



FINAL REPORT

Linker Service Year 2 Outcomes and Learning

Prepared for The Wyatt Trust

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Dictionary

Acronyms	Description
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COP	Community of Practice
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
KWY	Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
SA	South Australia
UCWB	UnitingCare Wesley Bowden



Acknowledgements

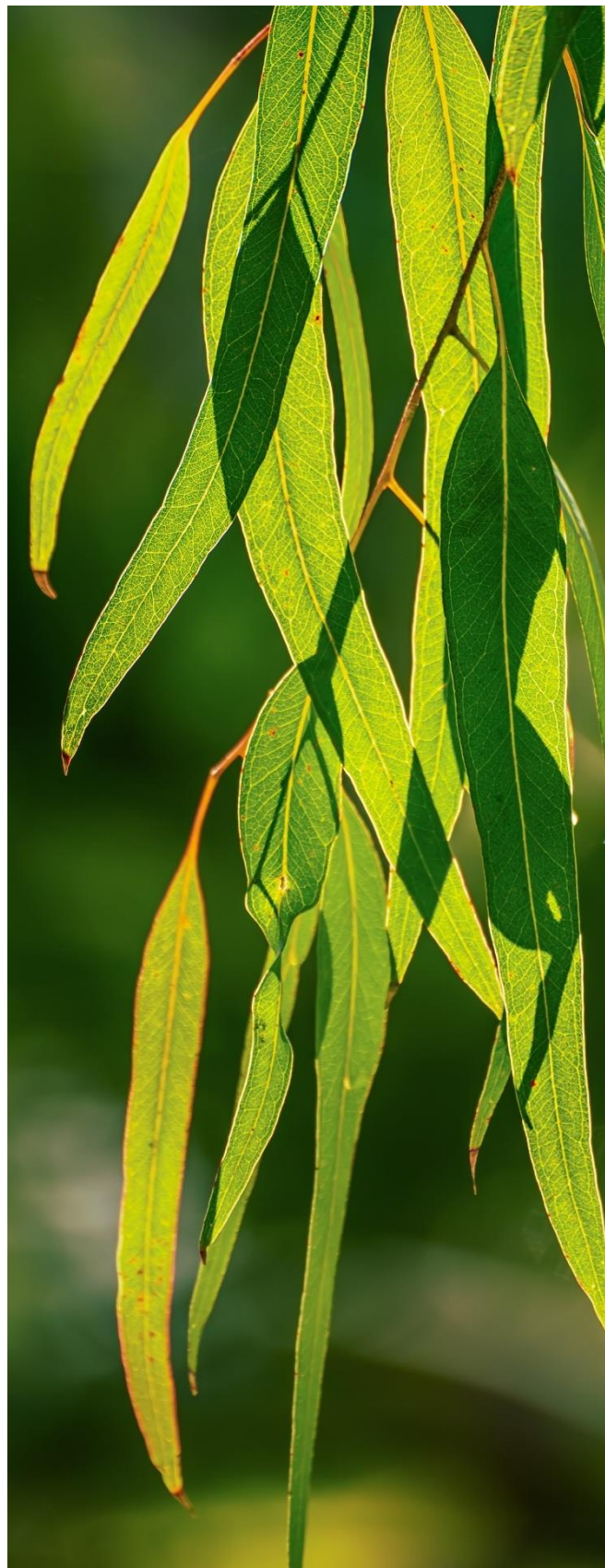
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which the Linker Service is delivered. These are the Kaurna peoples of the Adelaide Plains, the Boandik peoples of Berrin (Mount Gambier), the Barngala peoples of the Port Augusta region, Arabana peoples of Marree, and the Adnyamathanha and Kuyani peoples of the Northern Line. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present, and recognise and honor emerging leaders.

This evaluation has been shaped by the generosity, wisdom, and collaboration of many people, and we are sincerely grateful to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge, and experiences.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the people with lived and living experience of financial hardship who generously shared their stories and reflections throughout this evaluation. Their openness, honesty, and insights have been invaluable in helping us understand the intent, experience, and early impacts of the Linker Service. We are deeply appreciative of the trust they placed in us by sharing their experiences.

We also acknowledge the dedication and expertise of the Linkers and partner organisations - ac.care, Centacare Catholic Country SA, Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation, UnitingCare Wesley Bowden, and the Zahra Foundation. Their commitment to supporting people experiencing financial hardship, and their willingness to reflect on and strengthen their practice, have been central to both the delivery of the Linker Service and this evaluation.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to the Wyatt Trust for its vision and partnership. Its ongoing commitment to learning and continuous improvement has made this evaluation possible and continues to support the growth and impact of the Linker Service.





Introduction

Background

In 2022, the Wyatt Trust and a group of co-design facilitators undertook extensive consultation with older women and single parents, which highlighted the need for a new, tailored support service. This work led to a collaborative design process throughout 2023 involving Wyatt Trust, seven Partner Organisations, and lived experience experts. Together, they co-designed and prototyped what became the Linker Service, a person-centred initiative designed to support individuals holistically as they navigate complex systems and services.

