

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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The Bush Telegraph: An Examination of a Whole of Community Wellbeing Program in a Regional Setting¹

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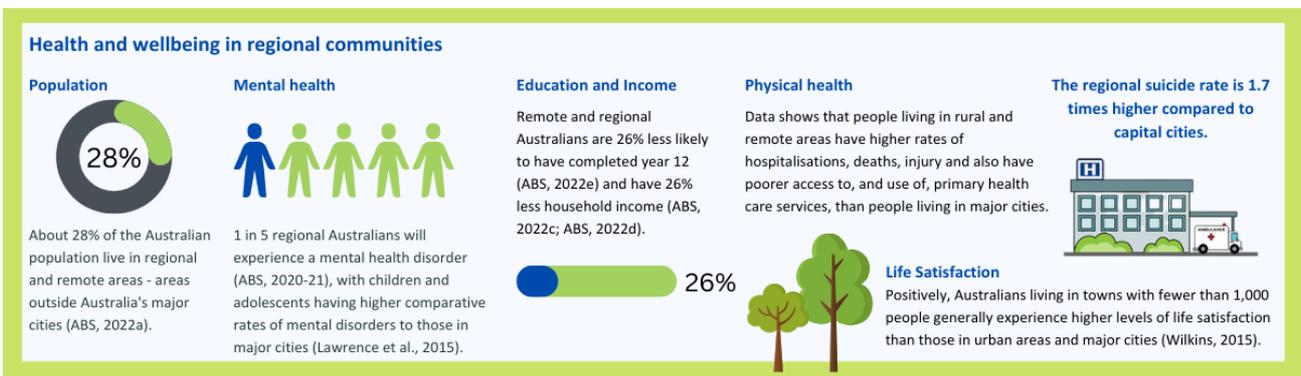
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Background: Collaborating to Improve Health and Wellbeing Disparity in Regional Communities

Regional and rural communities experience a range of barriers that impact on the delivery and accessibility of services that support health and wellbeing.

Local agencies play a vital role in providing support services that address the health and wellbeing needs of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable community members.

Interagency collaboration across multiple support sectors, such as education, employment, welfare, and housing, can help address the socioeconomic factors that impact on wellbeing (Allen et al., 2014), and also improve service efficiency (Crocker et al., 2020).



A Multi-Site, Whole-of-Community Approach to Wellbeing

Unfortunately, many wellbeing programs may not add value to regional and rural communities because they:

- Focus on **individualistic factors** (e.g., traits, behaviours, and mindsets) in understanding wellbeing outcomes, and may disregard broader community or contextual factors (e.g., local culture, trauma).
- Fail to consider desired outcomes or important factors required for achieving those outcomes, such as moment-to-moment support and existing interventions and programs.

The wellbeing program, 'The Bush Telegraph' overcomes these challenges by valuing **complexity** and **multi-disciplinary** approaches, and the role of systems and communities to understand and promote optimal human functioning.

It also aims to overcome the **challenges of interagency collaboration** by providing multiple agencies an **overarching approach** consisting of **shared** language, knowledge, methods, and skills so they can work effectively together to improve individual and collective community wellbeing.



Concepts integrated into The Bush Telegraph program

1. Summary of: Brennan, T. (2022). The Bush Telegraph: An examination of a whole of community wellbeing program in a regional setting. Submitted to fulfill the requirements of Bachelor of the Psychological Science (Honours). Central Queensland University.

The Bush Telegraph: A Systemic Approach to Improving Wellbeing Outcomes in Regional Communities

'The Bush Telegraph' is a LBI Foundation program focused on **empowering local community members**, who are embedded in the “bush” to “telegraph” the science of wellbeing and resilience in a manner that draws upon the voices, wisdom and strengths of the local community, and supports its translation into existing knowledge systems.



The **2021-2022 'The Bush Telegraph Project'** was a follow up to a pilot initiative conducted in 2020-2021. This project was delivered in collaboration with Centacare Catholic Country (CCCSA) with a more restricted and intensive focus to the Port Lincoln region. This follow up was funded by the South Australian Government, under the Statewide Wellbeing Strategy, led by Wellbeing SA.



Centacare
Catholic Country SA

The Bush Telegraph is founded upon the following key features:

Foundational IMPACT Training

- The foundational IMPACT training provides shared language, methods, tools and resources to enable the science of wellbeing, growth and trauma to be translated and personalised to individual context, in a manner that honours the strengths and knowledge of the individual and community.

Community Champions

- These IMPACT trained, coached and accredited community members have access to ongoing coaching and resources to empower their communities. There were four Community Champions, from Centacare Catholic Country SA, embedded within the 2021-22 project.

