

# Making a Difference to Children and Families

New ways service delivery can break cycles of disadvantage



# Bridgewater, Gagebrook & Herdsman's Cove

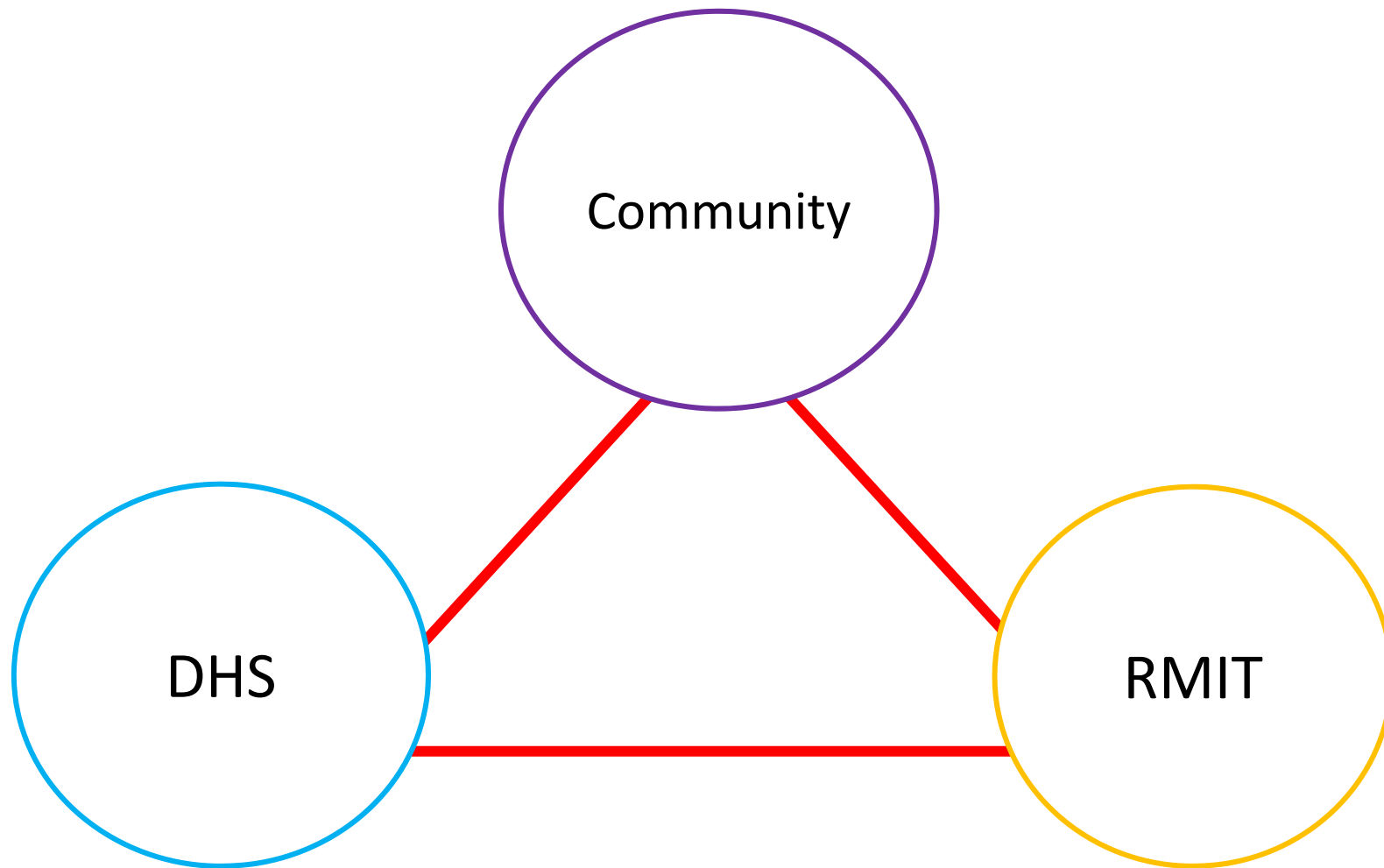


# Research questions

- How can the **Department of Human Services work with individuals and communities** to improve the circumstances and outlook of those experiencing intergenerational welfare dependency?
- How can an understanding of the **values and behaviours of communities and individuals** inform the design of services that lead to stronger future economic and social participation?