The Linker Service is grounded in a vision for sole parents, carers, and women over 50 experiencing financial hardship to not just survive but thrive. Central to the model is the Linker, a trusted worker who walks alongside clients to offer personalised, practical support based on their goals and needs. The delivery of the Linker Service is guided by **five overarching principles**.

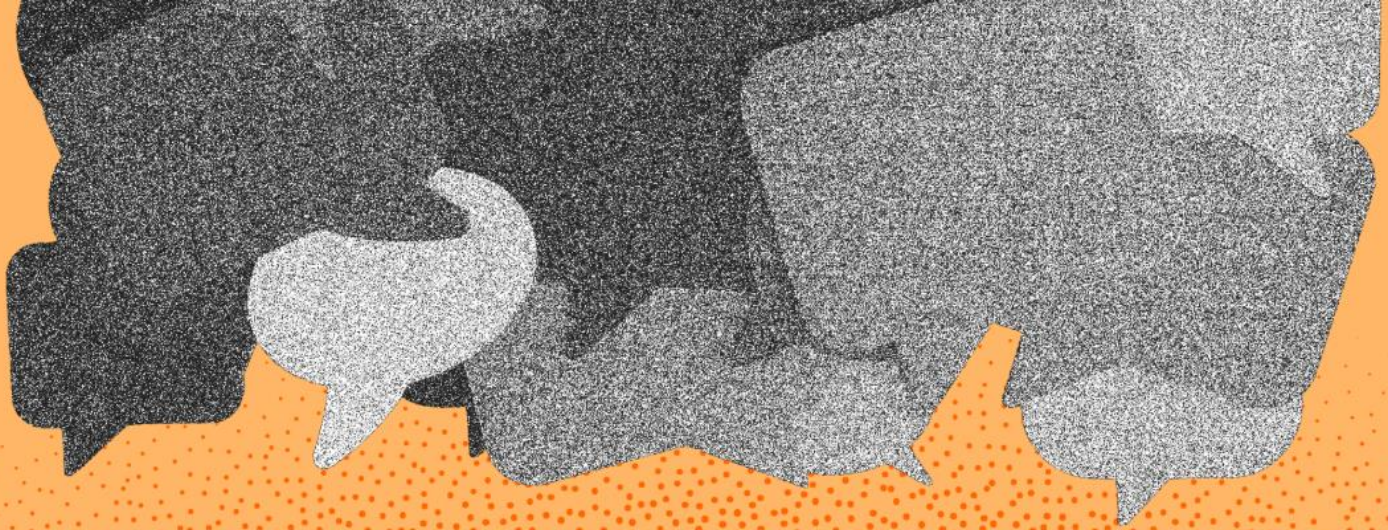
Principles

 We centre lived experience in our work.	 We prioritise the wellbeing and safety of our clients and Linkers.	 We are committed to the cultural safety and security of our clients and Linkers.	 We are holistic in our practice and walk alongside our clients.	 We advocate for human rights and social justice through our work.
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Service delivery commenced in July 2024, with funding committed to June 2029.

About the Linker Service's Year 2 MEL

This Outcomes and Learning Report is guided by the Linker Service's Year 2 Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan. The MEL Plan outlines how the Linker Service will generate insights to support ongoing service improvement and adaptation. It focuses on understanding whether the service is creating positive change for clients and the Linker Network, and how learnings from the first and second year can inform future delivery. Covering the period from July 2025 to June 2026, the MEL Plan evaluates outcomes, implementation processes, and emerging insights. It does not assess the earlier co-design phase or compare the Linker Service to other programs. Instead, it adopts a culturally safe, trauma-informed, and strengths-based approach, with strong involvement from the Linker Network and people with lived and living experience.



Responding to Recommendations from Year 1

A significant amount of work on the Linker Service model in Year 2 focused on responding to recommendations from Year 1 to support program improvement. These included:

Incorporate mechanism to respond to Linker wellbeing, including regular wellbeing checks and anonymous data collection mechanism

- **Key actions taken:** Linker wellbeing tracker developed and implemented quarterly with Linkers. The brief anonymous survey asks about Linker's well-being and support needs. Results are discussed within the Community of Practice sessions.

Develop a service blueprint and indicative service model for the Linker Service

Key actions taken: Draft service blueprint co-developed with the Linker Network in 2026 (final draft in-progress). The blueprint captures and visualises key processes, and practices across the Linker Network to support clarity and alignment in ways of working both in the 'front' and 'back' stage of the Linker Service model.

