build those partnerships and collaborative arrangements around the activities with other Community Partners, agencies, councils and government agencies because... because otherwise it’s just not sustainable and we can look at those arrangements and we see ourselves as being able to facilitate, they are reciprocal... that we have to have a number of arrangements.
Fostering a learning environment

A final function of relationship formation was described by Facilitating Partners in terms of fostering a learning environment. Part of this is about building a common understanding or common language so that information can be effectively exchanged.

...coming together with a common language and a common understanding and that comes through with a lot of relationship building skills.

It does however go beyond this. One respondent suggested that this environment was like a ‘culture’, helping to define the way that organisations work together to deliver services for families and children:

They are building a culture. This is the way that we work, this is the way we’re going to engage with families, this is the way we going to get better outcomes for our services and so they are doing it naturally. And it is happening through the practice reflection and that is with the Community Partners. And that conversation is happening about community capacity building. ...and it’s great to see the momentum happening and just talking, getting them together, having an afternoon tea before they meet, they get together for that informal chat for that relationship.

What works and why

The 2006 ARACY paper titled ‘Effective Collaboration’[33] identifies five clusters of success factors. These are summarised as 1) trust and a learning orientation; 2) leadership and agreement on common objectives; 3) clear roles and responsibilities; 4) teamwork and sharing; and 5) building partnerships. This research posed these factors to respondents, asking them to comment on their importance and also to add to the list. Recognising that success is a particularly slippery term, respondents were allowed to define it according to their own perceptions. Similarly no attempts were made to constrain respondents’ perceptions about what defined collaboration.

Table 1 shows the factors of successful collaboration identified by respondents together with an indication of the priority given to those elements (in terms of
The table also shows the significance of each factor within each site type. Overall, the table shows that approximately one quarter of the interview content in each site focused on key elements of collaboration.

### Table 2. Factors of successful collaboration within Communities for Children sites

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Regional</th>
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<td>Trust</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Vision, objectives and leadership</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Teamwork</td>
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<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples and explanation of factors are shown in the sections that follow. Headings follow in order of priority based on Table 2. It should be noted that respondents were specifically asked about factors that contributed to effective collaboration, rather than factors associated with the outcomes of collaboration. These then should be read as underpinning factors.

### Relationships

Respondents described the foundations of collaboration not in terms of partnerships but rather in terms of relationships. That is, the formation of collaborative partnerships was dependent on the foundation of relationships. One respondent summed up her thoughts on this:
...relationship building is probably the biggest thing that we have done and done very well and I think that is our foundation...

Strategies used by Facilitating Partners to promote collaboration include building on existing organisational and personal relationships, and working with pre-existing networks and programs. Others built strategies into their service delivery plans:

We have processes for consultation around the service delivery plans each financial year. I know a lot of the Communities for Children sites have developed a plan over the next four years but a lot of our plan is based on action research so we develop a service delivery plan yearly for that reason. So we have those consultation processes, we have what we call practice reflection groups where different partners come together and reflect on their own practices and how they are running their own activities. They found great value in that.

Within collaborative partnerships the purpose of relationship formation was described in a number of ways. These have been detailed in the section ‘Relationship building in context’ on page 18.

Trust

Relationships and trust were frequently described together within the same coding context. In some cases, several factors were combined, as was the case with the following respondent:

I should reiterate that what makes the strategies work is relationships and communication, probably common vision, and trust.

Trust was variously described in terms of friendship, honesty, a willingness to share information, and building an environment where people can comfortably work with each other. One project manager described trust in the context of professional respect:

What’s worked well has been about doing with people. Getting our hands dirty and being a part of the program. I want to help out, I want to be part of it. This builds up the trust. Recognising that the Community Partners are the experts in delivering services, and respecting them, that they’ve been given this program for a reason.
This sort of support can also be a strategy aimed at restoring trust if this is damaged: as one project manager said:

Support what other organisations are doing, attend their community events, be a very visible presence. Share the work.

Yet another factor associated with trust was the length of time the relationships were in place. One Facilitating Partner described the importance of the ‘long-standing relationship’ with the community as an underpinning component of the trust within the site.

They have a long-standing relationship with the community and they have an elected member on the committee, and the people working on the community for children project are long-term born and bred locals and dedicated to the community. In that particular instance… those factors have combined to be incredibly effective and the trust that they already have with the committee members has been fantastic in forming… and delivering the activities on the ground.

Vision, goals and objectives

While some respondents discussed the importance of a shared vision for ‘zero to fives’ as a factor that contributed to motivation for collaboration, the way this was interpreted by stakeholders within communities was sometimes at odds with the understanding of the Facilitating Partner.