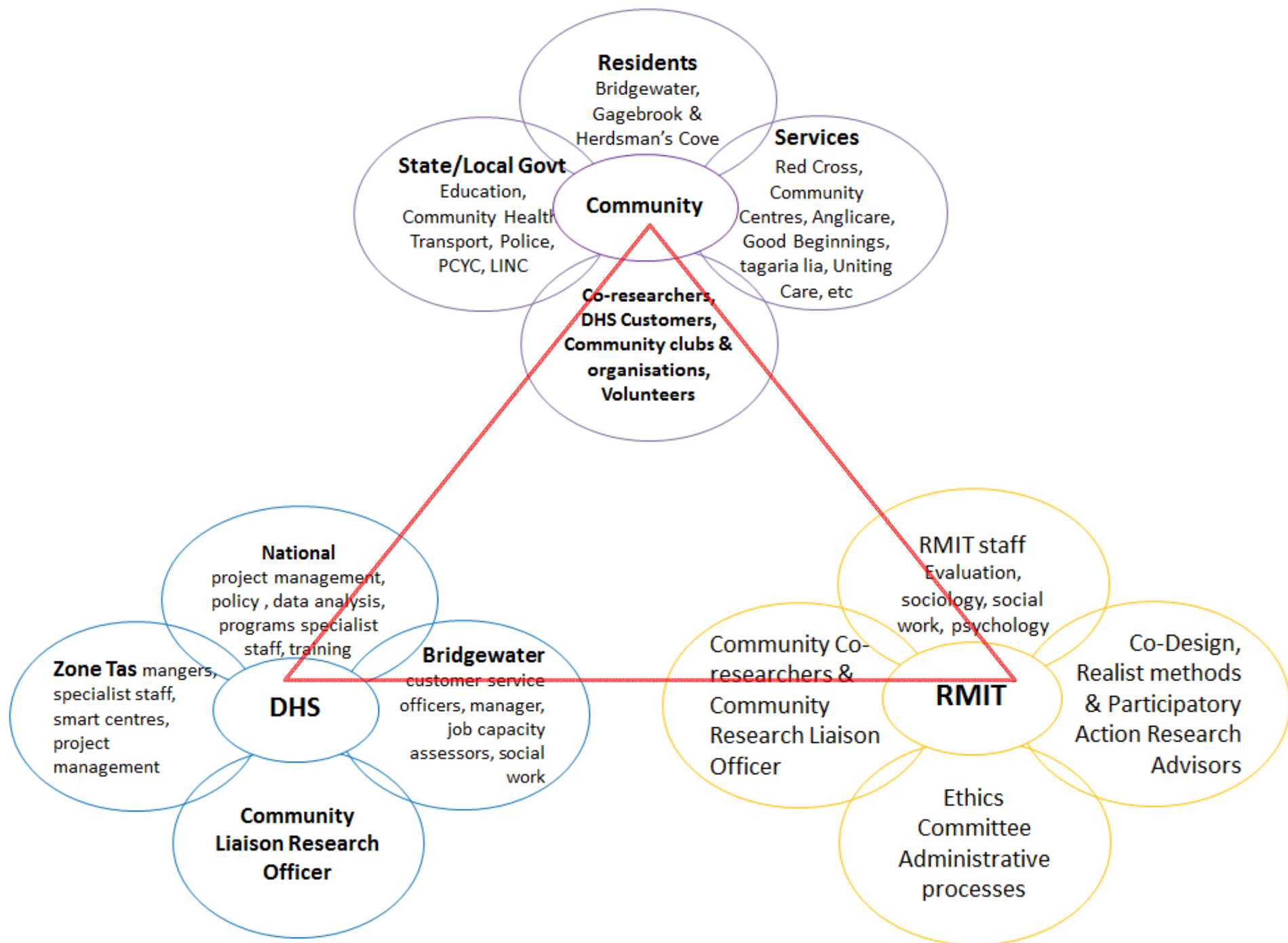
# Approach

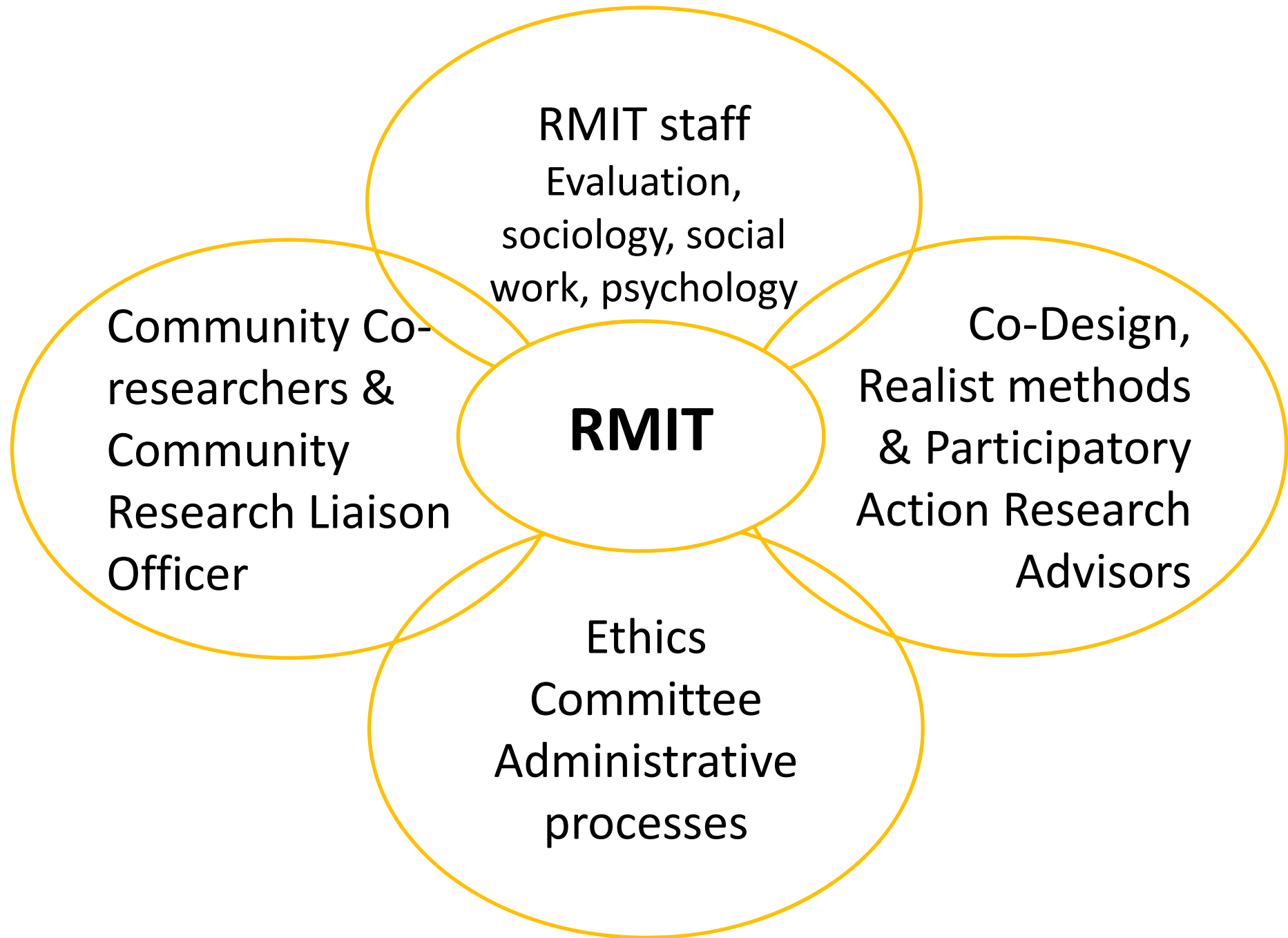
- **Participatory** – Community, DHS, RMIT, Co-researchers
- **Evidence based** - Multiple & diverse data sources
- **Informed by theory** - e.g. Trust, Scarcity, Program theories
- **Realist** - What works, for who, in what contexts & how
- **Co-design** - Creating real world solutions with people who will be directly affected by them
- **Asset based** - identifying values, building on strengths