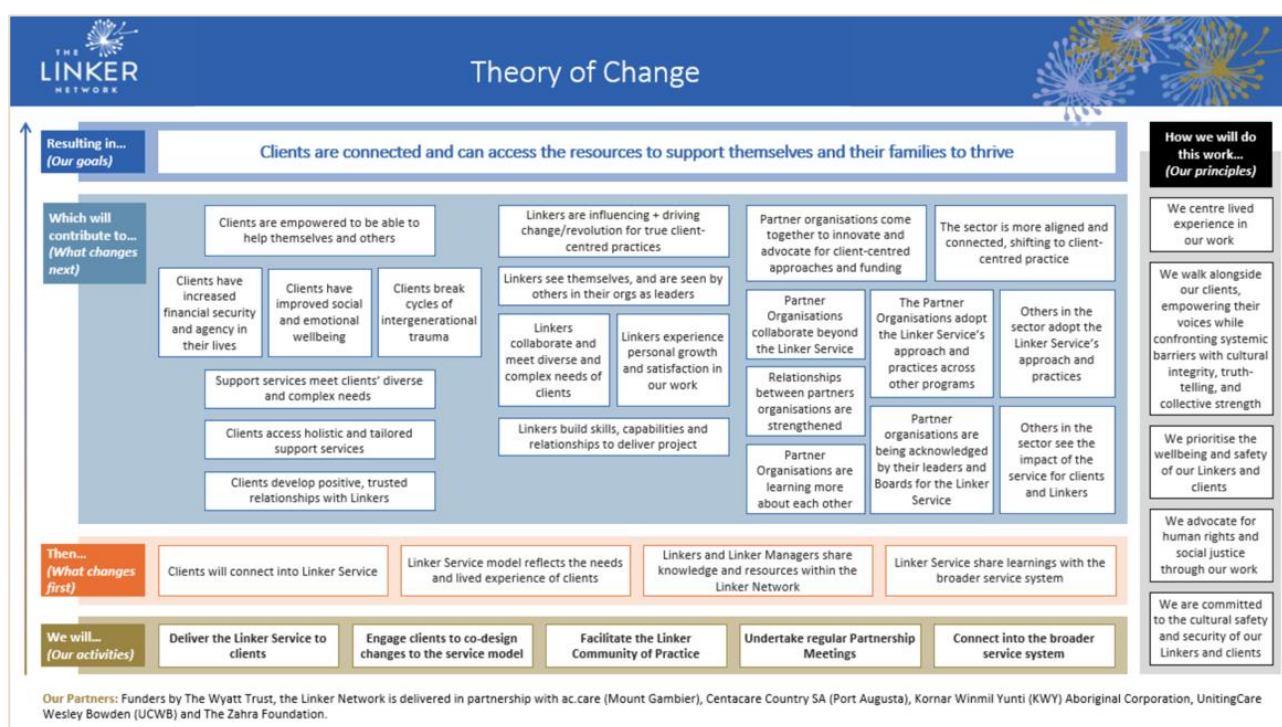
Explore how best to structure crosscutting roles in the Network, such as the coordinator role and intake officer role, to create clearer lines of accountability across the Linker Network

Key actions taken: Several Linker Network agreements and manuals were developed to help clarify roles and responsibilities across the network. Additionally, the development of the service blueprint has helped to create shared understanding of key roles across the network.



Develop a Theory of Change to support knowing how and when to weave data to tell the story of the Linker Service

Key action taken: The Linker Theory of Change, pictured below was developed in partnership with the Linker Network through a series of co-development workshops in 2026. Key elements of the Theory of Change that were developed include increased focus on Linker impact pathways, and greater emphasis on systems impact.



Continue to invest in growing our MEL capability to help us tell our story and codify changes to our service model at the same pace as our learning and adaptation.

Key actions taken: The Linker Network participated in two capability-building sessions to strengthen data collection practices. In addition, key evaluation tools- including the impact, learning and adaptation log- were transitioned to Microsoft Forms, making them more accessible and supporting greater engagement across the Linker Network.



Methodology

The evaluation questions and methodology guiding Year 2 of the Linker Service's MEL Plan were developed collaboratively through a half-day workshop and a series of online consultations with the Linker Network and lived experience experts.

This Outcomes and Learning Report addresses three overarching evaluation questions:

- To what extent is the Linker Service making a difference for clients and the Linker Network? (Impact)
- To what extent has the Linker Service been implemented as intended during Year 2? (Process)
- What are we learning about the Linker Service and how can these insights inform future delivery? (Learning)

The Year 2 MEL approach drew on a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to develop a comprehensive understanding of implementation, outcomes, and learning. The evaluation combined existing administrative and monitoring data collected by Wyatt Trust and Partner Organisations with new qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with clients and members of the Linker Network and data collected through the Linker Network Reflection Session.

Between March and June 2026, the evaluation team conducted 10 interviews with members of the Linker Network and analysed data from a further 10 client interviews, 2 responses to the Client Feedback Opportunity, three stakeholder interviews, three in-depth case studies, 5 responses to the annual Partnership Health Survey, entries from the adaptation tracker, impact log and learning log, and administrative data relating to 103 clients.

