



Examples and emerging insights from TACSI's big change work.

What we're learning about systems change through practice.

“Locked in to cycles of crisis driven reform, how do we find solutions that match the scale of the challenges that face our society?”

Stephen Huddart, President of McConnell



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We pay respect to the
Traditional Custodians
of all lands, past, present
and future. Honouring our
Elders and nurturing all
young people.

Introduction

Felicity wants to change things for her family, but she can't get the help she needs — despite ongoing involvement with child protection services.

Phil runs a small engineering business and is trying to employ young people in an area with known youth employment challenges. Despite his best efforts Phil can't fill his current vacancies — and the employment services send a steady stream of people who either don't want these jobs or are not ready for them. In the same town Doreen has a job — but can't access reliable transport to get to it.

Jake is a community worker who has received two years of training in everything from community engagement to systems thinking — but he can't seem to translate his training into practice.

Jessie works in crisis housing. Her job is to find people stable accommodation but the 12 weeks she is allocated for each contract is simply not enough time. Again and again she just has to refer people onward to the next service — who also have a limiting contract that makes any meaningful outcome unlikely.

These stories are unsurprising to most who work in Australia's social sector. It's painfully obvious to people looking for support, to people providing support and to policy makers that most of our social systems simply don't put people on a pathway to social and economic prosperity. In fact, they may even perpetuate ongoing dependency on state support. But we cannot merely say that these system are broken. They are generally doing exactly what we ask of them — but this is not what people want or need.

On a recent visit to Australia, Stephen Huddart, President of McConnell, a Canadian foundation that invests heavily in systems change, laid down the following challenge:

“Locked in to cycles of crisis driven reform, how do we find solutions that match the scale of the challenges that face our society?”

It's a question McConnell and many foundations, not-for-profits and governments have been exploring with a heightened sense of urgency in recent times.

There is now an imperative for big change across Australia's social systems — in education, ageing and health and to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Moving beyond crisis-driven reform will be fundamental in tackling the challenges of our time.

Progress *is* being made. There is a growing energy and momentum for collaboration, new types of partnerships and an eagerness to learn from models all over the world. There are increasing numbers of place-based initiatives, behavioural economics units and labs of all kinds. New methods and approaches are being tried. But these activities exist at the fringes of social policy development, whilst the problems they are meant to address are at the very core of our society.

TACSI's big change work



In this paper we'll explore a small number of initiatives that TACSI are involved in, which are all still a work in progress. We'll look at the various strategies employed for creating large scale change and the common characteristics across them.

All of these initiatives requires a further investment of time and resources — and while they all have promising indicators of success, they are yet to demonstrate the big change we seek. We hope this early reflection can contribute to our own and our partners' knowledge of what it takes to shift systems and prompt big change in Australia.

Stories from the front lines of big change



TACSI have been fortunate enough to work with a number of ambitious communities, service providers, governments and foundations exploring how to create change at the scale of the challenge. Together we've been working to shift systems towards early intervention and prevention, to activate latent resources in our communities, advance the economic prospects of disadvantaged regions, to change the norms of how Australians live as they age and to build the diversity of talent that will be required for us to create the transformations we all hope for.

Some of this work has taken a local focus, some regional, some national. Some has focussed on creating the experiences that will directly prompt change for people, others on the conditions that will enable those experiences. Some are trying to shift outcomes across systems, others to build the capability and conditions to do that. However they all started with a key question.

What is needed to enable the outcomes that people want and need?

Growing a movement of families helping families

When we asked Nicole and her family if they'd like to help another family as part of the first Family by Family prototype she said "What can I offer another family, I don't know anything, I'm just a mum." Nicole and her family have gone through some tough times together, and for four years as part of Family by Family they linked up with other families experiencing tough times to help them create positive change — families engaging with child protection, families living with poor mental health, disability or family violence, and sometimes all of the above. Nicole and her children listened, exchanged stories, shared their strategies, modelled what family can look like and introduced them to new people, places and routines. All of the time they had the support of a professional 'family coach' and a network of other peer 'sharing families' doing similar work. Seven years later, although Nicole doesn't volunteer for Family by Family anymore, it gave her the

confidence and aspiration to move on in her life — she has now finished her psychology degree and has her first full-time job. She is the first person in her family to go to university.