*“This project must be seen as a true collaboration  
between all levels of government, the research sector  
and the people of Bridgewater”*

**Research Project RFRO**









## Co-researchers



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**Research Ethics Training – Monday 21<sup>st</sup>  
and Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013**

Pauly Ramcharan, Kaye Stevens and Penni Neve





# Community Research Liaison Officer

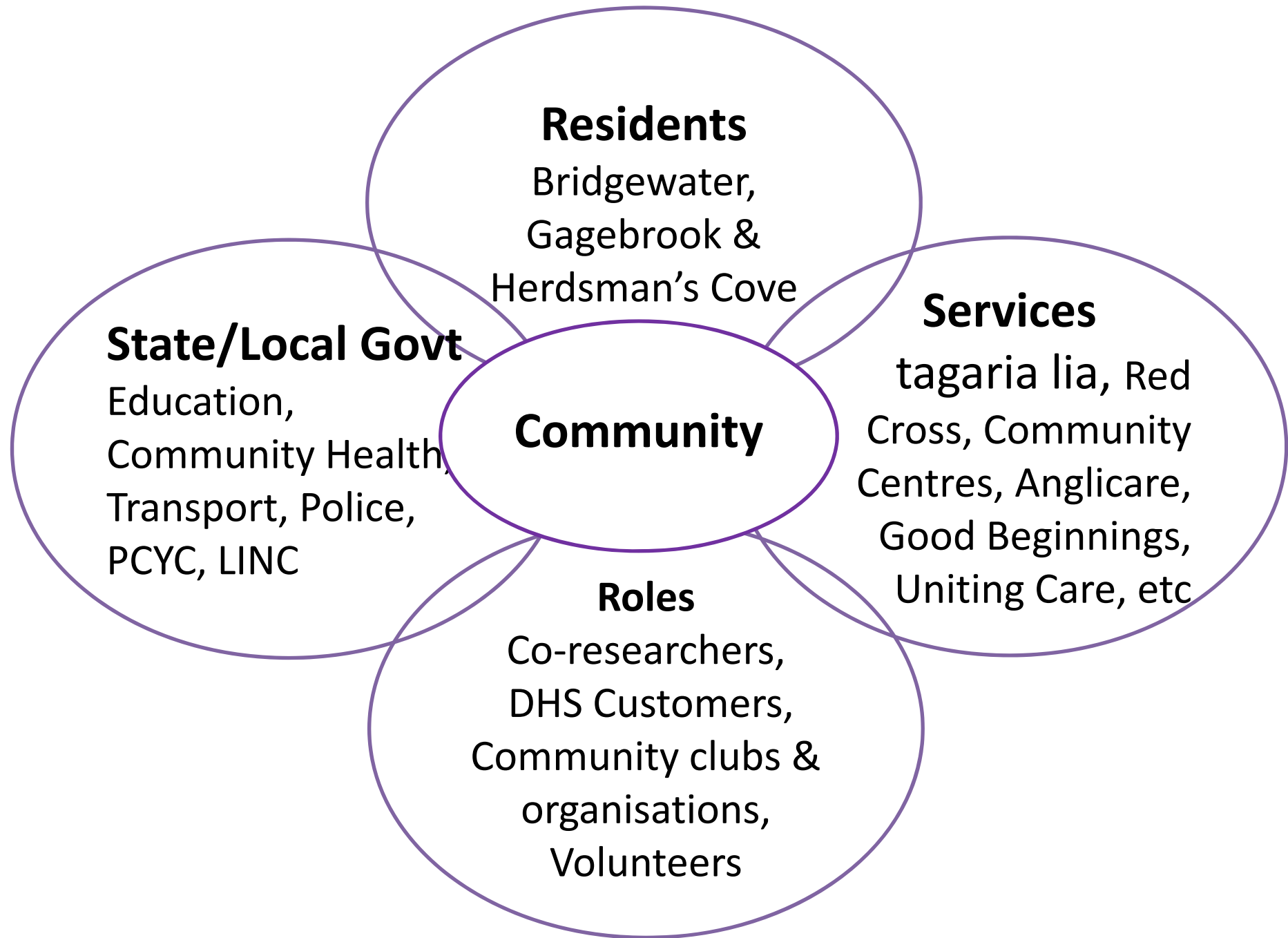
Employed by DHS

RMIT involved in recruitment

Roles:

- supporting community engagement
- building links with services & networks
- supporting co-researchers
- links between DHS and RMIT
- supporting DHS engagement









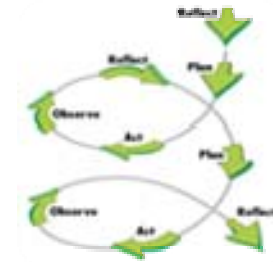
**Situation  
analysis**  
multiple  
data  
sources



**Prioritise**  
Agreed on  
priorities for  
further work



**Co-design  
changes**  
Design groups  
checked out  
assumptions,  
developed  
options for  
change



**Trial,  
evaluate,  
refine,  
scale new  
service  
approaches**

**Building and maintaining goodwill through  
transparent, respectful participatory processes and  
regular reporting back**

