

The background is a solid orange color. On the right side, there are several wavy, vertical lines in a lighter shade of orange, creating a sense of movement or a stylized landscape feature like a hill or a tree trunk.

Growing Lachlan: Community Driven Place-Based Change

FIONA MCKENZIE
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This research was commissioned by Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and member organisations of the Growing Lachlan Alliance: Lower Lachlan Community Services, Tottenham Welfare Council, and Western NSW Regional Network National Indigenous Australians Agency. It has been undertaken independently by Orange Compass. It is not intended to be used or relied upon by anyone else and is published for general information only. While all efforts have been taken to ensure accuracy, Orange Compass does not accept any duty, liability or responsibility in relation to this Report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Growing Lachlan has been a pioneer of community-led place-based initiatives in NSW; a growing movement across Australia that has recently started receiving greater attention and funding from all levels of government. Over six years, Growing Lachlan has developed into an important community asset, with trusted relationships that allow it to play a range of crucial roles. These are not traditional project management or service delivery roles but rather are about bringing new ways of working and thinking that support local groups to 'test and try' new approaches to addressing community priorities. Ultimately, it is aimed at fostering more locally grown solutions to local issues.

Growing Lachlan has been successful in achieving systemic changes in the community. These achievements have particularly related to an increase in community priorities directing investment, changes in how the community works together, and growth in the capacity of the community to drive long-term change.

Growing Lachlan's achievements include:

1. Hearing and elevating community views
2. Wider and more effective use of data
3. Bringing in extra funding to the region
4. Breaking down long standing barriers
5. Joining the dots to fill service gaps
6. Finding common ground
7. Catalysing new conversations and activities
8. Asking hard questions and challenging long held practices
9. Building new skills in many organisations
10. Getting more out of what we have and doing more for ourselves

Many of these achievements are ones in which the Growing Lachlan team has played a pivotal role. However, they do not claim nor seek credit for all the hard work of the many dedicated people involved. Often acting as intermediaries, the Community Connectors aim to support others to succeed and do

not normally seek attribution for themselves. Their goal is to see more locally driven and sourced resources being invested for a thriving community, which involves work with others at every step.

Place-based work demonstrates the challenges of community development in small regional towns including resource scarcity, volunteer burnout and serious socioeconomic disadvantage for population segments. There is no silver bullet for making change.

“Over six years, Growing Lachlan has developed into an important community asset, with trusted relationships that allow it to play a range of crucial roles.”

The Growing Lachlan initiative is slowly but surely working with community to address their priorities and are now gaining real, if hard fought momentum. It began by working with community to define their priorities: community renewal, economy development, community safety, youth and elderly care, underpinned by cultural recognition, respect and genuine participation. It has since worked with a range of groups and initiatives to achieve many wins and breakthroughs over six years.

The potential is there to really gain traction and create impact - if Growing Lachlan is able to continue to build on these wins. To do so it will need to address two key issues: generating wider awareness and buy-in locally, and growing a more diverse supporter base locally and beyond. This needs to be a long-term commitment as place-based change can take up to ten years or longer. Administrative and development resources also need to be built around the Community Connectors so they can continue to focus on empowering local people to strengthen their community and shape their own future.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report tells the story of the Growing Lachlan initiative and the major outcomes it has achieved, particularly focusing on its work since the release of the Growing Lachlan report in 2017. It builds upon the unique insights of 17 community members who have actively worked with Growing Lachlan in a range of roles, including farmers, educators, public servants, business owners, and council staff. It also draws upon a review of available documentation and a community workshop in Lake Cargelligo with over 40 local people in attendance. In addition to exploring progress and achievements to date, the report includes learnings and ideas for the future.



ABOUT THE LACHLAN SHIRE

Lachlan Shire is in the heart of NSW, the Central West - in Wiradjuri country home to the Kalarie, Ngiyampaa and Paakintji people. It is a remote area, covering almost 15,000 km² and is home to about 6,500 people. Condobolin is the largest town in Lachlan followed by Lake Cargelligo and Tottenham - 90% of the population lives in these three towns. There are also a number of smaller towns including Tullibigeal, Burcher, Derriwong, Albert and Fifield. Murrin Bridge lies just outside the Shire but because of its proximity and connection, it is an important part of the community.

Like so many regional and rural communities, Lachlan Shire has a number of remarkable strengths, but it also faces a range of challenges relating to its size and remoteness, low population density and aging population, heavy reliance on

agriculture and associated difficulty in attracting and maintaining a broad workforce and community service system. Although community planning is done at a local government level and interagency groups exist to try to coordinate services, in the absence of good cross-sector data and community input, coordinated service planning and delivery has been difficult. By necessity, local services are often not driven by locally identified needs, but instead, to available funding opportunities.

ABOUT GROWING LACHLAN

Growing Lachlan takes an innovative place-based approach to strengthening community. It has a dedicated small team (which has fluctuated between 0.3 FTE and 1.3 FTE over the life of the project) whose primary purpose is to work with various community groups and organisations to achieve progress on collective priorities. It is currently hosted by Lower Lachlan Community Services (LLCS) and supported by an Alliance of community leaders and regional representatives. The initiative is funded by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF). It has evolved significantly over time.

