EXPLORING LIFE AT 3-8 YEARS
SYSTEMS MAPPING EVENT SUMMARY

HANDS UP MALLEE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

ABOUT SYSTEMS

A system refers to the conditions that interact to hold both opportunities and challenges in place.

'Business and human endeavours are systems...
We tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system and
wonder why our problems never get solved at the deepest level'

Peter Senge

In 2018 Hands Up Mallee mapped the system that supports the First 1000 Days of Life and used this to promote a systems approach to direct change within our community.

In 2019 we have mapped the system that supports children 3-8 years in an endeavour to plan for change so that all our children can enjoy their best start to life, enter school healthy, fit, and ready to learn, so they can be best placed to move from learning to read to reading to learn by the age of 8 years.

WHY BUILD A SYSTEMS MAP

A systems map shows the complexity of the issues in our community and provides a lens to view complex problems through, potentially helping to anticipate the flow on effects (both negative and positive) of making changes within the system.

Used well it can empower placed-based change by incorporating community voice and activating community engagement.

OUR STEPS TO BUILDING A SYSTEMS MAP

1. Define the map territory (Mildura LGA)
2. Select systemic boundaries (all 3 – 8 year olds and their families)
3. Develop a Framing Question (What works for, and against, all children 3-8 years enjoying their best start to life?)
4. Create a seed map to help identify who has a role in the system
5. Build and implement an Engagement Plan
6. Design the consultation activities
7. Gather and compile information about causes and effects
8. Build causal loops, consider how they interact, and create a systems map
9. Test the map and fine tune it

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Three events were held to reach a broad cross-section of community

Monday 9th September	- Early Years Director's Dinner
Wednesday 11th september	- Community Leader's Table
Thursday 12th September	- Local Service Provider's Event

Jane welcomed people and explained the importance of mapping the system that supports a best start in life for all local children.

"A large part of a new way of working is a new way of thinking about the problems we face as a community"

Jane McCracken

Fiona and Eleanor presented the map and a detailed description of each region of the map.

For detailed information on the map regions and loops you can read the A Best Start in Life Systems Map handbook used on the day here: https://www.handsupmallee.com/best-start-to-life-resources

After each map region was explained, participants at their tables were given space to reflect on the map. They used coloured dots to mark what parts of the system they felt they had the most influence on, and what parts of the map created the biggest challenges or frustrations for them in achieving better outcomes for children and families.
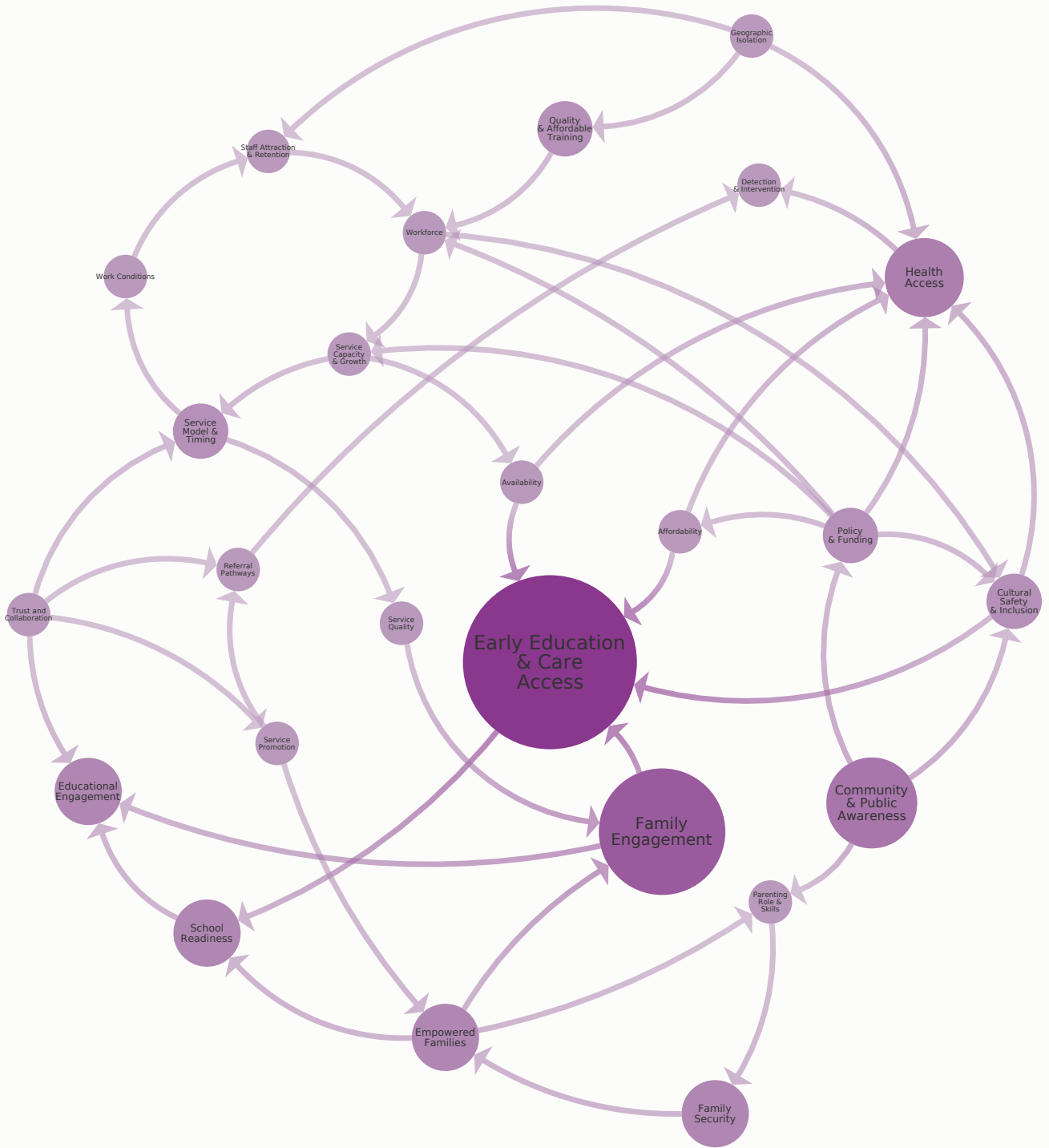
Each table held discussions about the following questions:

1.   If you were to change the story that you see in the map what would you do first?
2.   What do we need to differently to make this happen?
3.   What is your ideal world for children 3-8 in our community?
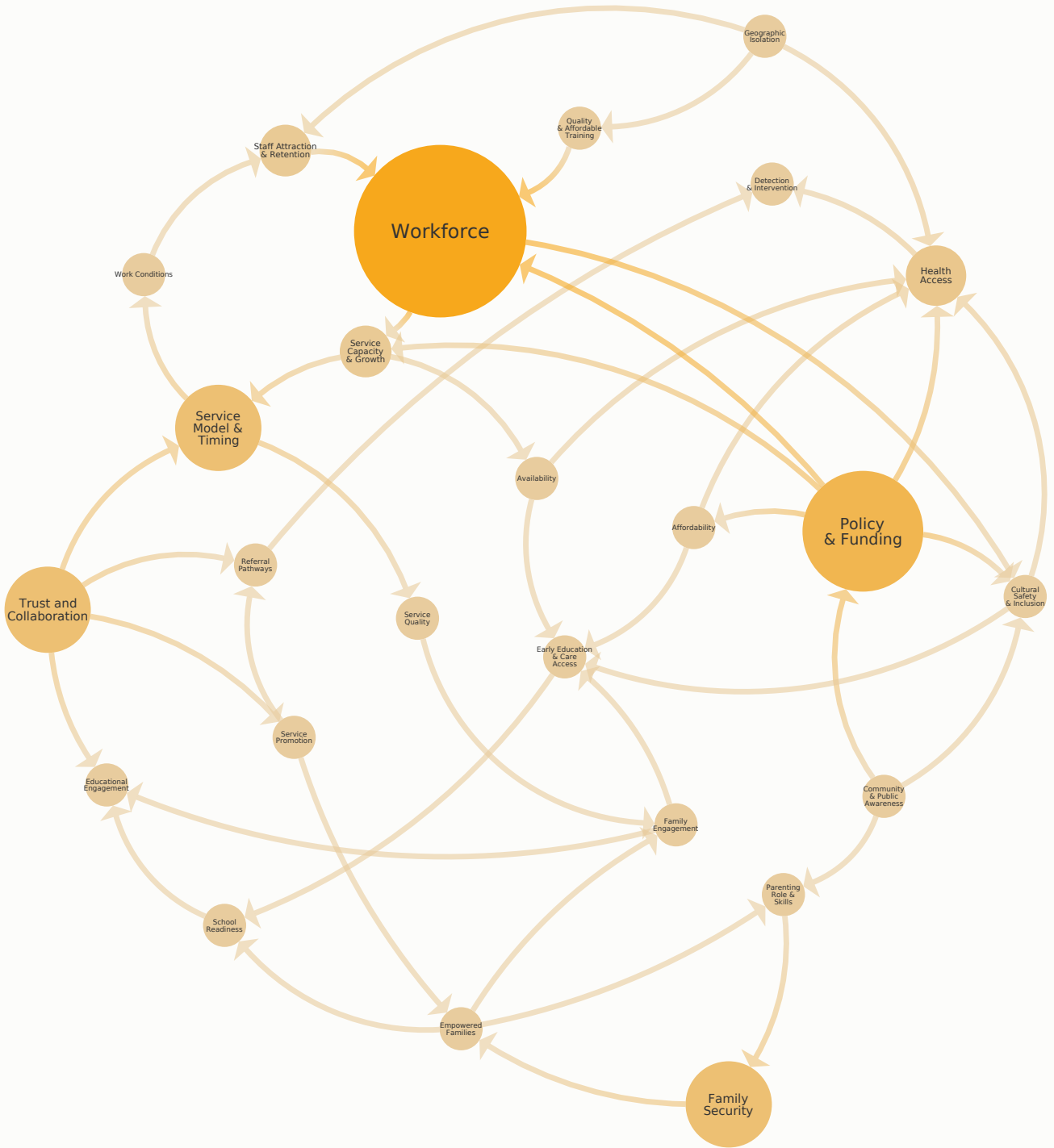
(see worksheet Appendix pg 17)