Over the past seven years Family by Family has supported over a thousand families in South Australia and New South Wales to reach their own self-set goals. 90% have achieved those goals and we've seen outcomes including reduced social isolation, improved parenting, education and employment outcomes. The program demonstrates a powerful approach to building social capital, and lasting social and economic change for families

Nicole wasn't alone in believing she didn't have much to offer other families — many practitioners and public servants thought the same at the outset. They were skeptical of how families could help other families, especially when families were engaged with child protection services.

Felicity is a mum of two. She likes Family by Family because it helped her work on the things she saw as important. She got support from someone who had been through the same things as she had. They were available when she needed them, even though that was out of office hours.

The things Felicity likes about the program are what families told us were important when we were designing the program. We learnt what makes 'helpful help' for families, through conversations at the park and over butter chicken dinners. We saw 'helpful help' happening in communities as well — families helping other families. An Aboriginal dad in Port Augusta taking other families out bush for fun, food and informal support. A mum who had been rehoused because of domestic violence providing advice to her neighbours over a beer. Family by Family amplifies and spreads these 'natural' mechanisms to make them available for more families, through a program that trains families and professionals and a new kind of commissioning arrangement with government.

TACSI is now working with service providers to design for scale — to develop the capability building and quality assurance mechanisms that will ensure this peer based approach, which challenges many of the norms of professional services, can grow to its potential.

In parallel we've been working with government to design new approaches to procurement and contracting that will ensure fidelity of delivery across a number of service delivery partners, including exploring how families can be engaged in choosing service providers and ensuring the quality of service delivery.

Ultimately, we want service providers and government to shift their norms and cultures and connect into the untapped potential of lived experience in our communities.

Building a better system for employment in Southern Melbourne

Phil runs a small engineering business on the outskirts of Melbourne:

"We offer safe jobs, with training, opportunities for going up the line, work that is not standard and not brain-numbing. We are generous in terms of pay. But we still can't find people — I can't help but conclude that people in this region don't want to work. And yet there's so much noise about youth unemployment... I just don't get it. Somewhere, someone has got things wrong."

He is finding more of his new employees through the networks of his existing employees rather than using employment services.

That makes it hard for people like Rob, who has few friends who are employed, and whose confidence is low because he has been out of work for over 18 months. He is motivated, but doesn't perform well under the pressure of job interviews. He needs other ways to meet potential employers, and he needs a support network who will put in a good word for him.

Through the project we found that in Australia around 150 reports into place-based disadvantage are written every year, and federal government spending on place-based disadvantage has increased to around 18% per annum, yet there has been little to no change in fundamental outcomes in these communities over the last 20 years — that's around 3000 reports later. In the last 5 years, 18 of those reports were written about Southern Melbourne. These reports focus on what disadvantage is,

who is disadvantaged, and what doesn't work. They often propose that we need more of what we already have. For example, for the 4000 young people experiencing unemployment there are now 180 different programs. The way this region is addressing unemployment isn't working.

Jane is one of those 1000 young people in Southern Melbourne that have been unemployed for over 12 months. She wants to work — she even has a job — but she can't get there. It's just 5 kilometres away but it would take her an hour to get there on two different buses and that just doesn't work with childcare. She doesn't have a licence or access to a car.

Doreen works in a job service provider, a government funded service connecting people with work. She told TACSI that there are no shortage of entry-level jobs, but at \$20 an hour it's not clear to people that it's the best financial option for them. With the extra cost of travel and childcare, and the casual nature of many of the jobs, it may be better to stay on unemployment benefits.