GROWING LACHLAN - THE EARLY DAYS

Growing Lachlan began as the 'Linking the Lachlan Initiative' in 2014, with support from VFFF. It emerged from a desire of the Lachlan Shire Interagency Groups to improve communication and collaboration between providers, increase service accessibility and uptake across the Shire, and influence government funding allocations to address local needs. There was a recognition that there wasn't a shortage of funded activities and services, but that there was a disconnect and a mistrust between the community and the social service system, potential duplication and lack of clarity about available services.

With the purpose of improving life opportunities and building a strong and prosperous community for all Lachlan Shire residents, VFFF funded Community Connector positions in both Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo. The two locations are important as they are distinctly separate in terms of service provision and community connectedness.

Quite quickly the Community Connectors created some tangible products, such as 'Digital Noticeboards' and the 'Weekly Blast', for better information sharing and service awareness. However, it soon became apparent that without an evidence base of what the needs, current service coverage and gaps were in Lachlan, the higher-level aims would not be met. The project therefore evolved in to a community research project which became known as Growing Lachlan. Over \$57,000 was raised to support the project. The work was supported through a group that is now referred to as the Growing Lachlan Alliance. The Alliance includes: Lower Lachlan Community Services (administrator), Western Plains Regional Development, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Families & Community Services, Regional Development Australia, Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Tottenham Welfare Council, and community members and Lachlan Shire Council.

From 2015 to 2017, the Community Connectors oversaw specialist research and intensive community consultations that asked locals what they needed and what they saw as priorities for the Lachlan Shire. Extensive data analysis was undertaken to provide a measure of the vitality of the Shire's communities based on factors such as community health and wellbeing, civic and economic participation and financial security. Over 580 community members provided input via a survey or one-on-one or group discussions. The Community Connectors then created a draft report that short listed 10 priority areas and facilitated further community conversations (16 different sessions involving about 120 people) in Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin and Tottenham, synthesised information and identified priority themes.



In 2017, the Growing Lachlan report was officially launched with events in Tottenham, Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo. This was the first evidence-informed picture of the Lachlan Shire community and how it is faring, with clear evidence and community perspectives. The report showed that:

- 1 in 5 people in our Shire are over 65 years old and another 20% are under 15 years old
- 27% of young children are developmentally vulnerable
- 1 in 3 households don't have access to the internet
- There are 1,083 businesses in Lachlan – but as many are closing as opening
- Lachlan has a consistently high ranking for domestic violence - between 6 and 10 of 139 NSW LGAs

The five priority areas identified for focus going forward were:

1. Investing in community renewal
2. Supporting economic sustainability and development
3. Improving community safety and crime prevention
4. Taking care of older and younger generations and
5. Strengthening cultural recognition, respect and genuine participation.

Community members have noted that the last area is one that underscores, and needs to inform, all of the preceding ones.



GROWING LACHLAN – A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

The report was a wake-up call for the community. It was also a call to action. It became a means for the community to identify opportunities for action and to track progress. It has since been used to refocus services, to collaborate on priority areas, and to leverage support and resources for the issues that matter to the community. The early years were important for the Community Connectors to build strong and lasting relationships with organisations across the community and to build the foundations for working differently together. In 2017, with further funding from VFFF, Growing Lachlan evolved from a research project in to a platform for bringing people together to advance action on community priorities, with the Community Connectors acting as important mobilisers and catalysts. This began with early wins such as investing in main street renewal and progressed to supporting more complicated collaborations on priorities such as youth engagement and domestic violence.

To support the Community Connectors, VFFF commissioned The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) to work with the team and Growing Lachlan Alliance to learn social innovation and co-design techniques so the Lachlan Shire could, in time, originate more locally grown responses to their community priorities. TACSI's approach involved drawing on the deep knowledge of the team and local people.

All of the above positioned the Growing Lachlan team to be able to encourage the alignment of resources (government, business and community) with identified priorities and to work with community leaders and organisations to plan and develop integrated policies, services and strategies. Key achievements are outlined further overleaf.



ACHIEVEMENTS

Growing Lachlan has been successful in achieving systemic changes in the community. This includes changes in:

- how community priorities direct investment;
- how the community works together;
- and the capacity of the community to drive long-term change.

The following outlines ten key outcomes under these three categories.

It is important to note that many of the outcomes listed below involve collaborations in which the Growing Lachlan team have played a part. They do not claim nor seek credit for all the hard work of the many dedicated people involved. Often acting as intermediaries, the Community Connectors aim to support others to succeed and do not normally seek attribution for themselves. Their goal is to see more locally driven and sourced resources being invested for a thriving community. The achievements below are intended to illustrate how Growing Lachlan has played that role, without intending to diminish the credit and recognition due to the many others involved in this work. Quotes have been included throughout to reflect the voice and insight of interviewees.