Determining clear objectives again comes down to I suppose a language barrier because we were talking about the same objectives at the beginning in Communities for Children but our understanding of those objectives were slightly different and integration for some people was very different from others… I think determining the clear objectives was an imperative when you are looking at collaboration.

Another said:

We have found that each partner has something of their own particular focus in terms of the way they operate while at the same time their conceptual understanding of Communities for Children varies depending on which ‘lens’ has been developed within their organisation—usually relating to what they see as their core business.
In a strategy to address this, one project manager said:

We’ve conducted a number of focus workshops. Topics have so far included an Introduction to Communities for Children, Facilitating Holistic Seamless Services, What must we Understand about Early Childhood? and Community Capacity Building. In these interactive workshops we have attempted to integrate theory with practice basically providing staff, line managers and volunteers working for Community Partners with a rationale and a vision of what we are attempting to develop as well as engage in team building. Regular site staff meetings then work at how each of the activities can best work together to improve outcomes for children. This can be achieved as we have co-located most staff at our [Parenting skills] hub. [Yes, there is a] degree of difficulty in encouraging diverse groups to work together … but we are hopeful that in the long term many more families will be reached through this exercise.

Another strategy was simply to approach the problem with patience and method: ‘We just work through these difficulties step by step,’ said one.

Beyond this it is clear that some Facilitating Partners see their role more than just being part of the shared vision for zero to fives but rather in actively shaping the vision. One respondent described this in terms of ‘holding the big picture’:

I can hold the big picture. I’m very fortunate Communities for Children has... allowed me to get together with people with some very good ideas. Meeting with people to trust in their vision. To work with them and keep them focused, it’s about being creative and flexible.

For some the focus of this vision building process was noted in the early stages of the program when the concept was new and emerging. As Facilitating Partners, project managers had a key role to play in informing the community stakeholders about the model, and providing a role as ‘enabling leaders’ to help facilitate this.

Leadership

Leadership was discussed mostly in the context of teamwork (see below). One respondent described the leadership role as ‘knitting the team together’. Another said: ‘[You have to] be a connector. Be able to identify potential sites for collaborative work, I guess.’ And another: ‘It’s relationship focused. I don’t direct. I
work with people, I barely see myself as a manager. I am constantly learning.' These views are compatible with the ‘enabling leadership’ model recommended in the literature [13].

Another project manager said that modelling how to be effective collaborative partners was an important aspect of the leadership role. One project manager, while recognising that her leadership role had been critical in realizing some aspects of the program, said that leadership came not from the Facilitating Partner but ‘from the committee as a whole’.

**Learning**

Respondents in this research linked learning with relationship building. One regional site project manager described this in terms of ‘actively learning with the Community Partners’:

> It’s about being there and actively learning with the Community Partners about how these programs are running or how they are working in the community without being imposing—but there to support them and that communication is vital, that ongoing nurturing of relationships is vital there.

The nature of the learning that underpinned relationships varied from site to site. In one case it was strategically embedded into the objectives of the Facilitating Partner. In other cases it was less formalised though still intentional. And in other cases still, it was more incidental, though still significant. An example of the less formal approaches to learning was given by a project manager of a regional site, who described it as ‘learn as you go’:

> The learning orientation has been there with us, with all the people that we worked with. This has worked well for us. The numerous discussions at the committee, the numerous discussions within the organisations, everything is learn as you go, and determine what works and doesn’t work, how can we fine-tune and improve. The willingness to learn is crucial. The process is about listening and trying to understand what is important for the other partners, and to value and respect and appreciate that.
Others used a blend of formal and informal approaches. One said:

We held an open day. We wanted to open a discussion about the foundations framework and we had 68 people turn out. It was very informal. We had physiotherapists, speech therapists, we had [universities and further education people], [a national early childhood organisation], practitioners, parents, and they were really interested in children zero to three years. People fed in their knowledge and expertise and thoughts … how these can move forward into practice.

Another project manager used ‘strategy groups’ as a means of relationship building and professional development for Community Partners.

We run strategy groups. Meetings of six or seven people who fit under one strategy. The focus is how can we collectively work together, within the Communities for Children model and one of the priority areas. The agenda is set by us as the Facilitating Partner, in consultation. There’s a focus to each meeting, and I or the project coordinator would probably chair the meeting. But it’s not formalised. And sometimes they go a bit sideways in the discussion that comes out of it, but it’s always very valuable. There’s strength in the blend of formal and informal. The feedback we got from last year was, they were getting value in those meetings.

And for others the learning was almost incidental: ‘There is always cross-fertilisation going when you are connecting with a range of people around a number of issues.’

The research shows that the learning that underpins collaborative activities was the result of a combination of intentional actions initiated by the Facilitating Partner in promoting a learning environment and the incidental learning activity that occurred in the process of developing partnerships.