We met Phil, Rob, Jane and Doreen as part of our research in Southern Melbourne. The insights from their experiences informed a number of workshops with businesses, service providers and government agencies, a network convened to identify practical opportunities to address the region's unemployment problem.

The ideas developed included:

- creating new networking opportunities that could link employers like Phil and young people like Rob
- an impact-focussed HR platform that screens people like Rob in rather than out, and thereby opens new opportunities for motivated jobseekers
- a community based and employer focussed

transport solution that would make it possible for people like Jane to get to both childcare and work

- and shifting perceptions so that young people see a future in manufacturing industries in Southern Melbourne — where employers like Phil are actually bucking the trend and experiencing growth, but finding it hard to attract employees.

Alongside innovation of tangible elements in the system, the network identified the need to prioritise some less tangible and more 'boring' innovation. This included experiments with a new approach to service commissioning and contracting, and building their own capabilities to undertake this kind of innovation work.

Collectively the options on the table overwhelmed the resources available at the time as well as the immediate remit of the organisations at the table. However in the last few months we have started work on how to bridge the gap in perceptions between employers like Phil and jobseekers like Jane and Rob. Imagine what could have been achieved if the energy and resources invested in those 3000 reports over the last 20 years were diverted into learning through doing.

Working outside-in to shift the goals and resource flows of the service-system

Jessie is a manager of crisis accommodation services in Brisbane's inner west. The facility she manages provides short term crisis housing and individualised support. The people she works with have been through some really tough times. They are people who are escaping domestic violence and don't have anywhere else to go, people who need a break from living on the

streets, people recently released from prison, many experiencing poor mental health and problematic substance use. Typically they are people who have cycled through crisis services many times and this engagement is about to set up their the next cycle.

Jessie's contract stipulates that she can provide 12 weeks of service to her clients to help them find longer term, more stable accommodation. Often it takes 6 of those 12 weeks to build a relationship with the clients, to build their trust and respect, to understand the multiple and layered issues that have led to them seeking accommodation. The remaining 6 weeks are rarely enough to address these fundamental life issues or to find stable accommodation. In most cases after 12 weeks Jessie has to refer her client to the next service, which is focussed on assisting the person to address just another slice of the issues they are facing.

This ongoing cycle has continued for years, inadvertently enshrined in the contract. The KPIs in the contract are built around outputs, and they are often singular in focus — housing, jobs, crisis management. For workers like Jessie, referring to another program after 12 weeks is the output the contract specifies and what the contract manager measures as success.

Commissioning for outcomes is a systemic opportunity to change outcomes in ways that stop people from continually falling through the gaps, between silos and jurisdictions. Jessie's story is just one of the many examples we heard of how contracting models currently limit outcomes and create experiences that just don't make sense for those they are created to help. Using contextual research methods and system mapping we worked with stakeholders, including service providers and government, to make the challenges visible and define the pre-conditions for success. What would the community sector and government need to do to make

commissioning for outcomes work?

The Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA) is leading a movement of community service organisations to ready themselves with the goal of promoting systems change by starting outside of government with what they have the authority and the power to change. TACSI has been working alongside them to make it happen. The next steps are to demonstrate the potential for the approach at a small scale — to aggregate funding for one organisation and / or one place with multiple funding streams, and to test with the organisation what it would take to focus this funding on real and sustainable outcomes for people. Government is keen to come to the table to support and work alongside the sector in the next stages. What's less clear is where the investment will come from to really demonstrate the value of this sort of approach at larger scale. It's talked about in theory, but no one really wants to take the risk to understand what it will take to make this sort of model a reality.

Building innovation capability and confidence in Regional NSW

It's 9am on Monday morning in the car park. Jake, a young community worker in regional NSW, hasn't done what he was supposed to. He was meant to set up interviews with Aboriginal families to understand how they experience services and what opportunities exist to improve. He was meant to print the materials for the interview that he'd co-developed with TACSI the week before. But he hasn't done it. Why?