## Situation analysis - aims



### **1. Learn about culture and values**

- local community and service systems
- service delivery at the Bridgewater Centrelink office and the broader DHS context

### **2. Develop relationships**

- Clear that a collaborative process – evaluators weren't 'experts' coming to study, diagnose and 'fix' problems
- Sought advice about how to engage with the community





# The community landscape

- 3 distinct suburbs
- High awareness of stigma
- Some sub-groups unlikely to be reached
- Distrust within and between sections of the community and of outsiders
- Violence & trauma – within families and in the community
- Active community members – leadership advocacy, volunteers
- Lots of services, some working collaboratively



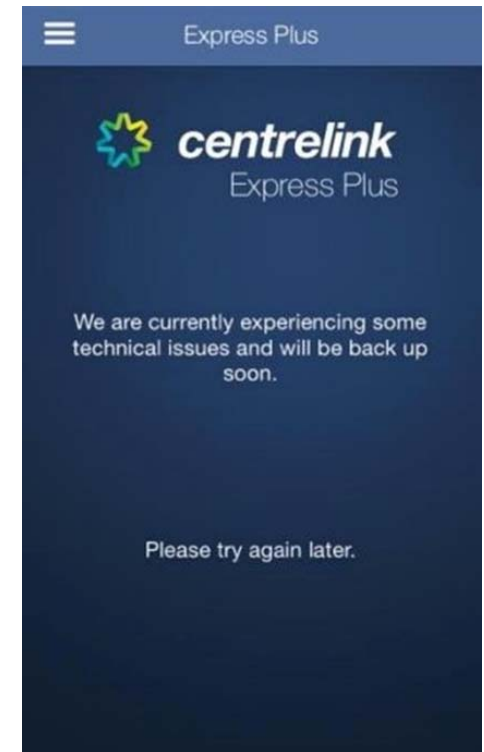
# Centrelink



- Large and complex organisation
- Multiple service channels – online, telephone, face to face
- Massive number of contacts with community - 43.1 million telephone calls per year, more than 800,000 per week
- National, zone and local levels
- Frequent changes - restructures, changes to policies, programs, priorities and processes
- Increased emphasis on digital services