**Commitment**

Commitment was identified as a separate factor that contributed to effectiveness of collaboration. It was described in various ways and associated with several other ideas relating to the relationship in collaborative activities: ‘Commitment and passion’; ‘commitment and motivation’; ‘commitment and support’; ‘commitment for the long term’; ‘commitment on paper and in words’; ‘commitment to working together’; and ‘commitment to ideals and outcomes of Communities for Children’.
Each phrase noted came from a different project manager and the variety may suggest that commitment is perceived both notionally and pragmatically. That is, project managers were looking for commitment to Communities for Children activities in both word and deed—recognising the need for both verbal assent to the idea of working together, but backing it up in practical terms.

**Communication**

Facilitating Partners identified communication as a factor contributing to effective collaboration at their sites. They treated communication as an integral part of the relationship building process. This is implied in the following comment:

> Our Community Partners have been involved with Communities for Children since the consultation phase. Working closely with them, regular meetings, good relationships, does promote effective collaboration. It’s very much about good relationships and good communication.

In response to questions about key elements of collaboration, respondents tended to discuss communication generically, rather than give it a specific form. However, all respondents discussed various forms of communication within the context of collaborative activities. These forms included both formal and informal methods: meetings, consultations, networking, forums, telephone calls, newsletters, emails, chats and conversations.
Table 3 summarises these by site type. In both regional and remote sites, meetings were the predominant form of communication, while in urban sites, forums and workshops were most frequently cited.
Table 3. Forms of communication used by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication form</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums and workshops</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chats and conversations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brokering

Some respondents explicitly described their Facilitating Partner role as collaboration brokers. That is, they saw themselves as key stakeholders in partnership processes who facilitated connections, drew together resources, initiated cooperative strategies, and initiated dialogue between Community Partners. In this, they saw a clear distinction between their role and the role of Community Partners. For example, one respondent described how she intentionally seeks out opportunities to promote collaborations.

*I think that part of my role as Facilitating Partner is to promote the communication between the service providers. ...Community Partners see it as an add-on to their role and outside their normal role and sometimes people aren’t quite so comfortable in doing that whereas it is part of the Facilitating Partner’s role to promote collaboration between organisations and to get them working more effectively as a system. I go out and seek these opportunities because I want them to work together because that’s part of our model.*

Another respondent described her brokering role as providing an entrée for service providers to engage with their communities:
…they are wanting to look at the child safe community and they want to have every single household having a fire alarm and that’s in an existing… project that [the State] Fire and Rescue service have, … so [we are] facilitating that and bringing those [groups] together where they are doing something with existing resources and trying to provide that entrée into communities.

Another example came from an urban community which included Indigenous families:

We brought people together and uncovered the opportunity [for them] to work collaboratively. A simple example would be the [place name] Elders Sewing circle. Another group, our [early literacy] program, said, we have a bunch of sewing machines that you can use if you like. So our Indigenous ladies, the Indigenous Elders, are now doing the bags for the reading kits for the whole region. We have been a broker of collaborative processes. Seeing where there are opportunities to bring people together, where those collaborative activities might emerge.

While most respondents who described the underpinning importance of brokerage roles did so in terms of their relationships at a community level—between non-government organisations, local government bodies, community groups, businesses and other service providers—a small number alluded to another role that they had. This role involved brokering between government bodies (at three levels), peak bodies, senior academics and other national organisations with the stakeholders of the site. In one instance, a project manager described how a formal arrangement between two levels of government and her Communities for Children was established:

The [Local] Council, when we first started felt the need to come along with us on this journey because they didn’t have information on this area… so they were keen to come on board and we were assigned their social planner [for] three days a week and did interviews with everyone we could talk to… and we employed eight people and we have continued that partnership through the [State Department Name], so the [Local Council], Communities for Children and [State Department Name] have a formal arrangement.
How’d you know who to go to when you first of thought about this?

As I do with most of my jobs I start talking to people, make lots of appointments. I don’t do a lot until I build up a picture. The [Local] Council opened up a lot of doors that I probably wouldn’t have got through on my own. I initiated that contact with them and I encouraged them to come along.

Brokerage then, in many cases, underpins the collaborative activities and arrangements within the Communities for Children model. The brokering that occurs happens at the initiation of the project manager and extends ‘upward’ to organisations outside the site, and ‘horizontally’ to organisations within the community. This observation concurs with findings of a previous ARACY paper on capacity building conducted by Millar and Guenther in 2007 [11].