We walked alongside Jake to help him do what was planned. We went to get the printing done, to buy gift vouchers as a thank you to participating families and to the community centre for finding families to speak to. We conducted the first interview and he observed, the next we led

together. By the end of the day he'd conducted two interviews of his own and set up five more. He was a natural researcher and story gatherer. He easily built rapport and engaged people from across the community. The following week he set up seven interviews on his own accord and shifted his assumptions about what was needed in his community. Jake was starting to understand his community from new perspectives. He could see new opportunities. He realised the power of hearing people's voices and then working with them to respond in more effective and innovative ways. He started to uncover the many ways in which mainstream supports are just not working for the individuals and families that are doing it tough. He saw the value of changing not just services, but systems — and now he is fired up to make changes alongside and with his community.

Over the past two years in the lead up to Monday, Jake, along with other members of his community, has been to numerous training sessions and conferences on collective impact and community engagement. TACSI had given him another two on 'discovery work' in the last month. So why wasn't he prepared? The challenge was in the translation of theory into practice. And he also didn't believe in his own ability, until we walked alongside him and he could see that he could do this - and more! Jake's confidence gap is just one example of the small but significant barriers that get in the way of people working differently in communities. Jake's challenge wasn't due to personal failings, rather the kinds of capability building on offer weren't preparing him to do the work that was needed on the ground.

With Jake and his peers, TACSI have been developing an approach to capability building tailored for communities undertaking place based systems change initiatives. It starts with where communities are at, with the capabilities they want to learn. The curriculum itself is based on the capabilities community members have

seen work — the mindsets, skills and processes that have actually made things happen in communities like theirs.

TACSI are also working hard to ensure that our support is 'biodegradable': we're building a network of peer support for innovation in the region so when Jake gets stuck he can draw on expertise and resources from a worker in the community down the road, rather than be dependent on a fly-in fly-out trainer from Sydney or Brisbane. Over time, the network may well play an important role in ensuring that capabilities are maintained in the system, as the people working in the system and the roles they play inevitably change. Whilst there has been significant investment into capability building in the region for years, it's only now, as a result of this different approach and the structures we are building around the approach, that people like Jake are increasingly equipped to deliver on the community transformation they have been tasked with. And given that we are designing in platforms that will keep Jake and his colleagues learning about how the transformation happens, we believe this will be the type of capability building that actually sticks and spreads across the region and the diversity of workers involved.

