

The Geelong Project **TGP**

A 'Community of Schools and Youth Services' Platform

Submission to Department
of Human Services and the
Victorian Government

Executive Summary

August 2014



1 Foreword

In October 2013, a deputation of stakeholders from The Geelong Project met with the Honourable Minister for Housing, Ms Wendy Lovell, local Members of Parliament, Mr David Koch and Mr Andrew Katos, and senior Departmental representatives. This meeting was requested to seek cross-government support for the ongoing development and implementation of an Early Intervention Platform in Geelong. The first stage of The Geelong Project was funded through the Innovative Action Projects program, though continued funding for further development as a Stage 2 IAP was not able to flow from that source.

Minister Lovell listened as the deputation spoke of the importance of reform work, and the progress and the successes achieved during the pilot phase. The Minister acknowledged the high level of stakeholder connectivity and community commitment to this project. After confirming that IAP decisions could not be revisited, the Minister presented the Geelong representatives with a challenge: Go back to the Geelong community and its key service providers and examine what local resources could be brought to bear through reorganisation and local reforms to contribute to the development of a Geelong early intervention platform. This proposition was taken on board by the Geelong representatives as a serious challenge.

It has been a major challenge for the youth service sector and schools to bring about the huge amount of local reform to achieve greater efficiencies and a service realignment that can achieve greater effectiveness. The necessary negotiations and discussions have taken several months, but in coming back, Geelong has undertaken an extraordinary local effort with the broadest support from all community stakeholders.

Existing resources reformed and reorganised into a community-wide early intervention platform, will provide the bulk of resources required for the TGP Early Intervention Platform. This commitment of cash and in kind equates to \$4.1m over two years and is expected to be supplemented further by philanthropic funding. This submission seeks an investment from the Victorian Government of \$1.33M over two years (\$666K per annum) to demonstrate the effectiveness and cost saving capacity of this new early intervention platform in targeting, accessing and supporting 1344 identified vulnerable young people and their families in Geelong. This investment by Government will be utilized as a form of 'hump' or transitional funding while a fully sustainable platform is developed and savings demonstrated that can offset operational costs.

This proposal has been developed in full consultation with the Geelong community and has the support of G21, City of Greater Geelong, Youth and Housing Service Networks, Geelong Schools and Community Agencies.

We thank you for your consideration of this submission.

2 Executive Summary

The Geelong Project (TGP) is a sustainable innovative, place-based, 'community of schools and youth services' model and platform for Early Intervention with young people at risk of disengaging from school and becoming homeless.

TGP has been developed over a period of five years by Geelong community agencies and schools and is based on a solid body of Australian research into Early Intervention. TGP is tackling the very real problem identified in recent government reports of fragmented, uncoordinated planning and disconnected service delivery to young people. It is offering a new platform for service delivery that responds to key government reform and policy directions.

The model involves population screening for risk, coordinated and integrated response, youth-focused and family-centred case management and longitudinal follow-up. **TGP is underpinned by major system reform creating new systems, processes and new forms of inter-professional integrated practice.**

2.1 Key Features

The signature features of The Geelong Project model of early intervention are:

- / A community collaboration of mainstream schools and youth agencies that integrates the work of all the key providers
- / Population screening for 'risk of homelessness' and associated risks such as early school leaving and mental health issues
- / Joint decision making by Schools and TGP Staff, with the young person and family, to refer into the youth services system
- / A single point of entry for schools by way of accessing an integrated youth services response
- / A three-tier practice framework as the foundation of a multidisciplinary service response for vulnerable students
- / In-school monitoring of at-risk students and early school leaving follow-up
- / A flexible and dynamic framework of youth-focused and family-centred intervention and support with tailored options
- / An e-Wellbeing IT platform supporting case-work in real time
- / Sophisticated outcomes evaluation
- / Robust cost benefit analysis

TGP represents a **unique partnership between schools and community agencies** committed to confronting and resolving long-standing issues of school disengagement and homelessness in the Geelong community. The strength of this **'community of schools and youth services' model** is that it integrates the work of the key providers in re-engaging the young person with school, family and community.

A key strength of TGP is the capacity of skilled early intervention workers to engage the young person's family. Preventing homelessness and improving school retention for vulnerable young people requires interventions to enhance parental support for the young person's behaviour, learning and engagement.

2.2 The Problem

The problem that TGP is tackling is multi-faceted. ABS data shows increasing rates of Youth Homelessness in Geelong. The Student Needs Survey, conducted across Geelong schools, has identified 1344 students at high risk of homelessness.