Preliminary findings were shared with the Linker Network during a full-day reflection workshop held on June 4th, 2026. The workshop provided an opportunity to test and refine emerging findings, collectively interpret the evidence, and generate ideas to strengthen the future delivery of the Linker Service and its ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning activities (see Annex for MEL plan).

As described in the recommendations section, there is a need to capture additional client voice in the annual evaluation. From next year, in addition to participating in annual impact interviews and client feedback surveys, clients will also be invited to take part in principles-based rubric scoring. This will ensure a greater diversity of perspectives is reflected in this important evaluation activity and strengthen the evidence informing annual learning and improvement.



Overview Findings and Recommendations

Year 2 – Key Findings

Finding 1: Trust-based relationships are the foundation for self-efficacy and independence.

Finding 2: The Linker Network is a strong learning community, but sustaining its culture requires deliberate attention.

Finding 3: Flexibility is central to the model's success but creates tensions that require ongoing navigation.

Finding 4: Lived experience is central to the Linker Service model, though how we articulate and embed it requires thought and care.

Finding 5: The influence of the Linker Service is rippling beyond direct service delivery, creating opportunities for systems influence.

Who we are reaching

Linker Service Delivery

In our second year, the total number of clients we worked with...

262 clients

This increased from 129 clients in Year 1



Of these clients...

103

are women over 50 years old

148

are carers or single parents

14

clients have chosen to pause or transition their involvement from their Linker

107

are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

33

are from a CALD community

18

clients have concluded their involvement and determined they no longer need support from their Linker

Our clients are located in:



- Metropolitan Adelaide
- Port Augusta
- Beltana
- Copley
- Limestone Coast
- Marree
- Mount Gambier



How we are adhering to our Principles

Principles	Excellent	Good	Just OK	Not OK	Harmful
We centre lived experience in our work.		✓			
We prioritise the wellbeing and safety of our clients and Linkers.		✓			
We are committed to the cultural safety and security of our clients and Linkers.		✓			
We are holistic in our practice and walk alongside our clients.	✓				
We advocate for human rights and social justice through our work.		✓			

Questions to guide our practice in Year 3

1. How might we begin to name and share strategies for moving clients from dependence to empowerment?
2. How might we better understand a client's journey within and beyond their time in the Linker Service?
3. How might we intentionally enshrine the culture of learning, sharing, and adaptation across the Linker Network?
4. How might the Linker Network support ongoing capability building for working in less structured, more flexible spaces?
5. How might we identify and name the different ways lived experience contributes to practice, design, evaluation, and operations over the course of a year in the Linker Service?
6. How might we mobilise as a Linker Network to intentionally shape our approach to and priorities for our systems influencing work?



Key Findings

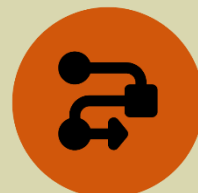
Finding 1: Trust-based relationships are the foundation for self-efficacy and independence.



Finding 2: The Linker Network is a strong learning community, but sustaining its culture requires deliberate attention.



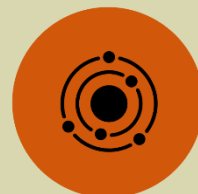
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Finding 5: The influence of the Linker Service is rippling beyond direct service delivery, creating opportunities for systems influence.





Finding 1: Trust-based relationships are the foundation for self-efficacy and independence.

Across all evidence sources was the finding around the role of trust-based relationships within and across the Linker Network. Clients consistently described the relationship with their Linker as the foundation upon which all other outcomes were built. Unlike more transactional service models, Linkers spend time understanding a person's circumstances, building trust and responding at a pace that feels safe and appropriate for their clients.

Trust and safety create the conditions for change.

Clients frequently described feeling valued, respected and heard by their Linkers. For many clients, this represented a significant departure from previous experiences with services that were less personal and more output oriented.

"It's been so nice to feel like a somebody, rather than a number or a nobody." (Client)

"I feel much more comfortable reaching out for help now. Knowing that I will be greeted with respect, is just a whole different feeling, and that's given me a lot more confidence to ask for help when I need it. 'It's given me confidence and made me feel, you know, sort of worthy of myself. I think it's important to share these things so other people can trust, trust in processes too." (Client)

The human centred connection created conditions where clients could be vulnerable with their Linker, and work in ways that supported sustained engagement with their Linker.

"Having that whole anchor for support and security at a time when there was none made the program very functional for what I needed." (Client)

"This made me feel more relaxed because I sort of became in fight or flight mode at one stage... She's helped me to feel like there are some good people still out there." (Client)

The evidence suggests that trust-based relationships are the primary mechanism through which client change occurs within the Linker Service. By creating safe, respectful and non-judgmental spaces, Linkers enable clients to move beyond immediate crises and begin building confidence, agency and self-belief. Rather than focusing on solving problems on behalf of clients, Linkers work alongside individuals in ways that support decision-making, self-advocacy and skill development over time.