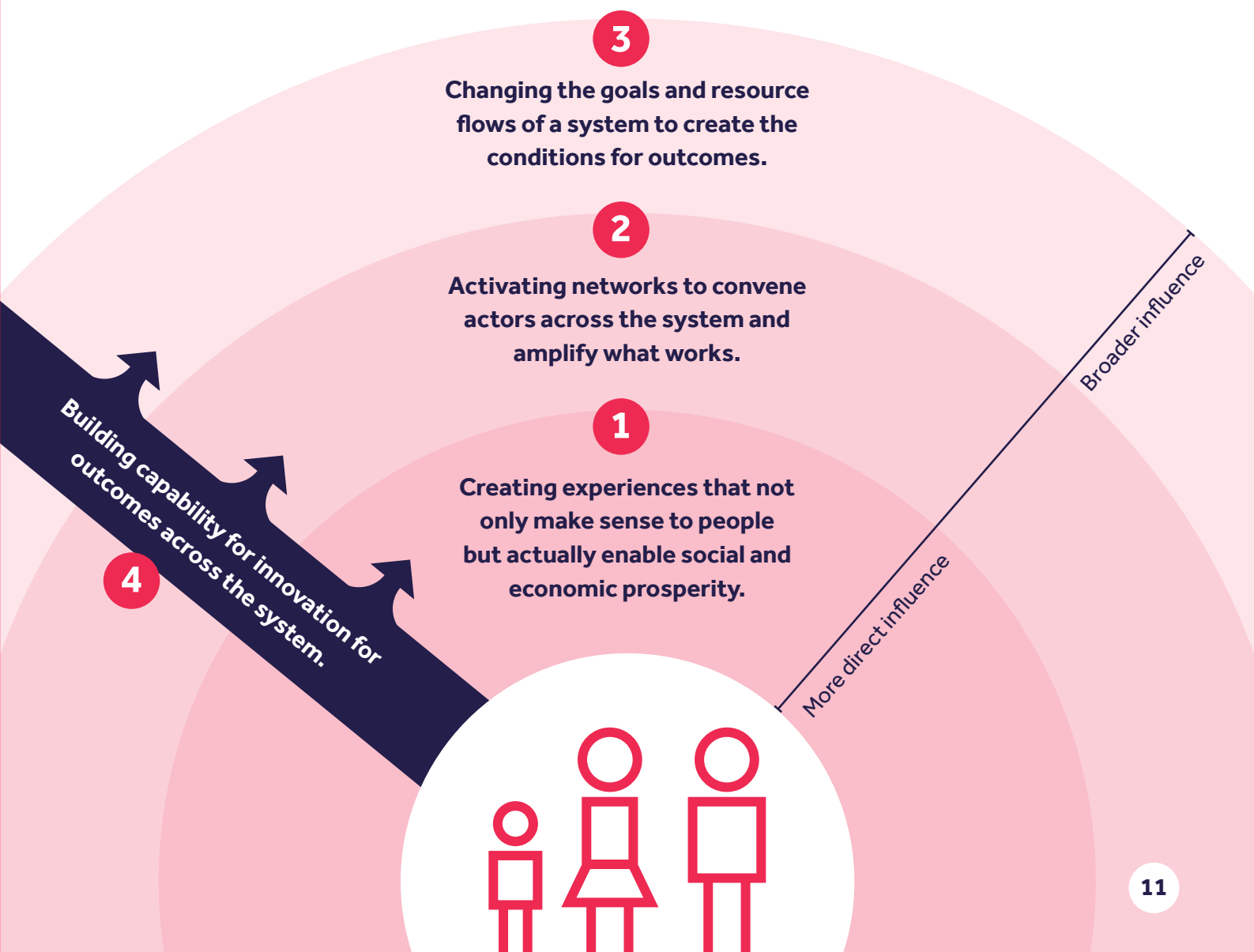
Patterns across our work



These stories are just four examples of initiatives taking different approaches to creating big change. Reflecting on these projects and TACSI's big change work to date, we see four system change strategies targeted at different levels in the system and six common characteristics. The appetite and investment for this kind of work is still embryonic in Australia. We feel we're just scratching the surface but we're hopefully taking a step forward in learning about what works.

The four practical strategies below, often used in combination, show that the ways to tackle social challenges are broader than services alone. Our hunch is the list should be longer still — for example we hope to explore the role of movements and advocacy in influencing broader mindsets, and the potential of building parallel alternative systems — but for now these are the approaches of which we have direct experience.

Four complimentary strategies for big change



STRATEGY 1

Creating experiences that not only make sense to people but actually enable social and economic prosperity.

This strategy works 'ground-up'. It involves the development and/or replication of interventions that create transformational outcomes for people — outcomes that enable social and economic prosperity. This may be a professional service, a peer-led experience, a practice within a service, or pathway through a number of these interventions. The key here is that any intervention makes sense to the people and transform lives rather than maintaining or managing disadvantage.

Whilst a new program or service may create change for those who experience it, it is unlikely to influence broader change — so we often combine this strategy with influencing goals and resource flows, using a new service or practice as a concrete example of what is possible.