**Teamwork**

Teamwork was described by respondents more as a product of collaboration than a necessary prerequisite. It was particularly important for facilitating partners in rural and regional sites where the geographically dispersed nature of the site required a high degree of coordination and cooperation in order to effectively bring stakeholders together. One respondent suggested that in order for collaboration to be effective, Facilitating Partners need to provide leadership to ensure that teamwork happens:

> You need to be able to have a pragmatic view but I think [collaboration] needs to be enhanced in a broader environment so if you like what teamwork is about is putting together all of these people that have these points of view and what leadership does is bring together those points of view.

Others described the importance of the ‘team’ almost incidentally with an apparent assumption that teamwork will happen within a team. When teamwork develops problems, strategies usually involve communication:

> Last year we paid for an external facilitator to come in and do a session [for Facilitating Partner and partner organisations] on what were the achievements for the year and what wasn’t working and what are the challenges we need to address.
Other factors contributing to effective collaboration

The foregoing factors discussed were identified by more than half of the 15 respondents. Table 2 identifies a number of other factors that respondents discussed, which are worthy of further explanation.

The importance of clear roles and responsibilities (identified in the earlier ‘Effective Collaboration’ paper) was discussed by seven of the 15 respondents in terms of the need for each stakeholder to act out their part in the implementation of the Communities for Children strategy within the site. Flexibility was a significant factor for five of the 15 stakeholders. This was described in terms of funding, organisational adaptability and creativity, service delivery and acceptance of a variety of personalities within the stakeholder group. Four respondents spoke about the need to first build an environment in which collaboration could take place. One said it was important to be willing to take some risk.

*The Facilitating Partner needs not to be afraid to take more risk ...You’re working with small-time organisations that need to grow. Things cannot grow if you’re scared to take risks.*

The prerequisite importance of partnerships (identified in the earlier ‘Effective Collaboration’ paper) was only discussed by two project managers. Respondents tended to describe partnerships as a consequence of relationship building processes in the same breath as collaborations—that is, they may have found it difficult to differentiate between the two. One response is indicative of this:

*That has led to all kinds of spin-offs but the key to the strength of that collaboration—that partnership—has been the development of a strong relationship with the [Local] Council.*

Approaches to collaboration

Consistent with models of collaboration identified in the literature, a range of approaches to collaboration were observed following the four processes on which the models are based. The descriptions shown in Table 4 should not be seen as discrete or unique to a particular site.
Rather, they should be seen as representative of emphases observed at the sites where interviews took place. It should be also noted that the approaches to collaboration described below do not directly describe the collaborative work carried out at the site. What they do show is how sites develop processes that lead to collaborative work.

Table 4. Approaches to collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Site types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural/ regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning community</td>
<td>Focus on learning together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource broker</td>
<td>Focus on accessing resources, meeting community needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team facilitator</td>
<td>Focus on creating an environment where cooperation can develop naturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic cooperative</td>
<td>Focus on shared goals, objectives and outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘approaches’ summarised in the table above are offered tentatively, based in part on the empirical evidence of the data and on the literature reviewed earlier in this paper (see page 2). In most cases the sites represented in this research demonstrate a mix of two or three of the approaches listed, but the examples given under each section below show the dominant characteristics associated with the model.
Learning community

Two of the sites examined in this research described their collaborative efforts in terms of a ‘learning community’ in which the Facilitating Partner (FP) acted to bring together shared knowledge and understanding both from within the site among Community Partners (CPs) and from outside the site from a range of government, academic and other Communities for Children stakeholders, including Facilitating Partners from other sites.

Both sites were in an urban context. In both cases, the Facilitating Partners had ready access to a wide array of strategic knowledge resources and were well connected with a broad ‘community of practice’ [21] both within their community and outside their site. The following quote demonstrates the passion for this kind of learning community and the extent of the relationships of the community: from government to universities, to the Committee, peak bodies and boards of other NGOs:
I think it gives practitioners and especially the committee an opportunity to challenge their thinking... and as I said we’ve had some very positive examples, a State government department, who have said 'we have actually changed our core business because of Communities for Children'. They have said that their priorities should be focusing on this area rather than focusing on a different area. Some of the other collaborations I suppose [emerge] from the Committee and from the early things where we have been invited to sit on other boards and I think that has been really exciting. We were invited to sit on the panel for [Peak Body]... We are getting a lot [of enquiries] from the University asking us to speak to the students.

The collaborative work described above is strongly focused on building capacity through shared knowledge. Because of the concentration of available knowledge resources, this approach to collaboration may be better suited to urban contexts—though it should not exclude others. Within this model the Local Evaluator may play a key role as a critical advisor or as a knowledge broker to facilitate the connections required.