Heat Maps drawn from the information gathered during these discussions feature on the following pages.
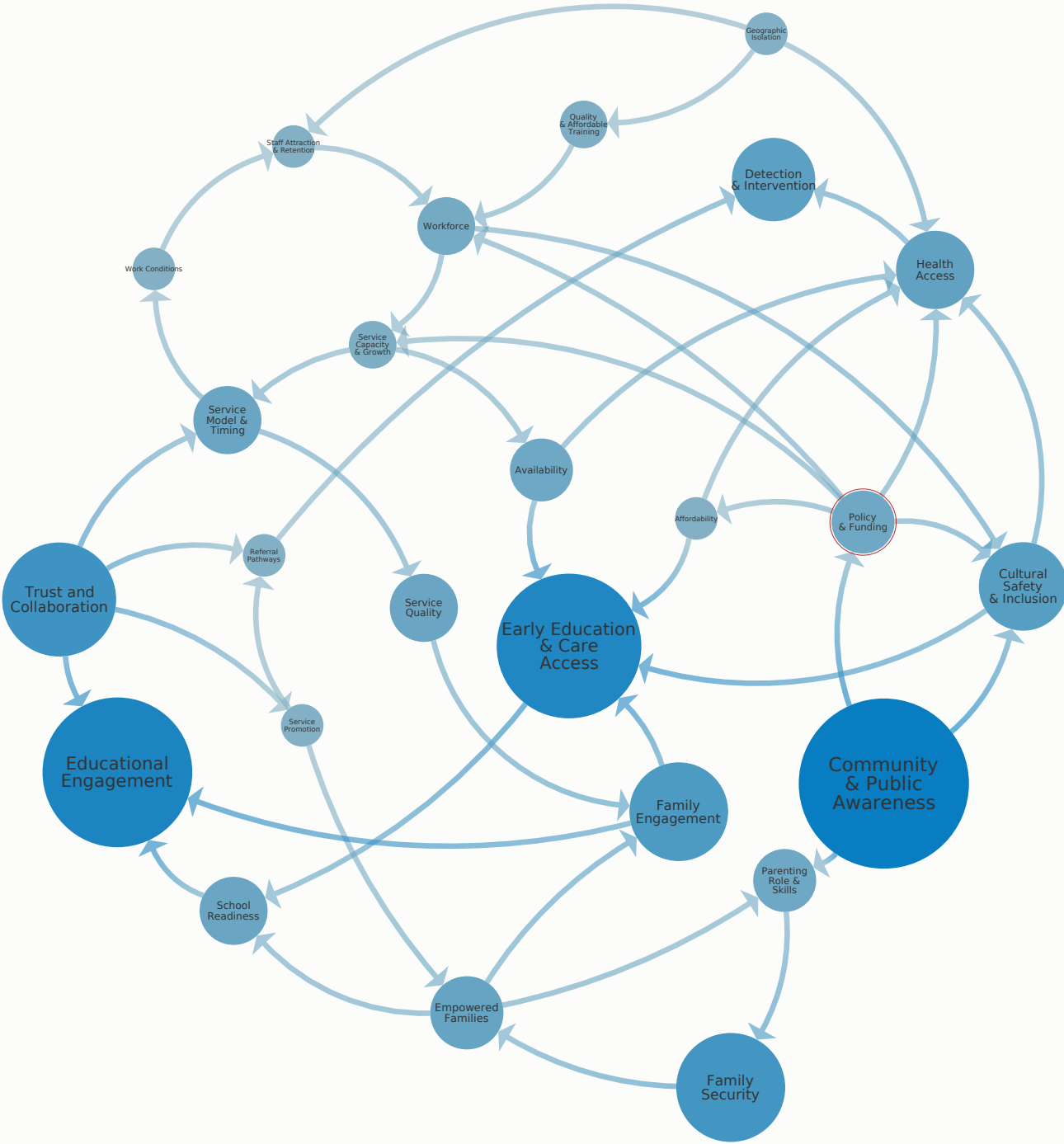
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Where we have the biggest influence.