Examples

Family by Family and Co-parenthood

Family by Family is an example of a peer to peer experience that creates pathways out of disadvantage by equipping families with the capabilities to solve things for themselves. Also over half of 'helping' families go on to education or employment. Alongside Family by Family we are developing Co-parenthood, a shared parenting alternative to foster care designed to support the restoration of children removed from their parents. The aim here is to get children out of the care system and back into family life when it's appropriate to do so.

Both of these initiatives are much bigger than the programs alone — we are seeking to influence how communities help each other, the culture of service delivery and the ways in which government contracting and procurement can engage with innovative programs and services.

Innovation Age

At a national level the Innovation Age initiative is seeking to shift the policy debate from a focus on housing and its affordability to considering a broader range of housing options that promote health and wellbeing, connectedness, and financial security. Our 'future of home incubator' is demonstrating new models of home ownership that increase security of tenure, new housing and urban precinct design that increases social connectedness, and new shared living platforms that promote connectedness and an alternative use of assets and space.

STRATEGY 2

Activating networks to convene actors across the system and amplify what works.

This strategy works 'middle-out'. It involves the creation of networks of innovators within systems to align their activities in a way that creates mutually reinforcing outcomes. This is likely to involve building a shared understanding of the current system and the experience of beneficiaries of that system. From this, the network identifies how to amplify what's working, how to bridge gaps between elements and what to stop doing. The network engages in live experiments to test these hypotheses.

The focus on experimentation by the network — learning through doing — differentiates this approach from approaches that focus on collaboration and consensus, an approach which, unintentionally, can lock communities into inaction. This strategy is often combined with building capability to design the kinds of experiences that create transformational outcomes, and the active engagement of those who set the goals and resource flows within the system.

Examples

End of Life Systemic Impact Network

In Victoria we are convening the change-makers striving for better outcomes for those dying, caring and bereaved through ageing related illness and decline. We are working with palliative care organisations, aged care providers, medical professionals, funeral providers, policy makers and more with the aim of enabling more people in Australia to age well and die a good death. Our strategy is to develop a robust network that will enable personal relationships, cross-sector participation, alignment of intentions, innovation capability and ultimately action on big systems issues.

Dandenong, Hume and Geelong

In Dandenong, Hume and Geelong (through the GROW initiative) we're working with a network of private business, government, service providers and communities to explore and experiment with ways to build systems that will increase employment for young people.

Koori Caucus, Victoria

In Victoria we've been supporting the work of the Koori Caucus - an existing network - to develop an alternative model for the justice system to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to further self-determination. TACSI worked as facilitators of the process and translators of the Koori Caucus' voice and ideas onto paper, before testing and refining those ideas with a network consisting of Koori Caucus members, front line staff and government decision makers. The result was a set of five interconnected initiatives, each with impact, sustainability and experience considerations, including an approach to systematise ongoing Aboriginal-led innovation in justice across the state.

STRATEGY 3

Changing the goals of a system and the resource flows within it to create the conditions for outcomes.

This strategy works 'top-down' to shift the goals and resource flows of systems, which in an Australian context are often enshrined in government policy. This strategy needs to work with strategies to build capability - so that people in the system are able to deliver on new goals and make best use of new resource flows.

A key challenge is the funding of innovation in this area. It appears as a key responsibility of government, however the complexity and political nature of the work means the government itself can be resistant to experimentation in this space. In fact, at this level we've found ourselves having to work 'outside-in', trying to shift approaches to government commissioning from outside government.

Examples

Commissioning for Outcomes, CSIA

In Queensland our work with the Community Services Industry Alliance is seeking to make commissioning for outcomes a reality. Their ambition is to both shift the goals of the system and how the resources flow through it. And they are doing this from the outside-in — taking the lead with the goal of prompting change in government. Their aim is that investment leads to outcomes and the goal of the system can shift from crisis response to prevention and early intervention. The potential pay off is huge, but the journey will be a tough one. The sector plans to learn their way toward what works through a series of small experiments starting with changing contracting for just one organisation. This is an important step in moving beyond payment for outcomes approaches that focus on singular interventions without considering the broader system or the experience of people .