The State Governments 2014 On Track Survey found the percentage of Geelong Students who complete year 12 and go onto university is now almost 7% lower than the State's 54.3 percent average, with the gap having grown from 5% last year. 25.3% of Geelong's 2013 early school leavers' said they were out of work - a 10% increase on 2012 and significantly higher than the 16.9% state average.

Young people identified through the Student Needs Survey, commonly present with high risks relating to family violence, mental health, disability, drug and alcohol, and youth justice concerns and are likely to place downstream demands on services that are already operating at capacity.

2.3 Costs to the Community

The failure to intervene early has huge social and economic costs for the individual and the Geelong community.

TGP is costed at \$3,653 per family which is a large saving to the community when compared to the high cost of homelessness, early school leaving, untreated mental illness and perpetuation of family violence.

2.4 The Opportunity

A trial of TGP with 95 vulnerable young people and their families in Geelong produced compelling outcomes with 100% of young people remaining in school, increasing engagement or returning to school and 100% of young people supported at home or obtaining safe accommodation.

The opportunity now exists to build upon this wider system reform and development, and establish a sustainable platform for Early Intervention to provide an integrated response to vulnerable young people with their families across Greater Geelong.

2.5 The Platform

This proposal shows how local resources and funding can be used more productively in establishing a sustainable Early Intervention platform.

The reform involves five youth and family agencies, three government departments, local government and 17 secondary schools consolidating and integrating over 16 disparate youth intervention programs. These programs range across the typically siloed streams of family support, youth justice, homelessness, family violence, drug and alcohol, education, and health services.

The proposal identifies and draws together resources from two specialist youth service providers in Geelong; Time for Youth and Barwon Youth and includes resource inputs from City of Greater Geelong, McKillop Family Services, Medicare Local, BATForce, Barwon Integrated Family Violence Committee and Minerva Community Services (formerly ZENA Women's Services). The proposal identifies in kind contributory resources from 15 Geelong Secondary schools.

The proposal also identifies contributions from partners Swinburne University and Geelong Local Learning & Education Network (GLEN). Grants for components of the platform from local trusts and foundations are also identified, including Give Where You Live and Geelong Community Foundation and revenue conservatively estimated from application to trusts. As detailed in the proposed budget over \$4m has been identified as the local contribution towards the total costs of \$5.4m for the TGP platform over two years.

This proposal sets out the vision and KPIs for the development of the Early Intervention platform over the next two years; 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. This comprises wider reform and development across all schools and youth services, supported by common data system developments, underpinned by sector workforce

training, with direct service provision with an estimated 1344 young people identified as at risk across the Barwon area.

This new TGP platform will be comprehensively evaluated to show life changing outcomes for vulnerable young people, the systemic impact of this reform on reducing homelessness and school drop-out rates, and demonstrate the social and financial savings that will be made.

2.6 Benefits to the Geelong Community

- / Youth homelessness, youth drop-out rates, low educational attainment levels, youth crime, drug and alcohol abuse, social inequality and disadvantage are matters of great community concern that are being addressed.
- / Over 1300 vulnerable young people will be able to access support from a trained interdisciplinary team of youth, family, education and employment, disability, mental health and drug and alcohol professionals.
- / The progression of young people into the homelessness, justice, unemployment, health systems will be stemmed with major savings for the community. Strategies based on prioritizing young people who are highly likely to enter the homelessness system will ensure that intervention prevents homelessness and addresses the problem of net widening.
- / Schools will benefit by having a single access point for vulnerable students into a complex human services system and will directly benefit from an integrated service delivery response that engages the young person and, importantly, works effectively with their families to bring about change.
- / The community will benefit through an enterprise that delivers a system-wide, integrated and coordinated approach achieving better outcomes for service users and markedly improves community productivity.
- / Ensuring that all Geelong's young people have a future is a great challenge in the current circumstances of decline in key manufacturing industry. Targeted interventions directed to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals in line with government policy, will ensure the take up of wider opportunities and pathways to training and employment.