Where we have the biggest challenges.

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Where we have significant impact.

Where we have significant barriers.

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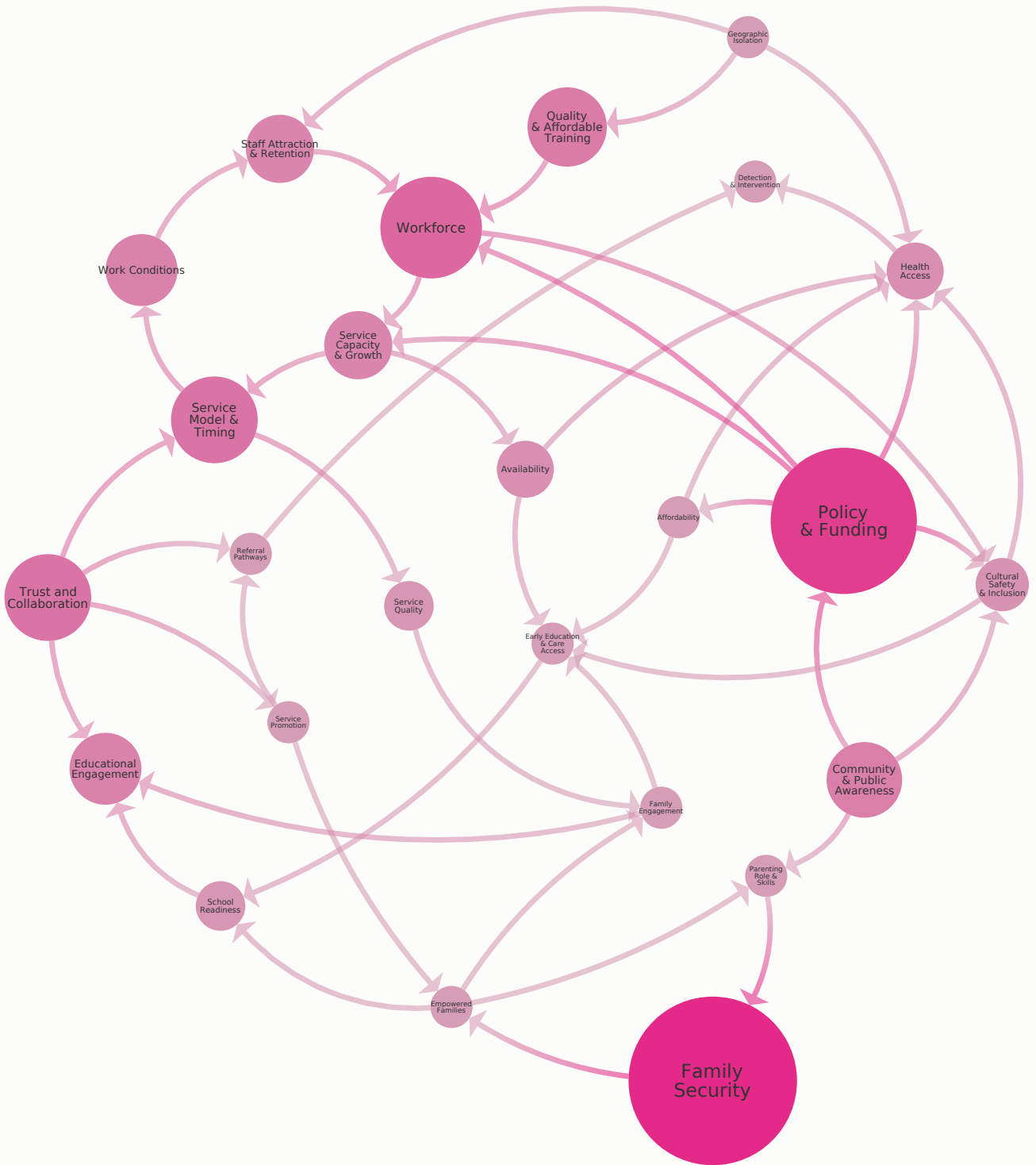
Participants then discussed who has a role to play in improving the system for children 3-8 and their families. They used gum leaves and sharpie pens to identify:

Leaders   Holds authority,   Sets directions
Influencers   Shapes change
Connectors   Identify & link people
Innovators   Ideas & design to do things differently
Doers   Take action, make things happen
Neighbours   Watch what is being done & may tell you if they like it or not

They posted their leaves on a diagram of a tree.
The avenue of trees will be used to help build our actors map for a best start, so we know who we can call on across our community to help improve the system for 3-8 year olds.

(see worksheet Appendix pg 18)

At the close of the event participants were invited to complete and submit a 'Count Me In' card that shared their desire of what to do next, do differently and how that will help with systems improvement for a Best Start in Life for all children in our community.

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN REACH FOR THE STARS...

BUILDING A ROCKET SHIP

...COUNT ME IN

Now that you're familiar with how the system is influencing life from ages 3-8 years locally tell us what you'll do...

...NEXT

...DIFFERENTLY

HOW WILL THOSE CHANGES SHIFT OUR SYSTEM?

YOUR NAME (OPTIONAL)

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Map regions where participants felt they would like start improving the system.

MAP REGION	COMMENTS
Window of Opportunity For a Best Start	Listen to children's voices and put my time and energy into what they would like to see changed – more play/physical activity for our community.
Community and Public Awareness	Acknowledging and recognising the importance of early years and education. Ask all clients and make our changes more community focussed. What do community feel are their barriers? More community involvement – co-design services
Empowered Families	More resources into early intervention, parenting programs, parenting support, mental health and PD on training about neuro-diverse children. Pay more attention to listening to the client voice, lived experience and co-design.
Family Engagement	Create personal agency for individuals and give them choice Changing the dialogue from deficit to empowerment. Less unintentional judgement/more reflective practice / intentional practice. Focus on friendly entry points, being welcoming.
Family Security, Safety and Resiliency	Enhance families valuing of early childhood education Continue to advocate for equality.
Trust and Collaboration	Breaking down the silos – working more collaboratively and resourcefully. Partnerships and collaboration needs to be authentic and committed to an outcome. Focus my energy on organisations that want to collaborate and keep the child at the centre.
Service Models	Services collaborating – wrap around model. Being more resourceful with what we have, advocating for more funding based on community need.
Short Term Investment	True investment in working towards shared goals and outcomes.
Quick Fixes	Educating quick-fix funded organisations to work together to pull funding together.
Local Workforce	Build capacity of EC Services to support children.

LEVERAGE POINTS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Leverage points are places within a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything. Leverage points are points of power, which if selected carefully and respectfully can ensure effective change occurs.

Place the child and family at the centre, and support the Rights of the Child.

Support parents as first providers and teachers of their child.

Create a workforce strategy that brings quality training locally, and attracts and retains quality staff.

Build workforce capacity, and use Communities of Practice to help share expertise and challenge existing practices.

Improve service models and service collaboration to strengthen client-centred practice, and improve service access and availability.

Use a systems approach to promote and direct change to improve prevention and early intervention. Improve service alignment and build an outcomes focus.

Promote more strategic and aligned use of available funds.

ABOUT TRANSITIONS

Many thanks to Kathy Couch who presented her insights about how to support children and their development during the many transitions they experience during their rapid growth during the early years.

Transitions are changes that happen outside of a person's control - for example a change in place, activity or routine. Sometimes transitions are predictable such as waking up and starting a new day. Other transitions are unexpected and unpredictable such as an accident.

During the course of a child's early years there are many transitions associated with developmental changes and as they experience new things such as going to child-care, kindergarten and school, and exploring their wider community.

Children like adults experience feelings as they anticipate or react to transitions and show them in their behaviours.

While one child may manage transitions smoothly, another may have difficulties.

Keeping child development in mind helps us to understand children's emotions and behaviours as they face transitions.

There is a connection between the transition experiences of children and their development in the domains of social and emotional development, language and communication, cognitive, perceptual and motor development.

Adults play an important role in supporting children through transitions. They can provide enough time between the changes from one activity to another for the child to make the necessary changes. Adults can help children feel secure and safe during the period of change. When they do so this has far-reaching consequences on the child's emotional wellbeing and longer term academic success.