**Resource broker**

Seven of the 15 sites exhibited characteristics of what we describe as a resource broker. That is, they collaborated with both Community Partners and/or key external organisations to access and build resources for their sites. A common approach was to partner with a local government body with a pre-existent and well-developed infrastructure to draw on. The model was used effectively in all types of sites, though in the urban sites the connections to local government were stronger. The approach was applied to sites with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Indigenous communities. One of the key roles of the Facilitating Partner in this model was to facilitate the critical ‘vertical and horizontal linkages’ [11] to bridge the gap between external resources and local communities. In some cases—though not all—there were formalised relationships that underpinned this facilitation.
An example of the formalised collaborative relationship is given by an urban site project manager:

And so [the Council] were keen to come on board and we were assigned their social planner for about three days a week and did interviews with everyone we could talk to and he was also part of the community research program social study and we employed eight people and we have continued that partnership through the [State government department] so the... Council, Communities for Children and [State government department] have a formal arrangement. We’ve been working with consultants to do interviews with [Australian Government department], state governments and what we are doing around the NGO interviews. We’ll have a big workshop in March. So it’s very much a formal relationship.

One other aspect of this model is that that Facilitating Partner tends to become recognised as the local expert in their field. They become the central point of contact for both local communities and government agencies, because of their extensive use of linkages both vertically and horizontally.
Team facilitator

Three sites demonstrated a ‘team facilitator’ approach—two were in regional sites and one was in an urban site. The mechanisms in each site were quite different but the common thread with all of the sites was that the locus of collaborative work was ‘the team’. That is, while in other approaches the Facilitating Partner drives the processes of collaboration, in the team facilitator approach, the Facilitating Partner coordinates the process and relies on the collective team—which may include a combination of Community Partners, the community consultative committee and sub-committees along with the Facilitating Partner organisation—to do the collaborative work. In this model, the Facilitating Partner coordinates the team players and creates an environment in which collaboration can take place. The diagram below is an attempt to represent this model.
In one regional site for example, the project manager described how she gathered together the information derived from each community represented at the site, which stretched across several hundred kilometres of the state, through a series of town-based early childhood sub-committees, developing a network that contributed ideas and resources to enable the community consultative committee for the site to pool those resources and work together cooperatively for the site as a whole. This demonstrates an ‘enabling leadership’ style [13] that fits this approach.

The other important element of this approach is that it focuses on creating the right conditions—or climate—in which collaboration can occur. In this way the Facilitating Partner creates spaces and places for collaboration within the team to develop naturally. For example, one urban site project manager described the process of ‘providing forums’ for this to occur:

> I think the other thing that has been clear in this site is providing forums for collaboration to occur. All of that opportunity of bringing people together. In this site there have been forums... and it is a lot of energy. However it’s been a really positive [experience]... that’s where a lot of that collaborative work has emerged from. It’s about creating that climate for that to happen.

For this approach to work effectively the team must have a propensity to work and cooperate together. It relies on the goodwill of the stakeholders involved and may be heavily dependent on strong relationships and trust between the Facilitating Partner and the community stakeholders. In one site where this approach was being used the dynamics of the site were in a state of flux and it was evident that new stakeholders entering into the site did not have the same sense of goodwill that existed previously. This changing context may suggest that a changed approach for that site will be required for collaborative work to continue.

**Strategic cooperative**

Three sites demonstrated characteristics following what could be described in terms of a strategic cooperative approach. The focus of their effort was on achieving outcomes based on shared objectives.
This differs from the resource broker approach, which is more focused on meeting needs and providing resources. It also diverges from that approach because it primarily draws on the collective strengths of the site rather than on external resources. It was identified only in regional and remote sites. The reason for this may be that access to external resources at these sites was difficult because of fewer available external resources. In each site where this approach was observed, the Facilitating Partner took a strong directive leadership role. The diagram below attempts to represent this approach.

A collaborative strategic cooperative

In one of the sites the Facilitating Partner had some difficulty achieving the expected results despite the direction it was providing. This was attributed in part to a lack of choice of available local resources and partly to a perceived problem of acceptance of the ‘brand’ of the Facilitating Partner organisation, which had only recently moved into the area to work. The project manager at this site was considering trying a different approach to collaboration.
In the sites where the approach was working well, the Facilitating Partner and/or project manager had an established presence at the site and the Community Partners were mostly working well with the organisation to achieve the shared goals that they had agreed to. This perception is expressed by one of the remote site project managers:

You have to have a common thread or a common objective. The common thing here is children zero to five. These people tend to want to collaborate more because they are focusing in this instance on the child and outcomes for children rather than what happens to individuals or organisations.