STRATEGY 4

Building capability for innovation for transformative outcomes across the system.

This strategy works 'across the system' to create change. It focusses on building the capabilities that people at different levels of the system will need in order to enable social and economic prosperity. These capabilities extend to the practices front-line workers or peers may need, the capability designers and replicators of experiences may need and the capabilities related to commissioning and systems

stewardship needed by those setting system goals and resource flows. A key challenge here is to move beyond training and resource genuine long term capability building. This requires thinking beyond short term training models.

Examples

The Regional Innovator's Network

The Regional Innovator's Network across Dubbo, Lake Cargelligo, Condoblin and Bourke in NSW is exploring how to grow and sustain capabilities and behaviours for systems innovation across community and service providers. We've been designing and testing more effective alternatives to training - leading to the creation of the Regional Innovator's Network, a peer-support model for growing and embedding innovation that has national potential.

Common principles of TACSI's big change initiatives



Surprisingly, whether working at the level of a family system or on a statewide commissioning model these diverse initiatives embrace a set of common characteristics. They:

- 1 Start with where people are at**
- 2 Prioritise action and experimentation**
- 3 Enable learning from people and systems**
- 4 Build peer support**
- 5 Amplify, bridge and stop**
- 6 Design for exit and scale**

1. Starting where people are at

Each of these initiatives starts with an understanding of local needs and tailors its approach accordingly. In Western NSW it was the community that defined the capabilities to be built; in Family by Family, families set their own goals.

2. Prioritise action and experimentation

These initiatives share the belief that action and experimentation drive learning and impact. Typically these initiatives get to action within hours, days or weeks, rather than months or years. Rather than assuming that the perfect solutions can be found right away, these initiatives encourage early experimentation with new models, prototyping to learn what works and what doesn't and ongoing iteration — like the experiment in Queensland to prototype outcomes-based commissioning with just one organisation rather than an entire sector, or the 20 week prototype of Family by Family which involved Nicole's family and 19 others.

3. Learn from people and systems

Each of these initiatives has informed the development of new models with insights from people experiencing those system on the ground, insights that may have come from spending time in lounge rooms with service users, in the passenger seat of a practitioner's car making home visits or from the desk of a decision maker. This 'people perspective' is used to complement a systems perspective — an understanding of the components, inter-relationships, resource flows and historical performance of a given system.

4. Build peer support

An important part of many of these initiatives has been building formal or informal connections with peers to support people on their learning journey. In Western NSW TACSI is building a network for regional innovators in to access support and expertise from the region. Through Family by Family, it's support from another family that's the core of what prompts change, whilst peer support enables learning for the families that help others and for professionals.

5. Amplify, bridge and stop

To create mutually reinforcing systems these initiatives variously, and in combination:

- Amplify what's already working well. For example, the curriculum for the regional social innovation network is based around capabilities that have already been demonstrated to make a difference in local communities.
- Bridge existing components in the system. For example, many of the opportunities in Southern Melbourne focus on connecting young people to jobs and employers to young people.
- Stop ineffective elements. For example, in Queensland we're working to end contracting that limits outcomes.

6. Design for exit and scale

These interventions are designed to dissolve with time in one context and to be replicated in another. TACSI's support in Western NSW is designed to 'biodegrade' over time and be replaced with the regional expertise network we've helped identify, connect and strengthen. The network model could be replicated in other communities, issue areas and at different levels of the system to grow the pipeline of social innovation talent in Australia.



Conclusion



Despite their diversity these initiatives all share the simple fact that their ambitions far exceed currently identified resources. The community sector in Queensland is funding a movement towards commissioning for outcomes and small scale experiments but it's unclear who will take on the risk of supporting statewide take-up. A prototype Regional Innovator's Network is happening in NSW but its potential could be realised elsewhere. The opportunities to address unemployment in Southern Melbourne are being realised one small step at a time when money can be found and redirected. Family by Family is growing on the basis of service delivery contracts, without any real significant funding for developing infrastructure for scale.