Community Conversations

- Interagency workshops to build a shared intent and collaboration.

Wellbeing Projects

- Community Champions support and empower Community Partner agencies to deliver projects that translate the science of wellbeing to the community needs and context, drawing upon IMPACT Program resources, tools, modules and strategies.



Government
of South Australia

Wellbeing SA

Study Aims

The purpose of this research was to evaluate The Bush Telegraph, bringing focus to the following points:

1. How do community providers across multiple agencies use shared language, knowledge, skills, and methods provided by The Bush Telegraph?
2. What are facilitators and barriers of implementing shared language, knowledge, methods, and skills between community providers?
3. What is the value of having shared language, knowledge, skills, and methods between community providers in rural and regional areas?

Study Methodology

The study employed a **case study approach** with focus group interviews used for data collection. Participants were divided into groups depending on their role within The Bush Telegraph. The term 'community provider' was used to include participants across all focus groups. Groups included:

1. **Community Champions** ($n = 4$): Participants had accredited IMPACT foundational training to provide mentoring and coaching to all community providers participating in The Bush Telegraph.
2. **Community Service Leaders** ($n = 5$): These workers facilitated the implementation of The Bush Telegraph within their individual community support agency and encouraged interagency collaboration.
3. **Community Informants** ($n = 3$): Practitioners and educators within each community support agency who used The Bush Telegraph to develop wellbeing solutions for individual clients.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was undertaken to identify common themes between the groups.

Results

The study found the following key outcomes.

Research Question 1: *How was shared language, knowledge, skills, and methods provided by The Bush Telegraph used by community providers?*

The study identified the following key themes across all community providers in terms of how the shared approach of The Bush Telegraph was used:

As a Clear Process to Guide Practice and Collaboration	• A framework based on intentionality gave structure and direction to interactions with both clients and other agencies.
To Improve Communication	• Having shared language and intention made written and verbal communication clear and concise.
To Enhance Understanding	• Understanding of the client and services provided by local agencies was greatly improved.

Research Question 2: *What are facilitators and barriers of implementing shared language, knowledge, methods, and skills between community providers?*

Facilitators	Barriers
<p>A Whole Team Approach Multiple staff members within the same agency attended training and supported the implementation of the program together.</p>	<p>Time Challenges Workloads, conflicting work schedules, and limited staff impacted on participant availability to attend training and coaching.</p>
<p>Flexibility of Program Content, Resources, and Training Allowed for implementation across different programs, agencies, work roles, clients, and contexts.</p>	<p>Participant and Staff Retention Low retention stalled implementation and embedding of content into wider organisational frameworks.</p>
<p>Participant Motivation and Commitment The simplicity, relevance, and value of program kept participants highly motivated and committed to the program.</p>	

Research Question 3: What is the value of having shared language, knowledge, methods, and skills between community providers in rural and regional areas?

Increased Confidence and Trust	• Confidence in participants' own practice and the practice of other agencies increased, contributing to increased trust between agencies.
Improved Inter-Program and Interagency Collaboration and Relationships	• Capacity to collaborate was strengthened and relationships both within and between agencies improved.
Improved Service Provision and Consistency	• A shared approach across multiple agencies improved service provision and made service more consistent.
Better Client Outcomes	• Client experience with local services improved. Clients felt safe and supported by local agencies.

Future Program Implementation Recommendations

The study identified the following areas of future program development and implementation:

- Agencies interested in participating in The Bush Telegraph should be encouraged to commit multiple staff members, or a whole team, to be trained in The Bush Telegraph content due to the benefits in implementation and embedding.
- More consideration needs to be given to manage time and work load pressures.
- Raise agency awareness of implementation challenges resulting from low staff and participant retention. Develop a plan to induct new staff into the program to ensure continuity and consistency of program implementation.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to gain the perspectives of community providers on their experiences in The Bush Telegraph Program, including how they used shared language, knowledge, methods, and skills, what were the facilitators and barriers to implementation, and what is the value of The Bush Telegraph in regional and rural areas.

This study found that shared language, knowledge, methods, and skills across multiple agencies improved both the practice of community providers with their own clients and their capacity to engage in effective interagency collaboration.

This research supports the incorporation of an **intentional practice and systems approach** into whole-of-community wellbeing programs that aim to improve wellbeing outcomes in regional and rural communities. It also demonstrates that a shared approach can be implemented across multiple agencies in regional and rural communities to improve interagency collaboration and service provision.

The study has highlighted the importance of promoting mental health and wellbeing outcomes through collaborative approaches that are founded upon shared language, knowledge, skills, and methods.

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