While the emphasis at these sites is on strategic cooperation based on shared objectives aimed at achieving outcomes, this does not imply that other sites did not aim to achieve outcomes. Rather, the emphasis in this approach is more about the collaborative processes needed to achieve outcomes and may be determined to some extent by the lack of choice of available external resources.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The international literature tells us that successful collaboration is believed to result in outcomes that are more integrated and holistic, and therefore more sustainable [4-6]. As intermediary agencies, Facilitating Partners’ role in promoting successful collaboration within the Communities for Children context is critical to the achievement of program outcomes. They are the nexus for ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ project linkages with government agencies and community organisations [11]. These linkages are the circulatory system of the program: resources, information and learning are disseminated through them, nourishing and sustaining the program.

Facilitating Partners’ interpretation of the collaborative role

Collaboration is viewed by Facilitating Partners in a very fluid and generic sense. They see collaboration as a mix of processes (e.g. relationship formation, building trust, communication and commitment, developing vision) and practices (e.g. teamwork, learning together, brokering).
Their view is one which demonstrates an understanding that collaboration includes coordination, cooperation and networking, rather than being a higher order of one of these, or a discrete practice. Consistent with the definition cited from the literature, they see collaboration in terms of relationship [2].

Comments by respondents in this research reflect a view that one of the project manager’s roles is to facilitate the networks and structures that allow for long-lasting and sustainable partnerships to take root within the community [37]. Many respondents believe that sustainability is being achieved in their sites through the collaborative efforts of Facilitating Partners and Community Partners coming together in service provision, and the resulting collaborative networks. They recognise the importance of both processes and structures [9]. This indicates a validation of the Facilitating Partner role of promoting successful collaboration.

The Facilitating Partners who were respondents in this research presented views of collaboration approaches and underpinning relationships that reveal the personal, creative and innovative ways in which the Communities for Children model can be interpreted and put to work. In research for a previous ARACY paper [11] many Facilitating and Community Partners described the value of the Communities for Children model in terms of its flexibility and the consequent freedom to attempt service delivery in innovative ways. Respondents in the present research confirm that the flexibility of the intermediary agency role allows for collaborative approaches tailored to wide ranging contexts [27-29].

**Facilitating Partners: Promoting successful collaboration**

On page 7 we outlined from the international literature six categories of factors related to promoting successful collaboration. These are factors associated with 1) the working environment; 2) membership characteristics; 3) process and structure; 4) communication; 5) purpose; and 6) resources [2].
To what extent are Facilitating Partners applying strategies to promote successful collaboration? And in what ways are they overcoming the challenges they have identified?

The working environment presents special challenges for remote sites and for some rural/regional ones. Remote sites find that, because of distance and cost, bringing together committees for meetings can be a challenge, but issues of travel and logistics are also raised by respondents in rural/regional sites. While it is not always possible to completely neutralise the impact of these challenges, Facilitating Partners in regional and remote sites tend to work together with other local service providers to share the costs of transport. Whereas networking between Facilitating Partners in urban sites is sometimes achieved through physical meetings, in remote sites Facilitating Partners share ideas and information using telephone conferencing and emails.

Membership characteristics also present challenges for remote sites, but all site types have problems with staff retention and turnover which are to an extent beyond project managers’ control. In ethnically diverse sites, including those with newly arrived migrants, project managers are having some success at identifying and recruiting appropriate community people for collaborations [30].

Membership factors are underpinned by trust, seen as a prerequisite for capacity building within sites [32]. Trust can be undermined by competitive tendering processes. Rebuilding and restoring trust requires intentional action on the part of project managers. Facilitating Partners report that they do this by actively engaging with Community Partners: listening, being open and honest, compromising, negotiating and working together to find mutually satisfying solutions to problems.

It should be noted that not all project managers are successful in doing this and this requires them to find alternative strategies to build capacity. The longstanding commitment by a Facilitating Partner appears to help when trust needs to be rebuilt.

As Table 2 shows (see page 23), trust, recognised as important in all sites, is given a relatively higher priority in remote and regional/rural ones.
Process and structure factors involve governance. In terms of processes, Facilitating Partners have a responsibility to see that Community Partners comply with reporting and financial accountability [33, 34]. Where problems arise, the Facilitating Partner has to address these with appropriate strategies linked to relationship building: ‘working through... step by step’, and providing additional administrative support.

In some cases where this fails to achieve the desired results, it becomes necessary to sever ties (and funding) with the organisations. In terms of governance structures Facilitating Partners describe various approaches, most of which rely on an active Consultative Committee to ensure that the processes described above are carried out transparently and with integrity. Others rely more heavily on the management structures of the Facilitating Partner, though there may be suggestions that an over-reliance on the directions of this organisation may hinder the site’s ability to effectively collaborate because it is seen more as a funder and manager than an equal partner. It is clear however that governance structures and processes are determined to a large extent by the organisational ethos and values of the Facilitating Partner.

