

Hands Up targets the big issues

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TEEN pregnancy and parental capability are among the biggest issues facing Sunraysia, according to locals surveyed by Hands Up Mallee.

The group has released a report that outlines its direction for the next 18 months, after more than 1600 conversations with locals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities.

It's identified early childhood intervention as the key to tackling Sunraysia's complex social issues like family violence and mental health.

An initiative of Northern Mallee Primary Care Partnership, Hands Up Mallee brings together various community organisations.

Jane McCracken, acting executive officer of NMCP, said the group identified the first 1000 days of a child's life as the most critically important.

"If we can get this stuff right in childhood, from conception to age two, we have a chance at solving problems down the other end," Ms McCracken said.

"We need to be able to think big enough to not just be throwing money at the acute sector."

Locals also said they want to see parents engaged in their

child's development and education, better drug and alcohol educations for youth, and more diverse job opportunities to enable families to stay together.

Ms McCracken said the community response was in line with what national research pointed to as key areas of concern.

"These are complex problems," she said.

"We're looking at what some of those root causes are.

"What we're doing now is clearly not working.

"Sometimes the way services are funded doesn't line up with what the community really needs."

She stressed that it was vital to look at shifting "bigger structures" in our local area.

"We want the community to get involved," Ms McCracken said.

"It's about providing tangible opportunities to be involved and to provide opportunities for them to do that."

Ms McCracken said Hands Up Mallee would get community groups together in April to action a plan in response to the community feedback identified in the paper.

You can take a closer look at the data and get involved by visiting www.handsupmallee.com.