Learning how to manage change requires certain skills. There are many ways we can help children and their families learn to cope and adjust to big and small changes that are part of life. One way is to provide them with information in advance about predictable changes. We can also share with families about the range of reactions to changes that can be expected in children at different developmental stages.

From infancy children develop emotional connections and attachments to familiar adults. Time to build trusting relationships during transitions is essential for a child to feel connected and secure.

While some children adjust to new environment easily, others need time to warm up. Children are still learning how to control their feelings and manage their behaviours. Adults can teach children a variety of ways to manage these. Predictable routines, setting realistic expectations and encouraging effective coping strategies helps children to handle stress.

While language development is rapid in the early years, children need time and help to learn the words specific to a new setting. Children might go through a silent period while they are figuring out this. By observing children and communicating with families adults can learn about the child's verbal and non-verbal skills. If language is delayed then the use of gestures and visual aids can help communication between the child and adults.

Children are natural explorers. By fostering a safe and secure relationship adults can provide children with confidence to explore, discover and learn about their new environment. Providing time and prompts as a child changes from one activity to another can help support the child's learning.

Share this output document with participants, political and community leaders, government organisations and service, and community.

Align the development of emerging strategies to create leverage, including the Municipal Early Years Plan and Best Start.

Draw on the Voices of Mallee Children, our Early Years social indicators, and the information gathered at these events to inform the development of systems change strategies.
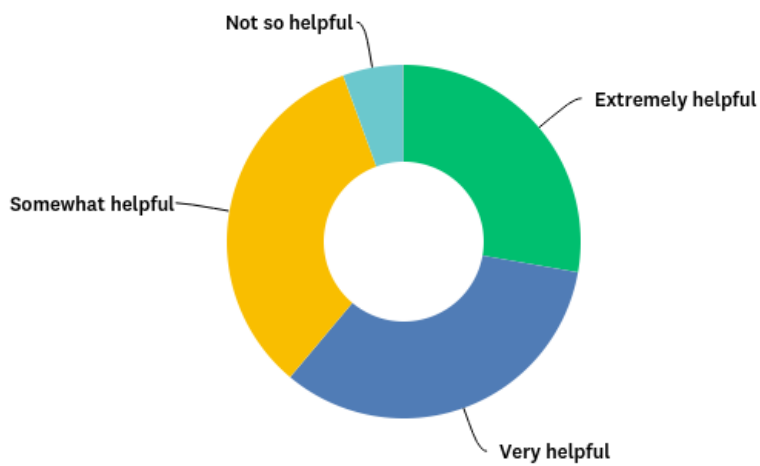
Draw on research on evidence-based practices to inform the approaches to be undertaken.

Engage with community to promote place-based change informed by lived experience.

Q1 Overall, how satisfied were you with the systems map, and how it was presented?
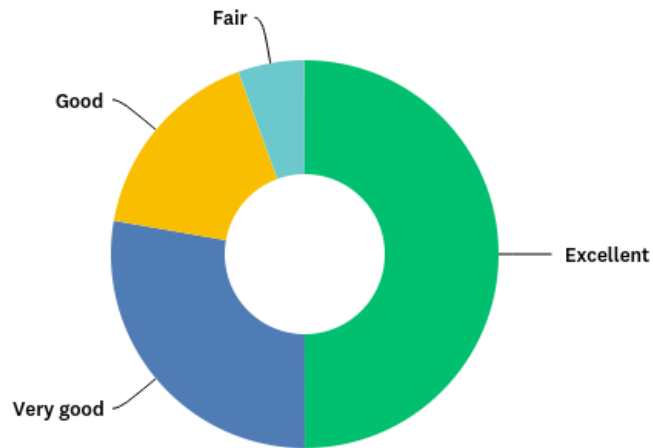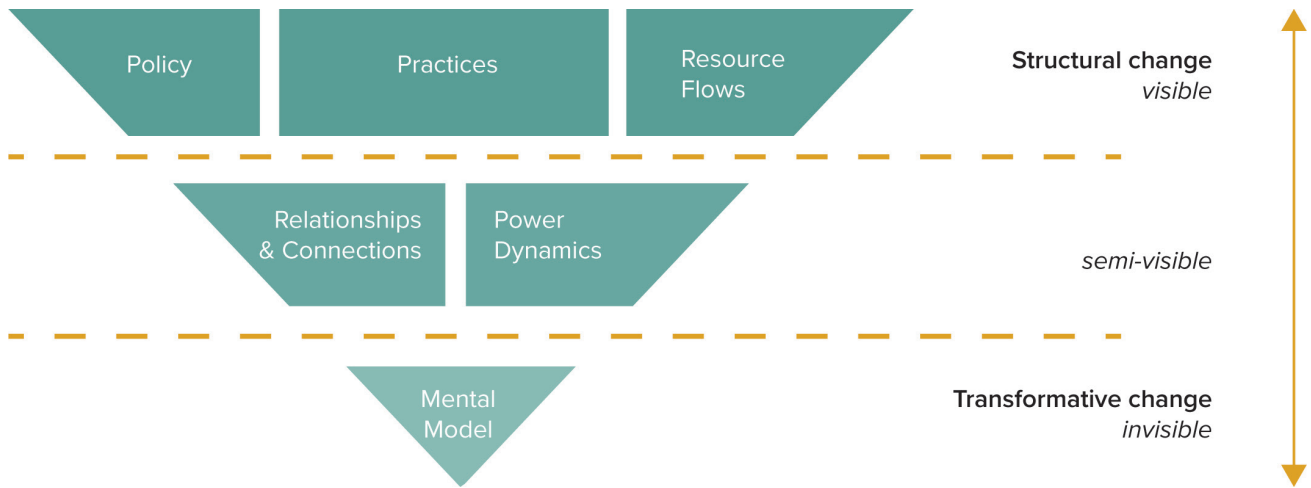