AN INCREASE IN COMMUNITY PRIORITIES DIRECTING INVESTMENT

1. Hearing and elevating community views
2. Wider and more effective use of data
3. Bringing in extra funding to the region



CHANGES IN HOW THE COMMUNITY WORKS TOGETHER

4. Breaking down long standing barriers
5. Joining the dots to fill service gaps
6. Finding common ground
7. Catalysing new conversations and activities



GROWTH IN THE CAPACITY OF THE COMMUNITY TO DRIVE LONG-TERM CHANGE

8. Asking hard questions and challenging long held practices
9. Building new skills in many organisations
10. Getting more out of what we have and doing more for ourselves

AN INCREASE IN COMMUNITY PRIORITIES DIRECTING INVESTMENT

1. HEARING AND ELEVATING COMMUNITY VIEWS

"Having someone take an interest in community needs is a great help, at least it shows that someone cares and is listening, especially in times of hardship."

The Growing Lachlan report helped to identify community priorities for action through extensive community consultations that really captured local voices. The Growing Lachlan Community Connectors also act as a conduit between the community and organisations working in the region. They have facilitated information flows about needs and services to regional, state and national agencies as well as the Lachlan Shire Council. And they have kept an open line of conversation with community through public events such as the well-attended community 'walkthroughs' as well as through one on one discussions and feedback. These connections are deeply relational and translate into greater engagement and buy-in to the work.

"We want our say. We want our mark on it, and that's been the big change now – that community is always being consulted whether it's through elders, or through the youth."

Making change visible also builds buy-in. Growing Lachlan has been able to strategically advocate for an investment in projects that are priorities for community members and for which there is energy and passion. This has included community renewal work on local gardens and murals in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo, a skate park and even window dressing of empty shopfronts in the main street. These are visible changes that help the community feel that they have been heard.

Our town is moving forward, we seem to be getting more funding, beautification of our streets etc is going forward in my eyes.

2. WIDER AND MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA

The Growing Lachlan report helped to identify community priorities for action through both community voice and the use of data. The report has since been widely used. For example, the Lachlan Shire Council incorporated the report findings in to its Community Strategic Plan as a way of including community voices in Shire-wide decision making. The report data has also informed Youth, Tourism and Economic Development Plans.

"I think that Growing Lachlan has really put the district under the microscope."

The Community Connectors continue to draw upon data and evidence to strengthen the case for resource allocation. The Growing Lachlan team now works with data specialists to obtain and analyse local data for strategic learning and to better understand progress and adapt to opportunities. Data was particularly important in raising awareness of problems with aged care in the Lachlan Shire and in refocusing influencers on this issue.



RAISING AWARENESS OF AGED CARE CHALLENGES

The Growing Lachlan initiative researched, wrote and published documentation on the state of local aged care. This included the profiling of local services, the creation of a customer journey and 'archetypal personas' based on real examples from Lake Cargelligo. It highlighted significant differences in cost and access across the Shire. The report suggestions included strengthening the provision of aged care services, building an aged care facility in Lake Cargelligo. This has since triggered a renewed focus on aged care. It was noted that even the Federal MP for the region, who has worked across the aged care agenda for Lake Cargelligo for some time, has become interested in the report and recommendations for assisting with increasing age care infrastructure.

3. BRINGING IN EXTRA FUNDING TO THE REGION

A range of organisations, including local not-for-profits, the Shire and schools, have been able to draw upon data in the Growing Lachlan report to demonstrate funding needs and secure additional support and resources. Examples include applications by Lachlan Shire Council, Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, Western Plains Regional Development, Lower Lachlan Community Services and Down the Track.

In addition, Growing Lachlan has also secured dedicated funding itself. Examples include:

- \$45,000 for the 2019 Western Business Forum (described further below)
- \$15,000 from Evolution Mining Funds as part of their Cowal Partnering Program used for seed funding and testing of projects that fit the five priority areas

The Community Connectors have also written many letters of support for different organisations seeking grants, many of whom have been successful in obtaining funding.

"There's been other projects in the community that have been successful in securing funding and they've got their legs initially from Growing Lachlan."

CHANGES IN HOW THE COMMUNITY WORKS TOGETHER

4. BREAKING DOWN LONG STANDING BARRIERS

Part of the original motivation for Growing Lachlan was recognition of the need for more connectivity with the service system, and the provision of more relevant services are driven by the community rather than government. This has clearly been delivered with research respondents indicating that the biggest shifts in how the community works together were in “coordinated actions to address social problems” and “collaboration across sectors and organisational boundaries”.

“Growing Lachlan is breaking down barriers that have been existing for years, and being strategic about how you do that – just keeping under the radar where they can keep things moving along and make sure they’re working together.”

This is particularly evident in the work to build relationships across silos and target the root causes of disadvantage as well as to strengthen cultural recognition and respect, which is the priority that underpins all the others.

“It’s the first time that I’ve found people working together in that region. So that’s been a massive change around since I’ve started.”