"We are meeting our clients where they are." (Linker)

This finding is reinforced by the Principles Rubrics, where the Linker Network rated its practice highly for both **centering lived experience** (4.0 out of 5) and **walking alongside clients** (4.25 out of 5). Together, these findings suggest that the ability to adapt support to each client's unique needs and circumstances is a key contributor to the Linker Service's early impact.



Confidence develops into agency and self-advocacy, with systems navigation support commonly cited as a key stepping stone along this journey.

Support with systems navigation appears to be a critical stepping stone, helping clients build the confidence and skills to engage more independently with services and opportunities over time. Evidence suggests that many clients move beyond feeling supported to becoming more confident advocates for themselves, often progressing from receiving direct support from a Linker, to navigating systems alongside them, and, in some cases, independently. These findings highlight that sustained outcomes are driven not simply by service transactions, but by trusting relationships that build clients' confidence, capability, and ownership of their goals.

"I'm learning to use my voice and be an advocate for myself." (Client)

"When I first started, I already had a stable house, but I have my own problems in my own life. So, basically, instead of getting annoyed by trying to talk on the phone to people, I'd go and talk to her about it. And it was good because we would catch up and have coffees and make like little goals, things like make sure that all my bills are paid on time. Then we'd put all these little things in place to make sure things stay on track." (Client)

Linkers described intentionally creating opportunities for clients to make decisions, solve problems and build confidence in their own time as a key strategy to supporting progress towards independence.

"Learning how a client works through a problem, even if a Linker may know a more efficient way." (Linker Network Reflection Session)

This also included slowly 'putting the ball in their court' and shifting aspects of their practice to being client-led.

"Asking clients what works for them and inviting clients to decide if they want a follow up appointment." (Linker Network Reflection Session)



Finding 2: The Linker Network is a strong learning community, but sustaining its culture requires deliberate attention.

The Linker Network has evolved into a trusted learning community characterized for most by openness, mutual support and a shared commitment to client outcomes. Considerate resource has been invested in listening to Linker needs, *adapting rhythms and practice to support strong conditions for network engagement* (Adaptation tracker).

The Linker Network is developing a strong culture of trust and collaboration.

Evidence from the Partnership Health Survey and interviews indicates high levels of trust, transparency, and collaboration across the network. The value of the partnership is acknowledged and understood across the partnership with 63-168 out of 170 score from Partnership Health Survey, creating key conditions for network growth and impact.

“A partnership based on genuine collaboration has been established.” (Partnership Health Survey)

Linkers especially, lean on the support of one another in the various community of practice spaces. As they get to know each other better, they have a good understanding of where they can leverage one another’s specific skillsets in support of their clients.

“We rely on each other’s skillsets so that our clients get the best outcomes.” (Linker)

“There’s strong camaraderie among the Linkers - we all have different expertise and we collaborate and help each other navigate different parts of the system. For instance, some Linkers have lots of experience navigating domestic violence and others are very skilled at financial capability work. We might be based at different organisations, but it feels like we’re all on the same team. And the community of practice is literally communities of practice. We’re reflective and focused on improving our professional practice.” (Linker)

Additionally, Linkers look to each other for emotional support and processing, particularly when faced with complex client interactions and situations.

“If I’ve had a pretty horrific case, I can ring one of the Linkers and have a chat.” (Linker)

Across all data sets, it was clear that opportunities for Linker engagement are critical to not just Linker practice, but also to Linker wellbeing. While ‘Wellbeing’ principle scored well, at a 3.8, there were several comments noting that supporting Linker Wellbeing will continue to require time and care, with references to *compassion fatigue* and *burnout* affecting Linkers at various points in time (Rubric scoring).



Maintaining Linker culture and requires intentional effort.

The type and level of involvement across the Linker Network has changed over time. As the project evolves, so too do the ways Linkers engage across the network. In early months, the Linker Network was deeply involved in design aspects of work- from working alongside lived experience participants in the program design, to setting up key processes and rhythms. While there are still regular opportunities for Linkers to interface, and significant effort put into the development of key Linker policies and practice to support network strength, the nature of their engagement has shifted over time, as expected in an evolving initiative like the Linker Service. Some Linkers reflected that opportunities for connection were more frequent during co-design than they are during service delivery.

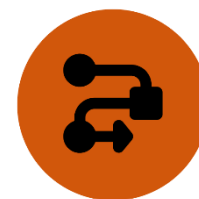
“We are still very strong but don’t have the connectivity that we did previously.” (Linker)

Indeed, the Linker Network is thinking increasingly about how to retain core elements of the model and its design, as inevitably, members leave, new members join and the project move further (in time) away from its lived experience co-design origins. This has been especially true in Yr 2, where the Linker Network experienced an increase in staff turnover – with changes happening across all roles except Linker Volunteers, sometimes across multiple staff levels within the same agency. This turnover, which is not uncommon in the social service sector, creates challenges both for operations and program implementation, but can also impact on network culture and Linker wellbeing.