Q2 How helpful were the systems discussions in informing your future work?

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Policies: Rules, Regulations, Priorities (formal and informal)

Practices: Organisational and practitioner activities targets to addressing and making progress

Resource Flows: How money, people, knowledge and information are allocated and distributed
Relationships and Connections: Quality of connections and communication occuring between actors

Power Dynamics: Which individual and organisations hold decision-making power, authority and influence (both formal and informal)

Mental Models: Deeply held beliefs and assumptions that influence one's actions

Water of Systems Change. John Karma, Mark Kramer, Peter Serge, June 2018. FSG reimagining social change.
https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

For a more detailed diagram on how to change a system see: http://enablingchange.com.au/systems.php
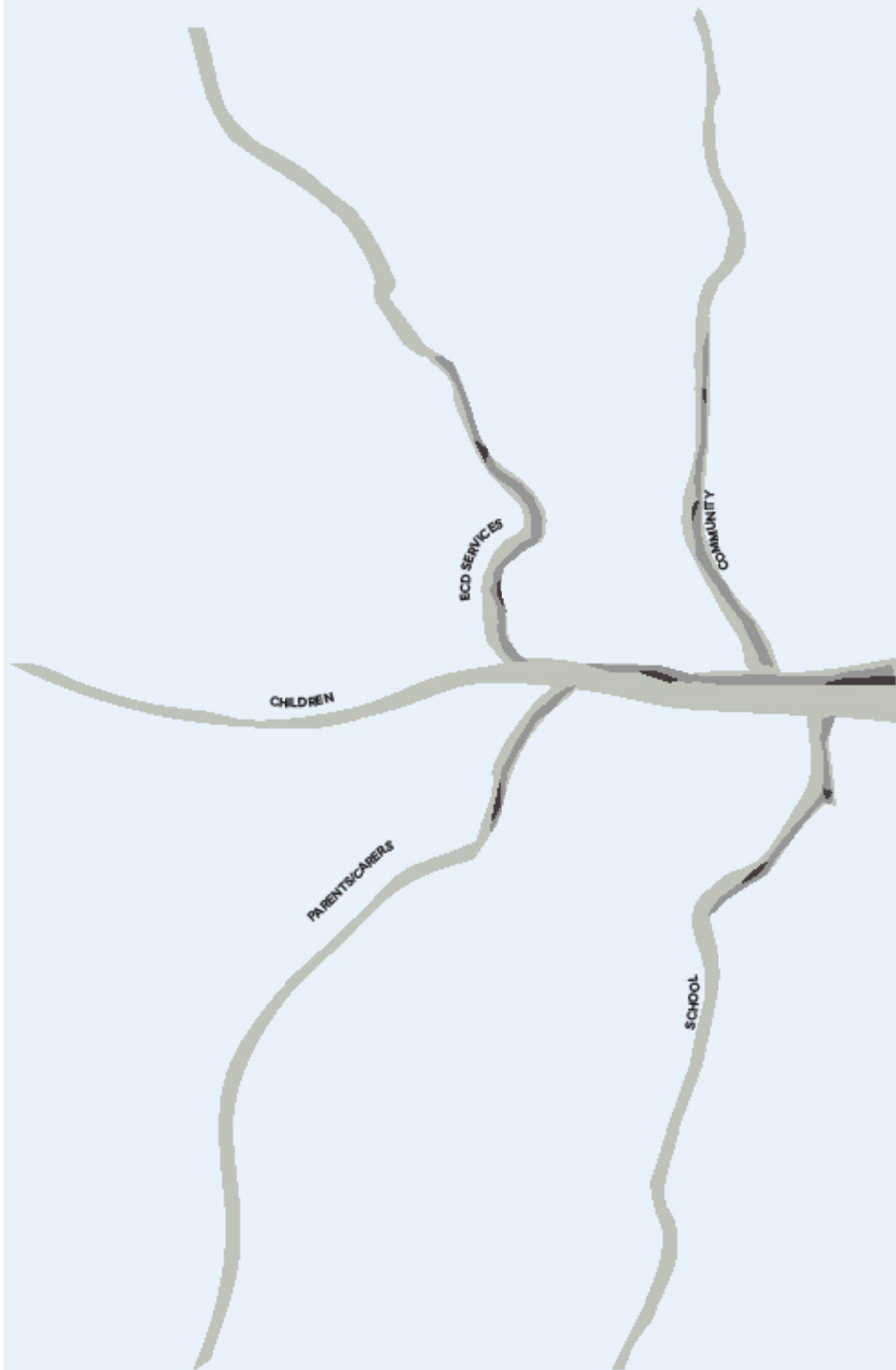
CREATING CHANGE WORKSHEET

