

Case Study 3

C4C Burnie Evaluation

Who Spans the Boundary? Local Delivery Organisations as Research to Policy Intermediaries

Parties Involved

EJ Baird (former Director and Principal Consultant, The Social Yield Pty Ltd), CatholicCare Tasmania (North West) and the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS).

Overview

The Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program is a DSS-funded initiative that supports children and families in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. The program operates through a tiered, place-based design, in which local Facilitating Partners fund Community Partners to deliver services tailored to local needs.

In 2020, EJ Baird was commissioned by a Facilitating Partner, CatholicCare Tasmania (North West), to evaluate its delivery of the Communities for Children program in Burnie (C4C Burnie). The purpose of the evaluation was to assess how well C4C Burnie was aligned with the national program in 2018–20, with a focus on governance, engagement, capacity-building, commissioning and continuous improvement. Drawing on program documentation and semi-structured interviews with C4C Burnie Community Partners and the program Consultative Committee, the evaluation identified strong performance across all themes alongside opportunities for improvement.

Unexpectedly, a CatholicCare Regional Manager with dual expertise in community service delivery and policy leveraged the evaluation to share the report directly with the DSS, who then applied the findings to shape program improvements at the national level. This experience highlights the critical role of local actors as boundary spanners and challenges the conventional assumption that translation flows directly from researchers to policymakers.

Research-Translation Successes

- Evaluation findings directly informed national program improvements, including clarification of key terms such as 'early intervention' and 'vulnerable'.
- Co-design of evaluation questions with local delivery actors enhanced the relevance of the evaluation, which made findings more impactful for policymakers.
- The C4C Burnie Facilitating Partner effectively bridged the gap from local insights to national policy, **demonstrating the value of informal boundary spanning***.
- Translation was enabled by the credibility of the delivery organisation and the strength of the relationship between the CatholicCare Regional Manager and her DSS contact.

Research-Translation Challenges

- The project was not initially conceived as an exercise in research translation, and therefore no formal plans were in place to communicate evaluation outcomes to relevant policymakers.

Transferable Insights

Key Methods

Methods that enhanced the relevance and translation potential of findings included:

- Co-developing evaluation questions with local program stakeholders.
- Communicating findings in a way that enabled rapid understanding by decision-makers while retaining sufficient detail for technical audiences.
- Utilising the 1:3:25 format and using pull-quotes to bring analyses to life.
 - **The 1:3:25 format:** a 1-page executive summary, a 3-page overview outlining the main findings and recommendations, and a 25-page detailed report providing full analysis and supporting evidence.

Reflections

- Paying attention to small but meaningful datapoints (such as undefined terms) can reveal opportunities for influence beyond the immediate evaluation scope.
- Intermediaries can be policy actors, not just implementers, especially in regional contexts, interpersonal connections are strong and professionals can often wear many hats.
- Research can achieve national or regional impact through intermediaries, even without direct engagement between researchers and policymakers.
- Translation into policy can occur after the research concludes, highlighting the importance of documenting and communicating insights effectively.
- Engaging actors with trusted positions in both local and national spheres can facilitate unanticipated but impactful translation pathways.

For more information

- [DSS Communities for Children Facilitating Partners Program](#)
- [CatholicCare Tasmania C4C Burnie Program](#)

*For more information about boundary spanners, please see the [Boundary Spanning Statement of Value](#).