As new members join the Linker Network, there is an ongoing need to preserve the core principles, culture, and intent of the Linker Service model, while also creating space for new ideas, perspectives, and practices to emerge.

“How might we enshrine the culture and DNA of the Linker Service and where it comes from while still creating space for learning and adaptation?” (Linker Network Reflection Session)

The findings suggest that the Linker Network has matured into a strong learning community, underpinned by high levels of collaboration, mutual support and a shared commitment to achieving positive outcomes for clients. Indeed, there has been significant time and thought invested into *listening and adapting* Linker Network practice to *ensure strengthened collaboration* (Adaptation Tracker). Linkers draw on one another for both practical expertise and emotional support, contributing to a culture of openness and collective problem-solving. At the same time, as the project evolves and grows further from its co-design origins, there is increasing recognition of the need to intentionally preserve the culture and values that underpin the model, while also creating space for new ideas, learning and adaptation.



Finding 3: Flexibility is central to the model's success, but creates tensions that require ongoing navigation.

Flexibility was consistently identified as one of the defining strengths of the Linker model and a key factor contributing to positive client outcomes. Linkers described the ability to respond to clients as individuals, rather than through rigid requirements, as fundamental to building trust, fostering engagement and supporting meaningful change for clients. This was often noted in conversation highlighting key contextual differences between regional and metro-based sites, and how these contexts informed Linker practices and ways of working. For example, in regional communities, a focus is often on developing peer support networks for clients. The Linker Service model provides flexibility for Linkers to flex practice and make these calls.

"Working from the Port Augusta office and traveling to Marree, Copley and Beltana mostly with the Aboriginal communities we work slightly differently and include group events, like the Campfire Healing that we organised with Adnyamathanha Elders and another agency, empowering the women to take leadership roles going forward and supporting each other from the smaller communities in the region." (Linker)

Flexibility enables responsive and client-centered support.

Linker Network members consistently described flexibility as one of the aspects of the model that distinguishes the Linker Service from other programs. The absence of strict timeframes, prescriptive KPIs and narrowly defined service boundaries allows Linkers to tailor their support to the needs, goals and circumstances of each individual client.

"We are able to focus on quality of service rather than ticking boxes and meeting KPIs." (Linker Manager)

"We're there when they need us, we have the time to build trust with them." (Linker)

"It's focused on individuals rather than just fitting into the system." (Client)

The findings also suggest that flexibility allows Linkers to respond to the complexity of clients' lives. Participants noted that clients often present with multiple, interconnected challenges and that progress is rarely linear. The ability to adapt support as circumstances change was viewed as key to maintaining engagement and supporting longer-term outcomes. This was reinforced in principles scoring, where the principles of *"we are holistic in our practice and walk alongside our clients"* scored the highest across all principles at a 4.25 (out of 5).

"Clients come with complexity, so once you work on one issue then another might arise. If we can work with one or two and support increased self-confidence then they might be better equipped to work on the rest." (Linker Network Reflection Session)



Flexibility can contribute to dependency and capacity pressures.

While flexibility is a clear factor in the impact of the Linker program, the findings highlight that flexibility within the model is not without challenges. Discussions across Linker Network interviews, learning logs and the reflection workshop revealed ongoing tensions related to risk of client dependency, service sustainability, Linker wellbeing and the capabilities required to work effectively in less structured environments. A recurring discussion centered on the balance between being available to clients and supporting them to develop independence.

“We’ve told people we’ll never close them...so now everyone’s at capacity.” (Linker Manager)

“If we’ve created dependency, we’re not going to be able to bring any more new clients into the service.” (Linker Manager)

“Having no time limit for the service can potentially be detrimental to Linker’s well-being.” (Linker Network)

Participants reflected the challenge of determining when and how to conclude support, particularly when clients value the service as a trusted safety net. Some noted that clients may no longer require intensive support but remain reluctant to disengage because of the security and reassurance the relationship provides. This creates pressure on service capacity and can contribute to growing waitlists.

Linker Network members also highlighted the implications of this tension for Linker wellbeing. Working in a model without stated and defined timeframes or boundaries can create emotional and practical challenges, particularly when Linkers are balancing client needs with growing demand for the service.

At the same time, Linker Network members emphasised that the goal is not necessarily to reduce flexibility, but to think more carefully about how flexibility is applied in ways that support both client empowerment and service sustainability.

Flexible practice requires specialist capability.

The findings suggest that working effectively within a flexible, human-centered model requires specific practice skills and judgement. Several Linker Network members reflected that flexibility should not be confused with a lack of structure. Rather, it requires practitioners to continuously assess client readiness, adapt their approach and balance support with opportunities for growth and independence.

“It’s a real skill to not fix.” (Linker Manager)

“I need to upskill in motivational interviewing and solutions-focused therapy.” (Linker)



Linker Network members described the importance of deep listening, patience, adaptability and knowing when to step back rather than immediately solve a problem on behalf of a client. This approach can be challenging, particularly when practitioners may know a quicker or more efficient solution.