Participant names:

If you were to change the story that you see in our map, what would you do first?

What do we need to do differently to make this happen?

What is your ideal world for children aged 3-8 years in our community?

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EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS TREE

ECD SERVICES

COMMUNITY

CHILDREN

PARENTS/CARERS

SCHOOL

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A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN REACH FOR THE STARS...

BUILDING A ROCKET SHIP

...COUNT ME IN

Now that you're familiar with how the system is influencing life from ages 3-8 years locally tell us what you'll do...

...NEXT

...DIFFERENTLY

HOW WILL THOSE CHANGES SHIFT OUR SYSTEM?

YOUR NAME (OPTIONAL)

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A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN EXPERIMENT...

MAKING ROBOTS

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN BE TECH GIANTS...

WEARING A MECH-SUIT

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN CREATE THEIR OWN PLACE...
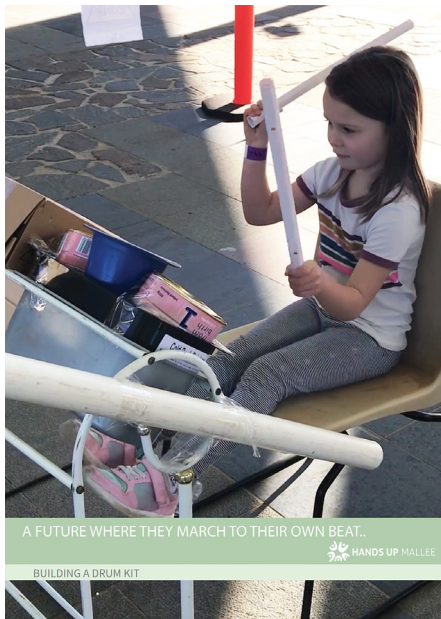
BUILDING A NEW CITY

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN CREATE A CITY...

BUILDING A NEW CITY

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN EXPLORE NEW PATHS...

BUILDING A MARBLE RUN

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A FUTURE WHERE THEY MARCH TO THEIR OWN BEAT..

BUILDING A DRUM KIT

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CREATE A NEW POINT OF VIEW...

BUILDING A FERRIS WHEEL

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CHOOSE HOW TO GET THERE...

BUILDING A TRAIN

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CLIMB TO THE TOP...

BUILDING A ROCK CLIMBING WALL

A FUTURE WHERE THEY CREATE RECIPES FOR SUCCESS...

COOKING IN THE MUD KITCHEN

A FUTURE WHERE THEY GET THINGS MOVING..

BUILDING A HEADER

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Systems Practice Training Program by +Acumen
https://www.plusacumen.org/courses/systems-practice

Better systems, better chances: A review of research and practice for prevention and early intervention
Themes: Knowledge brokering, Protecting children, Supporting families
Author: Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C.
Date: August 2015
https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=207&cid=6

Supporting Transitions: Using Child development as a Guide
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/supporting-transitions-using-child-development-guide