STRENGTHENING CULTURAL RECOGNITION, RESPECT AND GENUINE PARTICIPATION

Building cross-cultural awareness and strengthening engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been an important focus for Growing Lachlan and the region. And the acknowledgment and celebration of the importance of the Indigenous community and their culture has been highlighted as a significant outcome of the work of the Growing Lachlan Community Connectors. Progress has been made in numerous ways. The quotes included below are from indigenous elders in the community.

In a 2016 celebration of all things Anzac, windows were decorated with local veterans/past and present, including Aboriginal veterans never before recognised and women of war. The team also hung Aboriginal and Australian flags along the street for the march. Youth Services and Family Support also decorated their shopfronts in the same theme.

“On a day when the country stops to remember the fallen, today I witnessed for the first time in my life here in my home town – the Aboriginal flag proudly displayed on the ANZAC march procession route. If it’s happened before thumbs up, if it this is the first time, then thumbs up. Better late than never.”

A major part of this is the very successful NAIDOC Ball. In 2017, the Community Connector in

Condobolin established a NAIDOC committee to increase collaboration between the different actions that were taking place as part of NAIDOC week. This included the majority of the local Aboriginal organisations including the Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, as well as the Lachlan Shire and Growing Lachlan. Events included a community march, BBQ, sporting activities, musical entertainment, Youth Deadly Awards Such and the first ever NAIDOC ball. There have now been two celebratory NAIDOC balls hosted, with increasing community engagement each year in both Lake Cargelligo and Condobolin. This level of collaboration was previously not thought possible.

"It isn't the actual ball that is the win here – it's the process, the relationships and partnerships that deliver on the day and it is the non-tokenistic acknowledgement of culture that is localised, fun and heart felt."

Other ripple effects have occurred, where the Community Connectors have played direct and indirect roles including the increase in the number of Welcome to Country ceremonies being performed. Welcome to Country has now become a feature of key local events. For the first time this year the Welcome to Country was performed at the rugby league and netball grand finals. This year was the first time in history that there was a Welcome to Country at the Lake Cargelligo Show. Services meetings now also commence with an Acknowledgement of Country.

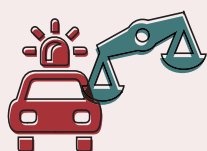
"I think there's little things that have happened around recognising culture and our Aboriginal history that haven't been so obvious. So little things like welcome to country at the football and netball league grand final for the first time ever. It was easy to do and it was something that was so important... you could hear a pin drop. Even the wind dropped. It was just calming. It was – people are now realising we've got a community that's really absolutely starting to embrace it."

5. JOINING THE DOTS TO FILL SERVICE GAPS

An early motivation behind Growing Lachlan was to improve collaboration between services providers, increase service accessibility and uptake across the Shire, and influence government funding allocations to address local needs. The Growing Lachlan team have helped this to happen in various contexts through convening as well as through their work to clearly map service provision and gaps.

"It's talking about the elephant in the room, you know, and putting it out there and saying 'here are the statistics, here is where we sit, and we need to make something happen'."

One example is service mapping undertaken in Tottenham. A member of the Growing Lachlan team attended a welfare council meeting in Tottenham where it was apparent that there were major service gaps in the area. Significant work was put in to service mapping and presenting this evidence back to FACs through the Growing Lachlan Alliance. Funds and resources were redirected towards these gaps including action by FACS to redirect existing funds within the Central West Family Support Services to ensure the delivery of family-based support needs to Tottenham. Service mapping has led to more joined up and responsive service network and community needs being addressed.



COMMUNITY SAFETY

Joining the dots on the challenge of domestic violence has been an important achievement. Action was first triggered by the Growing Lachlan report, which highlighted domestic violence as a critical issue. The Lachlan Shire was consistently ranking between 6 and 10 of 139 NSW Local Government Areas. This was a shock to many in the community and quickly became a much stronger focus. The local interagency group made it a priority and a dedicated committee was formed. A Growing Lachlan team member joined this committee while Lake Cargelligo also formed its own domestic violence committee as a result of the report. It was identified that the Lachlan Shire had less than one full time equivalent (FTE) resource for the whole area to deal with domestic violence.

It was at this stage that Growing Lachlan undertook the Lake Cargelligo service mapping exercise to determine gaps/referral pathways and localised collaborative arrangements. Additional funding was secured and a localised campaign was launched to highlight service options for families and individuals. The Growing Lachlan team put funds towards the campaign as well as the installation of posters in public locations. Since it became a focus, two White Ribbon marches have been held and a Domestic Violence Awareness Project has commenced within the local community. The Growing Lachlan team has since completed further work on mapping of domestic violence service provision in order to encourage a move towards even more joined up partnerships and resources.

6. FINDING COMMON GROUND

"The Growing Lachlan report has been the basis for everything else that's happened since then."

The Growing Lachlan report and snapshot summary have proven to be critical resources as well as a source of common ground. Everyone has access to the same data and starts with a shared understanding of the current state of play in the region. It has helped people to recognise they are seeking similar outcomes, even if they have different approaches.