2.7 The Case for Government Support

- / Government will be building on a program with a record of proven success with reform and service delivery. The enterprise has moved beyond the initial large investment in developing partnerships and infrastructure and this is reflected in the proposed unit costs of TGP based on normal operations.
- / TGP will demonstrate savings, as it costs much less to intervene early before young people are in crisis. Savings to Victorian taxpayers will be measured with the expertise of Swinburne University and Researchers from University of Western Australia and through funds sourced for cost benefit analysis through Give Where You Live.
- / In Victoria TGP can potentially provide a wider platform for the work of Reconnect, School Focused Youth Services and disparate School re-engagement programs.
- / The system reforms and innovations that TGP is undertaking, take forward many of the recommendations made by Professor Peter Shergold (2013). TGP has already attracted national and international interest. The product will be a fully documented model that is able to be reproduced within other regions across the State and Country

2.8 Proposal to Government

A substantial investment by Government so far has achieved outstanding results. This submission seeks a 'whole of Government' approach that spreads contributions across the range of programs relevant to young people at risk. Relevant State and Commonwealth programs at this level of intervention include homelessness, education, youth and family services, family violence, disability, mental health, youth justice, drug and alcohol and health services. It is proposed that DHS and DEECD share the main costs of the trial with contributions from Department of Health, Office of Youth and Department of Justice.

It is proposed that Government:

- / Invest an amount of \$1.33M for two years (\$666K per annum) from across these programs, towards the cost of establishing and demonstrating the effectiveness and efficiency of a sustainable Early Intervention platform in Geelong
- / Consider how a new partnership between TGP and Government can be developed to fully capitalise on the opportunities for sector reform in developing effective Early Intervention approaches.

2.9 Sustainability

The amount of \$4.1m has been identified and committed locally as the foundation of an early intervention platform costing in total \$5.4m over 2 years. A substantial investment by Government in The Geelong Project (from DHS and also from DEECD), has this far achieved outstanding results.

The Department with the greatest stake in TGP is DHS in relation to the problem of 'homelessness' and hence a substantial initial investment of 'hump funding' is sought from DHS. However, consideration could be given to other authorities especially Education DEECD sharing initial costs and greater financial responsibility as the project develops.

2.10 Conclusion

TGP platform is a community response to the need to intervene early to improve the life outcomes of young people who are vulnerable for whatever particular reason. Responding to this vulnerability requires an integrated response by the community which, in turn, requires a 'whole of government' response in supporting reforms that restructure ways in which vulnerable young people are supported.