Another essential factor in the process and structure group is a learning orientation [33]. This is a priority for some—but certainly not all—Facilitating Partners in the processes of collaboration. It is linked to relationship building. Facilitating Partners are using a number of strategies to promote a learning orientation. These are usually a blend of formal and informal. In one site, ‘strategy groups’ have proved popular and effective. In others it is evident that the locus of learning is within the joint meetings of Community Partners and the Facilitating Partners. In others, the learning orientation is directed ‘upwards’ ensuring that learnings are shared at peak body, academic and government agency levels. Again, the approach depends to a large extent on the project manager and the ethos and values of the Facilitating Partner.

Respondents recognise the role of communication [18] as integral to the relationship building process and as a factor contributing to effective collaboration.

Purpose factors, including a clear and agreed set of goals, rank highly among elements of effective collaboration identified by respondents, where these are frequently linked with leadership. As Facilitating Partners, project managers are
aware of their key role in representing the Communities for Children vision to community stakeholders, and as ‘enabling leaders’ to help realize the vision [13]. Sometimes the vision as interpreted by stakeholders within communities may be at odds with the understanding of the Facilitating Partner.

This may be due to cultural or semantic differences in community responses to terms and values associated with the vision and its goals. Bringing people together for information sessions and workshops is seen as a useful strategy to address such issues. Communication (see above) is perceived as offering the way to ‘a common language and a common understanding’ of ‘the way that we work … the way we’re going to engage with families … the way we going to get better outcomes’.

Resource factors include leadership [13, 33], seen as inseparable from teamwork [33]. Facilitating Partners see themselves as ‘knitting the team together’, being ‘connectors’. Leadership is closely involved with brokering [10], which underpins the collaborative activities and arrangements within the Communities for Children model. This especially applies to the ‘horizontal’ brokering with community organisations, where, as one project manager said, the Facilitating Partner can be a ‘broker of collaborative processes’.

Overall, Facilitating Partners have been shown to be keenly aware of the factors that contribute to successful collaboration, and of the need to devise strategies to promote these.

**Implications of the research**

A number of implications emerge from the findings of the research undertaken here. These are summarised under seven headings below.

**Implication 1: Contextual variables determine success**

Contextual variables determine to a large extent the success or otherwise of the collaborations (all other things being equal). Quite clearly, the expectations of achievement for remote, regional and urban sites will be qualitatively and quantitatively different. For example in some remote sites communication (because of language and infrastructure constraints) and transport (because of cost or wet
season accessibility) make collaborations that depend on frequent and regular contact between Community Partners and the Facilitating Partner impossible.

While learning occurs at a variety of levels in remote sites, promoting a ‘learning community’ approach (as described here) in a remote context is not possible because of the limited access to external knowledge resources. Similarly, adopting a brokering approach that depends on ties to a large local government body would not work, because in remote sites, such bodies do not exist. Different contexts therefore call for tailored approaches to collaboration which over time may change.

**Implication 2: Remote and regional sites require greater flexibility**

There are resource implications (particularly for remote sites) that need to be taken into account more fully if collaborations based on a Communities for Children model are to be replicated into the future. The model should recognise that remote and regional sites’ ability to access appropriate knowledge, infrastructure and human resources will be far more limited than in urban sites. Put simply, funding applied to remote and regional contexts, needs to take this into account, either a) by offering a more flexible arrangement (e.g. allowing the Facilitating Partner to have an increased proportion of the site’s funding) or b) by applying additional funding to ensure that external resources are accessible.

**Implication 3: Established links are an advantage**

There may be benefits in ensuring that Facilitating Partners in the model have pre-existent links with the community. While not wanting to proscribe the choice of a Facilitating Partner, the evidence from this research suggests that there are advantages—particularly in terms of building collaborative relationships—for sites when relationships between the Facilitating Partner and the community already exist. In practical terms what this may mean is that if collaboration is a key component within the strategies of a site (and for all those interviewed it was) finding a person to manage a project with existing connections in a community may take precedence over other qualifications and expertise. It may also mean that organisations without existing networks within a community may want to think twice
about engaging with the community using the Communities for Children or other similar model.

Alternatively it may suggest that concentrated efforts to build the necessary community networks must be made before collaborative work can begin. This will consequently result in reduced expectations of outcomes in the shorter term.

**Implication 4: Collaborative approaches need to respond to change**

A changing context may require a changed approach to collaboration. It may be important for Facilitating Partners and other community stakeholders to recognise that when things that worked previously no longer work, a changed approach may be required. For example when the mix of stakeholders changes and the emerging relationships need to be re-nurtured, a more directive leadership style (such as the resource broker approach) may be better than a less directive approach such as the team facilitator.