"I've seen so many times where you talk to different groups who are seen to be not getting on, but they're talking the same thing, they want the same thing, they just have different ideas about how to get it."

The Community Connectors in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo are also creators of common ground and sit at the heart of the Growing Lachlan model. They are continually brokering connections and collaborations to improve community outcomes across the Lachlan Shire community now and in the future. They have supported many new initiatives.

"So often the connectors will find a common ground to make something happen where it may not have without it. They're essential; they're the glue that brings a lot of stuff together. It's a bit of a cliché, but they are the glue that brings things together."

An example is the Professional Women's Network, which was launched to support women in the Lake Cargelligo area. The Community Connector is one of the founders of the network and a facilitator at network events. She also introduced the concept of a 'giving circle' where small amounts of money pooled by the collective can be reinvested in to the community.

"We all come to the table with different networks, and that in itself has been really interesting...I think it's been really, really fantastic to see the impact and see people supporting each other that may not have even crossed paths before."

7. CATALYSING NEW CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

"One of the key things that Growing Lachlan has done in our communities is starting some of those difficult conversations."

The Growing Lachlan team has started many difficult and new conversations to push for better outcomes for the region. An example is YOUth Talk 2019, which is a research project being led by Growing Lachlan to discover what local young people think. This is a challenge to the traditional approach of coming up with predetermined project or simply investing resources in to infrastructure projects, which has been a default approach. The Community Connectors are consulting community to create a better understanding of current services and whether they are delivering what young people need. And when it became apparent that youth service providers were working with a common cohort of vulnerable youth, they asked Growing Lachlan for a proposal on how they could all better coordinate around them. Growing Lachlan is now working to ensure youth services are less fragmented and more collaborative in their use of resources and local infrastructure. This work will also inform a shire-wide youth strategy.

GROWTH IN THE CAPACITY OF THE COMMUNITY TO DRIVE LONG-TERM CHANGE

8. ASKING HARD QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGING LONG HELD PRACTICES

For Growing Lachlan, capacity building has been particularly focused on learning to think and do things differently. This includes examples like YOUth Talk mentioned above. It also includes investing time in helping people and organisations to question their current practices and make significant shifts in how they work. This was acknowledged by a range of people interviewed for this research who said they had been assisted in their projects by the Community Connectors.

"For me, she's [Shane Phillips] a massive part of why the program has grown into the model that it is; a social enterprise. You'll have a discussion with Shane and she'll challenge the way that you're thinking but she'll challenge you in a good way to make you think 'Can we get more out of this? How can we make this bigger, better? How can we move this into another space?'"

Capacity building is critical in smaller towns where the number of people and their ability to be involved is often limited. Often it is the same residents that sit on many of the local boards and committees and their time is stretched across many commitments. This means that building the capacity of the community to drive change is critical to ensure that it remains community driven and sustainable in the long-term. It also has flow on effects as these skills are brought in to local businesses and the community.

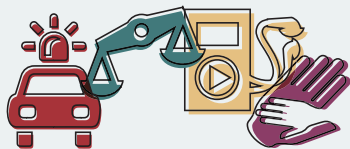
Supporting the ability of the Growing Lachlan Community Connectors has been the Regional Innovators Network (RIN). It was acknowledged as playing a major role in challenging mindsets, building personal and team capabilities and learning with curiosity.

"The whole point is to do this work differently. The whole point is to ask the questions in a new way and in a way that causes people to think about it."

9. BUILDING NEW SKILLS IN MANY ORGANISATIONS

"The opportunities of the different thinking that [Shane Phillips] in particular brings to Growing Lachlan - and having day to day access to Shane and the way that Growing Lachlan works - it's pretty key for our organisation."

The Community Connectors in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo act as knowledge brokers, networkers, project managers and intermediaries. Much of their work is dedicated to helping others to succeed, without taking credit for themselves. They do this by working with initiatives and organisations to build their skills and capacity. For example, they have worked on strategic planning for Lower Lachlan Community Services and with Down the Track, a program for disengaged youth that has reduced juvenile interaction with police and improved youth employment outcomes. Many community innovations would not have evolved in the way they have without the input and support of the Community Connectors.



RE-ENGAGING YOUTH

Down the Track is a program for disengaged youth. It is about early intervention, role modelling and positive activities for young people. It has been running for two years. During that time Growing Lachlan has provided mentoring and support on the development of the program, including facilitating focus groups and aiding in difficult conversations with local families, creating a program logic that has helped secure funding, and encouraging the expansion of the model in to a social enterprise.

"I really want to highlight how critical Growing Lachlan's support and the way that they consult with Down the Track is to our work."

The program now includes a weekly breakfast club at the Lake Cargelligo Central School that allows young people to expand their networks and get to know what people do in the community. There is an agricultural stream where young people learn skills like fencing, they do shearing and lamb-marking. Then there is the social enterprise stream which is catering. That has really taken off because there are limited catering opportunities in Lake Cargelligo. They cater for one to two events a week and have catered for a wedding as well as for the NAIDOC ball.