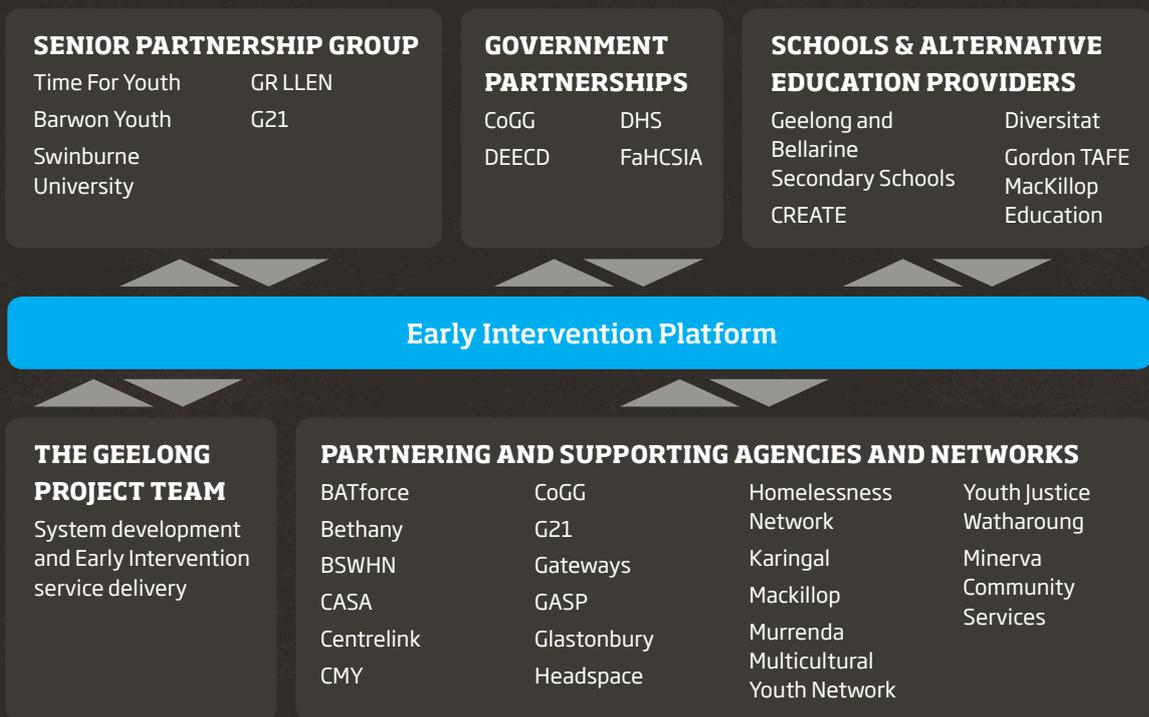
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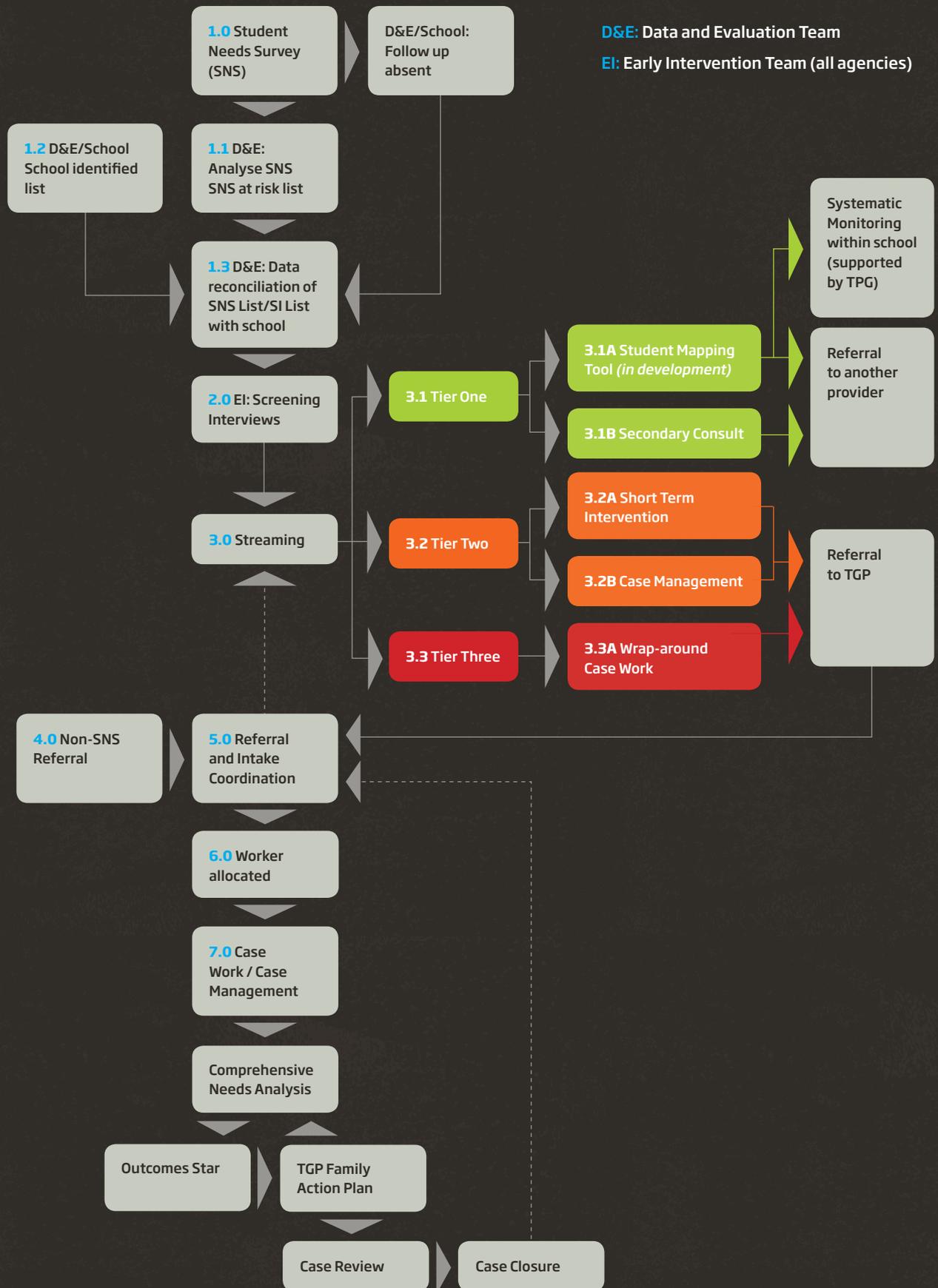
The Geelong Project Foundations