**Implication 5: Successful collaborations ≠ successful outcomes**

The outcomes framework to some extent dictates the ‘success’ of collaborations but not all partnerships work with that approach in mind. In other words, while the National Evaluation Framework prescribes outcomes in terms of five priority areas, the success of a local collaboration may well fall outside the scope of these outcomes. For example, volunteering rates may be an appropriate indicator measuring the priority area *child-friendly communities*, but for many collaborations, indicators of community participation and engagement—particularly among those who are hard to reach—could be a far better measure of the success of a particular collaboration.

**Implication 6: The nature of sustainable outcomes may be determined by the collaborative approach taken**

We noted earlier that sustainability was a key concern among Facilitating Partners interviewed and that collaboration was identified as a way of ensuring sustainability (see Sustainability, page 9). However, the qualitative nature of that sustainability may be determined by the collaborative approach(es) taken. For example, if the
resource broker approach is applied it may be reasonable to expect sustainable results in terms of meeting community needs.

If the learning community approach is taken it may be reasonable to expect sustainable outcomes in terms of knowledge resources that are available to the participating stakeholders. If the team facilitator approach is used the impact may be more likely to be in terms of sustained networks. While we cannot make this claim definitively, based on the findings there is at least some evidence to support this proposition.

**Implication 7: Successful processes and structures can be measured**

Up to this point in the paper we have discussed an array of factors and indicators that point in some way or another to success (or otherwise) of collaborative work. How can these be applied in a coherent and structured approach to make sense of the different collaborative approaches identified? We propose that using the findings of this research, together with the literature reviewed, it is possible to synthesise these indicators and factors into an evaluation framework that may be used for planning and review purposes.
Table 5 tentatively offers such a framework.
### Table 5. Underpinning factors, process and structural indicators of collaborative approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative approach</th>
<th>Underpinning generic factors</th>
<th>Underpinning specific factors</th>
<th>Process indicators of success</th>
<th>Structural indicators of success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Available knowledge resources</td>
<td>Does the opportunity to apply knowledge exist?</td>
<td>Are there structures in place to ensure sharing of knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong vertical linkages</td>
<td>Does the Facilitating Partner access resources through both horizontal and vertical linkages?</td>
<td>Are there community and organisational structures in place to ensure sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting horizontal linkages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open networks and communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource broker</td>
<td>Strong relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Team facilitator</td>
<td>Clear roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Is there a well defined function for the team?</td>
<td>Are there facilitators in place to ensure coordination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic cooperative</td>
<td>Enabling leadership</td>
<td>Measurable objectives</td>
<td>Is there a way to measure the difference the strategy makes?</td>
<td>Is there a legitimate organisation structure in place to ensure community acceptance?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the indicators and factors have been presented in a fairly crude fashion, we propose that it would not be too difficult to expand each factor into a set of clearly defined criteria that could be used for selection and evaluation purposes both by funders and potential collaborators to help assess organisations’ current and emerging capacity to engage in successful collaborative work.
CONCLUSIONS

The responses from Communities for Children project managers in this research show that Facilitating Partners are endeavouring to promote collaboration, and that they are having some degree of success in this. Key underpinning factors identified in the international literature are being addressed and demonstrated in their efforts. The collaborative approach framework offered in
Table 5, applied to sites as they fall within this broad range of approaches, reveals certain process and structural indicators of success in their collaborative work.

The degree of success in promoting collaboration is affected to a large extent by contextual variables, with remote, regional and urban sites developing collaborations in the face of different challenges requiring ongoing flexibility. Funding applied to remote and rural contexts needs to take these challenges and this need for flexibility into account.

Existing connections in a community would appear to be so advantageous as to predispose for successful collaboration within a Communities for Children-type model those potential Facilitating Partner organisations with strong networks already. Flexibility in collaboration approach and processes will be necessary in order to respond to change. Measures of the success of collaborations are relative and need to be flexible. They are dependent on the context of the collaborative work and the approach taken by lead agencies. There is evidence to support the proposition that the nature of sustainable outcomes may be determined by the collaborative approach taken, depending on the focus of the approach.

While the research reported on in this paper offers several factors associated with successful collaboration—all of which have some support in the literature reviewed—questions about the qualitative and quantitative measurement of that success remain unanswered. The findings do however imply that success can indeed be measured. Using a matrix of approaches and indicators we suggest that a framework for planning, assessment and evaluation can be further developed so that funders and collaborators alike have a basis for determining more definitively whether and to what extent successful collaboration is being achieved within the Communities for Children—and other similar—models.
REFERENCES