“Gauging how a client is feeling and then gently encouraging them to more self-advocacy based on knowing your client well and identifying the appropriate windows for support.” (Linker Network Reflection Session)

Participants also reflected that there can be a tendency to move too quickly toward solving problems rather than investing in the empowerment process that enables longer-term change.

“Clients becoming self-sufficient is a critical part of the Linker’s role but I think sometimes we jump the empowerment phase to get to the solutions phase.” (Linker)

These reflections suggest that ongoing capability development remains important. For many Linkers, the experience of working in less structured, and more flexible spaces is new, and requires skillsets that require ongoing development.

The findings suggest that flexibility remains one of the most valuable and distinctive aspects of the Linker model. It enables trust-building, responsiveness and human-centred support in ways that are often difficult to achieve within more traditional service models. However, flexibility can also create tensions related to client dependency, service capacity and Linker wellbeing. The challenge is not whether flexibility should remain, but how the network can continue to support Linkers to apply flexibility consistently, intentionally and sustainably. This includes strengthening shared approaches to empowerment and transition planning, building practitioner capability, and creating opportunities to reflect on how flexibility can best support both client outcomes and the long-term sustainability of the service.





Finding 4: Lived experience is central to the Linker Service model, though how we articulate and embed it requires thought and care.

Findings illustrate that the integration of lived experience remains a defining feature of the Linker Service and is deeply embedded in both the model's origins and the way the service is delivered. Linker Network members consistently reflected that lived experience is not simply a design feature of the program, but a core philosophy that shapes how Linkers engage with clients, make decisions, and understand change. Throughout interviews, logs, and across principles rubrics, the commitment to human-centered and client-led practice was frequently linked back to the lived experience foundations established during the co-design process.

Many in the Linker Network described lived experience as one of the elements that distinguishes the Linker Service from more traditional service models and approaches. Linkers reflected on the importance of understanding how clients want to engage, listening in different ways, and supporting people to make decisions for themselves rather than directing or solving problems on their behalf. These practices were viewed by many as practical expressions of lived experience principles in action.

Linker Network members also noted that lived experience continues to influence how the network thinks about adaptations of the Linker Service model. There was a strong sense that the service should remain grounded in its co-design origins **and** continue to elevate client voice in both practice and decision-making. This was particularly evident in discussions about peer support groups and community-based approaches emerging from current client feedback and experiences.

"This was a conversation that began in the co-design phase but we weren't sure how to do this, so it's exciting to be here now. Especially when these solutions/groups are stemming from the voice of client lived experience/empowerment." (Linker Network Reflection Session)

At the same time, the findings suggest that there is ongoing reflection within the network about what lived experience means in practice and how it should be preserved over time. As the project moves further from its original co-design phase and new Linkers join the network, several in the Linker Network raised questions about how to retain the values and intent of the original design while still allowing the model to evolve and adapt, based on input from current lived experience clients. Some reflected that lived experience can sometimes be spoken about in broad terms, and that there is value in continuing to articulate how it is enacted in day-to-day practice rather than assuming a shared understanding across the Linker Network.

"Not just saying we are client-led (lived experience-led) but actually living that." (Linker)

"How might we enshrine the culture/DNA of the Linker Service and where it comes from while still creating space for learning and adaptation?" (Linker Network Reflection Session)

Several folks noted the opportunity to include more client lived experience voice in the project moving forward to ensure ongoing lived experience input, including through *"seeking more engagement with the client feedback responses"* and also *"more client engagement in evaluation"*