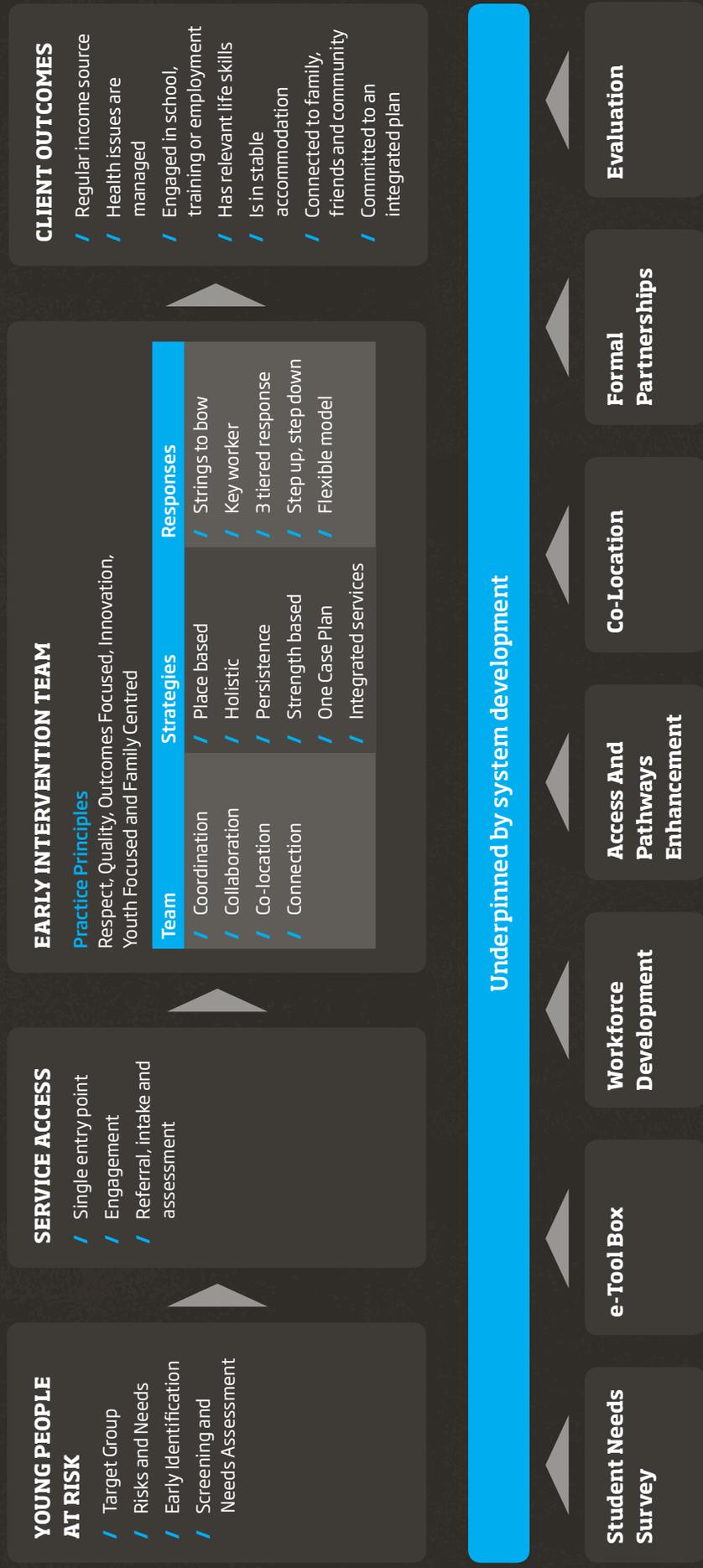
The Geelong Project Partnering Relationships



An Early Intervention Platform Process Flowchart



Model of Early Intervention



The Geelong Project: Early Intervention Pilot Program Logic



3 Stakeholder Sign Off

Mike Kelly
Chief Executive
Officer, Time for
Youth



Paul Tobias
Principal
St Joseph's College



Damian McKew
Principal
Clonard College



Ken Stewart
Assistant Principal
Geelong High
School



Mark Bolton
Chief Executive
Officer, Ladder



Elaine Carbines
Chief Executive
Officer, G2I



Jodie Ryschka
Executive Officer,
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Aboriginal
Community Care



Ken Massari
Principal
Northern Bay
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Grant Boyd
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Bill Mithen
CEO, Give Where
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John Townsend
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