Participants have completed TAFE Certificates including WHS & First Aid and introduction to Shearing. They have also done chainsaw work, basic welding, dog training, had trips to Armidale, family history work, team building exercises, job readiness - skill building and some road trips to work on group activities. Participants have secured ID, birth certificates and TFNs which brought them greater independence.

15 young people have gained full-time employment through the program. Another young person who had dropped out of school was mentored back into school, completed year 12 and was then supported in obtaining a scholarship to go to university.

Down The Track has links to improving community safety and crime prevention as well. Local statistics show reductions in youth crime and anti-social behaviour. For example, in previous years, the local police would have to take juveniles over to Wagga two to three times a week. In 2019, there has only been one transport required to Wagga Wagga all year.

10. GETTING MORE OUT OF WHAT WE HAVE AND DOING MORE FOR OURSELVES

"The role of Growing Lachlan is not only to help guide and work around co-design, but it's also helping to build skills within our Shire for people to be able to do some of these things themselves, like community groups or organisations."

Growing Lachlan has focused on growing the capacity and ability of the community to do more with what they have and to tap in to existing programs and resources where possible. One example is the Western Business Forum. Growing Lachlan successfully secured \$45,000 in funding to host this forum in late 2019 in Condobolin. The Forum is an event focused on helping businesses examine what they're doing now and how they can change their business models or grow their business, and how they can get ready to apply for tenders for numerous large upcoming infrastructure projects. School students studying business are also invited to attend free of charge. Growing Lachlan has since pulled together a lot of key players from across Australia as well as within the Shire together to support the focus on economic development. They have also approached the Condobolin Business Chamber and the Western New South Wales Business Chamber to explore how they could collaborate to address economic development.

Another example is the 2018 Lake Cargelligo business gathering, for which Growing Lachlan successfully won funding and convened. The gathering involved guest speakers as well as approximately 35 local business owners. It has seeded the idea of possibly developing a Chamber of Commerce for Lake Cargelligo to better support small business in the region. And outlined below is an example of a project run by the Lake Cargelligo Community Connector around School Based Apprenticeship Traineeships (SBATS) program, an existing program that was underutilised.



REIMAGINING EMPLOYMENT READINESS

Work on employment readiness began when it was realised that there were untapped opportunities under the School Based Apprenticeship Traineeships (SBATS) program. TAFE representatives in particular raised the need for more opportunities for young people and it was realised that a lot more could be done to take advantage of the program. Growing Lachlan began to work with the central school and created an 'employment readiness' class in collaboration with the school careers advisor. The program introduced design thinking and co-design and was built with the students for the students. Growing Lachlan has also worked with local employers to gain their involvement in the program. Features have included student talks and discovery research, tours of local businesses, working with students on creating resumes and teaching students about dressing and arriving on time for work. Students also led a skills and business audit to map the local opportunities available. Since 2017, 25 year 9 and 10 students have been involved and several students have been placed as apprentices.

"It's been giving the young people opportunities to see that there's real jobs within our community, they don't have to leave, but if they do choose to leave they're prepared, they know what they need to do."

THE ROLE OF GROWING LACHLAN

As is evident from the examples above, since its establishment Growing Lachlan has worked across Shire communities to support a wide variety of people, groups and services to activate their ideas towards advancing the community priorities. It is not a service provider itself but rather plays a unique connecting and supporting role. It also encourages new ways of working and collaboration and challenges groups to think on how things can be done better, and how they could take action better together.

While small, Growing Lachlan has been a pioneer of community-led place-based initiatives in NSW; a growing movement across Australia that has recently started receiving greater attention and funding from all levels of government. Over six years, Growing Lachlan has developed into an important community asset, with trusted relationships that allow it to play a range of crucial roles. These are not traditional project management or service delivery roles but rather about bringing new ways of working and thinking that support local groups to 'test and try' new approaches to addressing community priorities. It is growing a culture of innovation in the Lachlan Shire. The range of roles Growing Lachlan has played is summarised in the image below.



LOOKING AHEAD

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

As a community-led place-based initiative, it is possible to draw upon Dart's (2018) Place-based Evaluation Framework¹ to determine areas where there has been 1) significant progress; 2) some progress and 3) no visible progress as yet. In addition to the descriptions below, a figure has also been included with colour coding.

Based on this research, it is evident that significant progress has been made with these components (green):

- Sufficiently resourced facilitating partner convenes and catalyses systemic change in the community
- Community priorities and aspiration direct activities and investment
- Transparent governance with a common agenda
- Local, specific innovations to improve our place
- Instances of impact for individuals and families

Some progress has been made on the following, noting that further effort is required to ensure that these components become embedded for the long-term (orange):

- Agile and adaptive funders, initiators and intermediaries
- Capacity building to achieve sustainability and self determination
- Communities lead change and decision-making structures are embedded
- Policies, practices, norms, and service models improve at place
- An integrated learning culture
- Multisector collaboration and joining-up services

It appears that no progress as yet is visible for these components (red):

- Place readiness and interest in systemic changes in our community
- Better flow of resources, funding and infrastructure
- Sustainable population level impacts

It is worth noting that for areas of 'some progress', there has been positive signs but more needs to be done. For example, in terms of an agile and adaptive funder, VFFF has played this role extremely well but they can't continue to do this on their own. The need for more diverse resourcing to underpin the initiative is discussed more below. Likewise, community voice is definitely informing change, but more could be done to ensure more formal community driven decision-making structures are developed.