# DHS Landscape

- KPIs focus on efficiency and through-put rather than outcomes
- Clunky IT system & gaps in information management
- Service officers were managing competing demands
- Hierarchical organisation
- Specialised roles – experienced by customers as fragmented
- Diverse and sometimes complex customer needs
- DHS delivering services for other departments



# Constraints

- Changes needed to be delivered with existing DHS resources
- Changes needed to be sustainable after the end of the project
- Difficult to get time to work with front-line staff as a team

## Where we got to

[illegible]

# Literacy Initiative

In partnership with 26TEN and the Bridgewater LINC -  
designed and trialled literacy awareness training,  
referral protocols and feedback processes





## Co-designing the change

- Interviews with community members
- Interviews with clients of a local literacy program
- Interviews with DHS staff
- DHS staff training trialled with co-researchers
- Feedback from DHS staff after initial training led to revisions
- Feedback from DHS & LINC re referral processes

## Data for assessing outcomes:

- Referral data
- Number of customers with literacy needs noted on their file
- Staff feedback (DHS & LINC)

## Community context

- Sensitive to being treated as 'stupid' - potential shame
- Negative school experiences
- Frustration when
  - expected to use online service
  - Had to repeatedly tell DHS that they couldn't read

## DHS context

- Staff not trained to identify & respond to low literacy
- Concerned about causing offence
- Expected to refer to SEE program (KPI)
- Inconsistent recording of low literacy
- Expected to direct people to on-line services

## **Training aims:**

- Increase awareness of the impact of low literacy
- How to identify that someone has low literacy
- How to assist people with low literacy
- How to have a sensitive conversation about literacy
- When and how to make a referral
- Asking permission to note literacy on the person's file

## **Building relationships** to support referrals:

- DHS staff visited the LINC & vice versa
- Shared morning tea
- Feedback to DHS staff about outcomes of referrals
- LINC brochures / info

## Outcomes

- People using the LINC for the first time – being introduced to a range of services including literacy, vocational training, and programs for children
- People returning to the LINC
- Feedback from DHS about ‘transformational’ conversations
- Increased DHS staff sensitivity and responsiveness
- Process being rolled out across Tasmania – also interest from other states & territories

## What we learnt

- Change in culture for some staff to:
  - Ask customers permission to note low literacy on their file
  - Be asked to use their discretion in assessing whether it was appropriate to initiate a conversation about literacy
- Needed to clarify that staff could refer to the most appropriate service (regardless of KPIs)
- Training just the start - needs to be followed up with ongoing support
- Relationship between DHS and LINC staff supports referrals
- Take different staff and customer needs into account

## Evaluator roles in navigating landscapes

- Learning about community and organisational cultures
- Developing relationships
- Ethical decisions e.g. re data collection
- Facilitating processes to build shared understanding from different perspectives
- Respectfully challenging assumptions
- Feedback to different audiences



## Navigating the Community Landscape

Build trust and credibility by:

- Focus on relationships
- Seeking and acting on advice
- Seeking to understanding community dynamics
- Being upfront & transparent
- Not over-promising
- Valuing strengths as well as naming challenges
- Building on existing networks and activities
- Giving back, adding value

# Working with Community Co-researchers

- Accepting that people would contribute when and how they could in ways that they wanted to
- Following up co-researchers who couldn't attend meetings
- Supporting skill development
- Supporting career and study plans

## Navigating the DHS landscape



- Balancing responsiveness to changing DHS landscape with a focus on overall project aims
- Understanding the perspectives of staff in different roles and contexts
- Identifying competing demands and priorities at the service delivery level
- Continual feedback about project findings and emerging issues

# Principles

- Investing in relationships
- Valuing diverse perspectives and types of evidence
- Giving back
- Challenging assumptions (including our own)
- Not doing damage – realistic expectations & ethical decisions
- Facilitating shared understanding