These are promising examples of different ways of working, but they are all at risk of underperforming, or ending. The big change to which we all aspire requires greater investment into social innovation, research and development if it's to succeed. And there are so many more questions to explore:

- How do we turn promising local impacts into scalable impact?
- How do we build a pipeline of skilled systems innovators?
- What are the best institutional forms to facilitate systems change?
- What kind of institution and initiatives could build the commissioning for outcomes ecosystems?
- What kind of institutions can co-ordinate change within systems?

- Who wants to make big change happen in Australia?
- How do we build our practices for engaging with senior influencers and decision makers, including politicians?
- What's the role of social movements and how can we work with them?
- What's the most useful role we can play in this as Australia's national centre for social innovation?

Every week at TACSI we're learning something new and significant about creating big change. We hope our practical work and honest reflections can help Australia take a few steps forward in catalysing the big changes we need.



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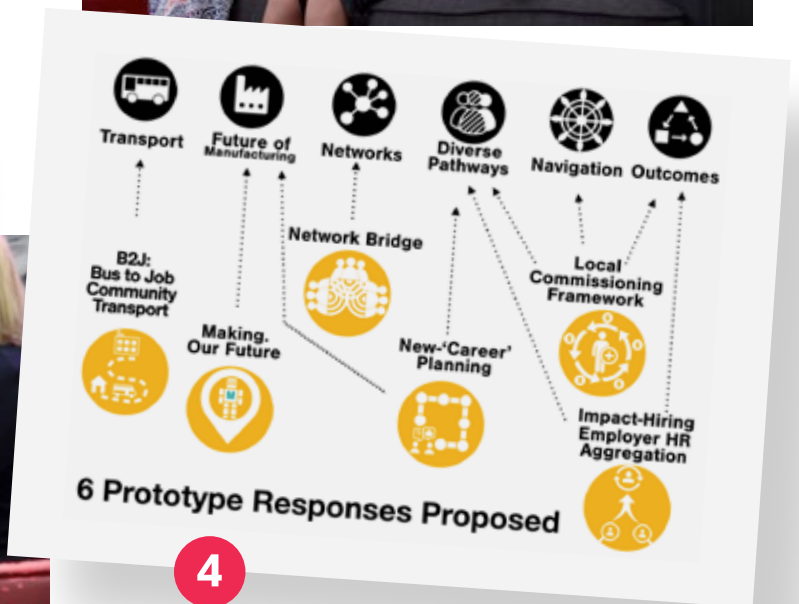
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Images from our work

1. Learning to inform the future of home and housing for older people, as part of the Innovation Age.
2. Sharing Families getting support from their peers as part of Family by Family.
3. A framework for readiness for commissioning for outcomes, developed with community services in Queensland.
4. Opportunities to amplify and bridge elements of the employment system in Southern Melbourne.
5. Capability building in action in Dubbo as part of the Regional Innovator's Network.

About

The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) is a team of more than 30 dedicated social innovation practitioners. We focus on innovation for social and economic prosperity.

- We design next generation systems and services
- We build social innovation knowledge and capability
- We support social purpose organisations in service and systems innovation

We have nearly 10 years of experience of innovation to address some of the most intractable issues in Australia.

We believe in learning through doing and in the power of working alongside the people who face the very challenges we're trying to solve.

We currently seeking investment to advance big change initiatives in our four strategic areas:

- Disrupting Disadvantage
- Furthering Self-determination
- Redesigning Ageing
- Activating Social Health

Thank you

TACSI has been honoured to work and learn alongside the individuals, communities, organisations and funders in Australia and overseas with the ambition and determination to make big change happen.





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