For areas where no progress as yet has become evident, there are a range of reasons as well as implications. While sustainable population level impacts are not yet visible, this is not surprising as it is too soon for these to be seen. It typically takes more than five years for such initiatives to achieve population level outcomes. Of greater concern is the lack of 'place readiness' in the community, meaning that while there is some buy-in, it is not widespread. This is perhaps the biggest challenge for Growing Lachlan, which is underpinned by the belief that real change will only come when the community drives it. If the community is not activated, then change will not be lasting. It is for this reason that it is recommended below that the governance and membership of Growing Lachlan be reviewed to see if wider buy-in could be built.

¹ Dart, J. 2018. Place-based Evaluation Framework: A national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches, report, Commissioned by the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS) and the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS).

Progress of the Growing Lachlan initiative as a place-based journey (modified from Dart, 2018)



WHAT ACTIONS ARE REQUIRED?

Growing Lachlan has been about introducing new ways of working, asking how things can be done better, getting them done and embedding deeper collaboration across the Lachlan Shire. It has come a long way in a relatively short period of time with relatively few resources. While much has been achieved, Growing Lachlan has also faced some significant challenges including lack of diverse resourcing, awareness about its work, quantifiable evidence of impact and community buy-in and readiness. It has also experienced turnover of key personnel within the team and partner organisations. Given these challenges, the following areas are recommended for future action.

FINDING MORE DIVERSE RESOURCING

There was a clear sense from respondents that if Growing Lachlan ceased operations it would be a great loss to the region. The Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation has been the philanthropic partner of Growing Lachlan since it was established, investing almost \$500,000 from 2013-2019. As Growing Lachlan has evolved over time, it has been facilitated by flexible funding and committed support and capacity building from VFFF. The hope was that, over time, eventually more funders would be enrolled as supporters. Unfortunately, this has yet to eventuate and needs dedicated attention and planning. Growing Lachlan is approaching a pivotal moment as current funding concludes shortly and demand for its support grows. It is pursuing various avenues to secure its future and recognises that creating financial sustainability through a more diverse resource base is crucial. There are a range of ideas for how this could occur gradually over time, including through contributions from membership and even a fee-for-service model. For example, the capacity building and strategic support currently offered by the Community Connectors at no cost could be turned in a fee-for-service model that helps to generate some income as well makes the inherent value of their work more visible.

“
Growing Lachlan is approaching a pivotal moment as current funding concludes shortly and demand for its support grows.
”

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT GROWING LACHLAN

Much of the work of the Community Connectors is intentionally low key. They seek to activate others and are often 'leading from behind'. This means they purposely are sometimes invisible in terms of the work they have been instrumental in enabling. This also means Growing Lachlan has additional work to do to better communicate its value and contribution. To date, the purpose and function of Growing Lachlan has not been well articulated, and there hasn't been a dedicated effort to promote the brand. Lack of acknowledgement of the support of Growing Lachlan by stakeholders also contributes to an overall lack of public awareness about the initiative. More work to communicate the vision and mission of the initiative is needed. This could include more community walkthrough events, the use of shopfronts to document the work and a greater presence on social media.

TRACKING CONTRIBUTION

Given the nuanced and collaborative nature of Growing Lachlan, it isn't easy to report on the unique contributions that Growing Lachlan has made. It is also difficult to quantify the impact of social interventions. This is typical of many place-based approaches, which often involve ongoing learning, adaption and the incremental implementation of numerous interventions. The use of qualitative reporting including narrative based case studies is therefore important and should help to capture progress being made. Identifying quantitative outcomes will also become more feasible over a longer period of time. If resources allow, greater effort is needed to track and report the achievements of Growing Lachlan through both methods. It is likely that this may help address other challenges such as financial resourcing, public awareness

and community buy-in. Having documentation that tells the story of Growing Lachlan could also help with bringing new people 'on board' as the staff within the team and partner organisations inevitably change over time. This turnover currently proves a great burden on the longest serving individual of Growing Lachlan, who has been and remains pivotal to its ongoing success.

REVIEWING GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

"Growing Lachlan is not an organisation. Everyone is part of Growing Lachlan. If they want to be."

There are several areas that need reviewing when it comes to governance and membership. The first is the Growing Lachlan Alliance, which has been the overseeing body of the initiative. It has many strengths, including achieving traction with the NSW Government, which sets Growing Lachlan apart from other efforts in the region. The challenge is that, despite current wins, the Alliance is not working as well as it could. There was an expectation that the Alliance would be more active in its support of the small Growing Lachlan team outside of scheduled meetings. This has not happened and could be partly explained by a lack of understanding of place-based approaches. It could also be that the terms of reference themselves are not suitable. While they have served their purpose, a lot has been learned since the original terms of reference were drafted, and the initiative has evolved. It is recommended that these terms be revisited and the time commitment expected of members is made clear.

The second issue is membership. While Growing Lachlan envisages a shared story across Lachlan Shire, for which all residents feel ownership and pride, there is more to be done. Achieving this could require moving towards a different model for governance and membership in order to build momentum. For example, options might include firstly creating a smaller Advisory Board of skilled specialists who could provide support to the Growing Lachlan team, acting as a 'brains trust' and providing influence on behalf of the initiative. This could then be complemented by a reimagined Alliance that is opened up to much wider community membership. Being a member of the Alliance could become part of local identity and could be fuelled by movement building activities. A citizen panel could be created that formally embeds community decision making. Meeting quarterly, panellists would be paid for their time and would provide immediate feedback and insight on critical issues for the region as well feedback on the work and plans of service providers.

When it comes to the shape of the team itself, a dedicated host organisation is required - one that can provide administrative, fundraising and staffing support for the team. As mentioned above, key person risk is an issue and burn-out is a factor. A more supported team would be more resilient and also better able to plan for succession.





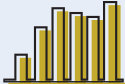

These are simply suggestions and consultations with existing partners is required to ensure the right form and function for governance and operations is determined going forward.


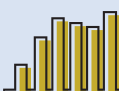

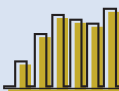
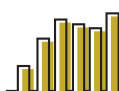

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Place-based work demonstrates the challenges of community development in small regional towns including resource scarcity, volunteer burnout and serious socioeconomic disadvantage for population segments. There is no silver bullet. The Growing Lachlan initiative is slowly but surely working to address these barriers - and are now gaining real, if hard fought momentum. Five years of effort has led to many wins and breakthroughs for the priorities of community renewal, economy development, community safety, youth and elderly care, underpinned by cultural recognition, respect and genuine participation. The potential is there to really gain traction and create impact - if it is able to continue to build on these wins. Place-based change can take up to ten years or longer. Long-term commitment from all partners is required if Growing Lachlan is to empower local people to strengthen their community and shape their own future.

APPENDIX 1 - COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS

Growing Lachlan has supported, partnered with and, in some cases, catalysed a range of locally specific innovations that have improved outcomes for individuals, families and the wider community. Some examples are provided below.

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY AREA	ROLE OF GROWING LACHLAN	OUTCOME
Aged Care Profiles	Taking care of older and younger generations 	Research, documentation, publication, promotion, advocacy	Wider and more effective use of data; Raised awareness of lack of services
Domestic Violence programs	Improving community safety and crime prevention 	Priority informed by GL report, catalyser, researcher	Joining the dots to fill service gaps
Down the Track	Improving community safety and crime prevention; Taking care of older and younger generations  	Funding secured based on GL report as evidence, advice, capacity building	Building new skills in many organisations; Bringing in extra funding to the shire; Reduced incidences of crime
Lake Cargelligo Business Gathering 2018	Supporting economic sustainability and development 	Secured funding, catalyser, convenor, organiser	Getting more out of what we have and doing more for ourselves; Economic development and business support; Additional funding
Lake Cargelligo Skate Park	Investing in community renewal 	Priority informed by GL report, catalyser	Hearing and elevating community views; Facility for young people

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY AREA	ROLE OF GROWING LACHLAN	OUTCOME
NAIDOC Ball	<p>Strengthening cultural recognition, respect and genuine participation</p> 	Catalyser, convenor, organiser, collaboration lead	<p>Breaking down long standing barriers;</p> <p>Cultural awareness and recognition</p>
Professional Women's Network	<p>Supporting economic sustainability and development</p> 	Catalyser, convenor, organiser	<p>Finding common ground;</p> <p>Doing more for ourselves</p>
Regional Innovators Network	<p>Investing in community renewal</p> 	Content creation, design and testing	<p>Equipping communities with the social innovation skills, knowledge, mindsets and tools they need to thrive;</p> <p>Model of regional innovation for use by others</p>
School Based Apprenticeship Traineeships (SBATS) program	<p>Supporting economic sustainability and development</p> 	Organiser, collaboration lead	<p>Getting more out of what we have and doing more for ourselves;</p> <p>Connections between students and businesses;</p> <p>Local jobs audit by young people;</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>
Western Business Forum	<p>Supporting economic sustainability and development</p> 	Secured funding, catalyser, convenor, organiser, collaboration lead	<p>Bringing in extra funding to the Shire;</p> <p>Getting more out of what we have and doing more for ourselves</p>
YOUth Talk 2019	<p>Taking care of older and younger generations</p> 	Research, documentation, publication, promotion	<p>Catalysing new conversations;</p> <p>Long held practices being questioned and reconsidered;</p> <p>Youth voices shaping youth activities across the Shire</p>