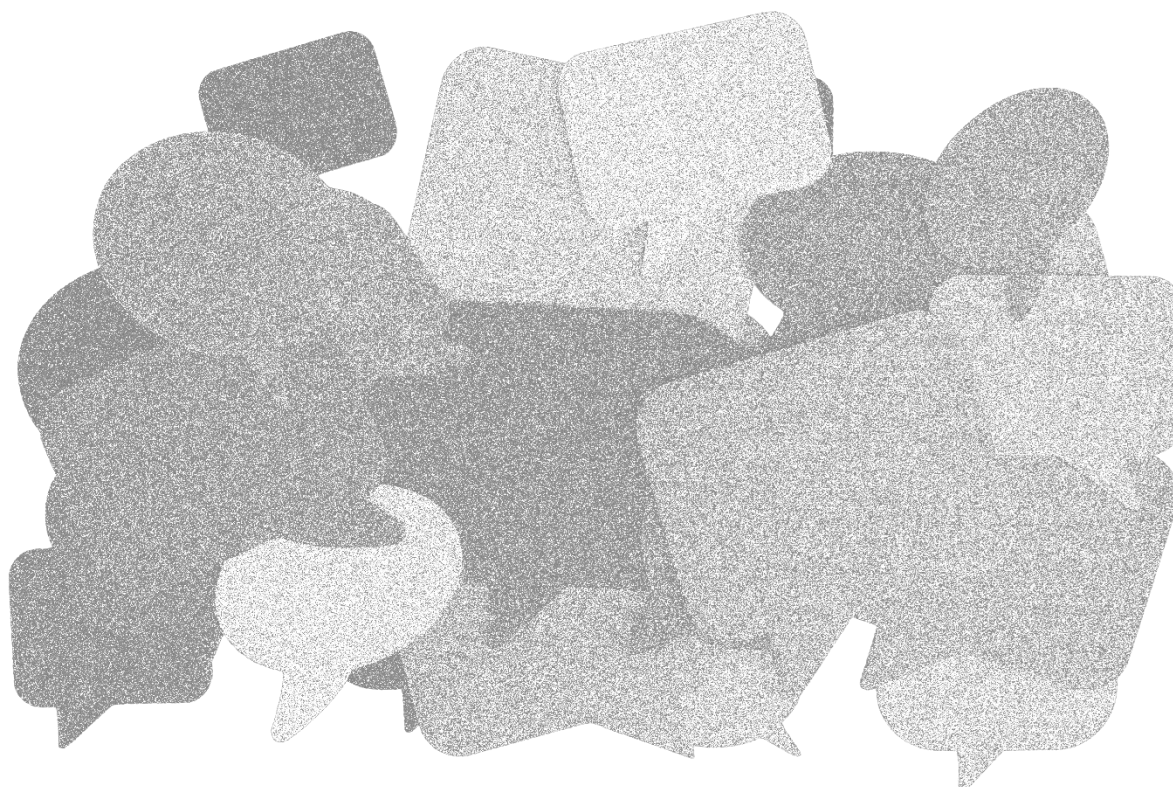
activities” (Principles rubric scoring). Other comments raised the need to clearly name the different types of lived experience around the table in the Linker Service, including the lived experiences of Linkers themselves.

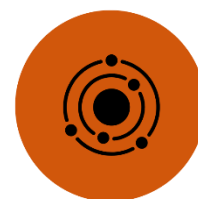
“I believe we use our own lived experience with clients and all interactions throughout logs we are using our own lived experience to improve and grow and do the best by our clients.”
(Linker)

Participants also recognised that the culture of the Linker Service has been shaped by multiple influences, including partner organisations, Wyatt, and the lived experience group that informed the original model design. Rather than viewing culture as fixed, there was recognition that it continues to evolve and requires active stewardship.

“We have culture from each agency, culture from Wyatt and culture from lived experience. The Linkers have taken from all of that to develop their own culture.” (Linker Network Reflection Workshop)

Overall, the findings suggest that lived experience remains central to both the identity and effectiveness of the Linker Service. However, as the network matures, there is an opportunity to more intentionally articulate what lived experience-informed practice looks like, how it is embedded across the network, and how its values and principles can be preserved while allowing the Linker Network to continue learning, adapting and growing.





Finding 5: The Influence of the Linker Service is rippling beyond direct service delivery, creating opportunities for systems influence.

Findings suggests that the influence of the Linker Service model extends beyond direct client outcomes. Indeed, members of the Linker Network described growing interest in the model from partner organisations, increasing recognition of the value of relationship-based and client-led approaches, and emerging opportunities to influence how services are designed and delivered within partner organisations and the wider sector. While much of the Linker Service's focus remains on supporting individual clients, there is increasing evidence that its practices, values and ways of working are creating ripple effects across organisations and communities. This is consistent with principles scoring by the Linker Network, which scored the principle of 'advocating for human rights and social justice' at a 4 (out of 5).

Partner organisations are being influenced by Linker ways of working.

Linker Network reflected that there are growing instances of the Linker model influencing how partner organisations think about collaboration, integration and support for people experiencing complex challenges. This included a described growing appreciation for the value of relationship-based, flexible and client-led approaches, particularly in service environments that are often constrained by stricter eligibility criteria, timeframes and performance requirements.

"It reinforces the need to not work in silos but to bring the organisations together." (Linker)

"I think that they are quite interested in how Linker is building this program." (Community Stakeholder)

Reflection workshop participants noted that Linkers are regularly asked questions about the model by colleagues and partner organisations, reflecting growing curiosity about both what the service does and how it achieves outcomes. Linker Network members highlighted that organisations are often interested not only in the outcomes being achieved, but also in the underlying principles of the model, including its co-designed origins, flexible funding structure and client-led practice approach.

Interest in the model continues to grow.

Linker Network members reflected increasing interest in expanding eligibility, extending access and exploring opportunities to integrate Linker approaches within other services. Several community stakeholders interviewed identified unmet need within communities and questioned whether elements of the model could be applied more broadly across different population groups and service contexts.



"I think the Linker program is awesome and I feel like it is beneficial because a lot of families get lost in these big organisations, whereas the Linker program is amazing because it's that one Linker to a small cohort... Whereas, say, if they go to another, you know, like Housing SA, for example, they get lost... Whereas the Linker program, there's all these different avenues and then we've got that one worker to really advocate for them. I feel like that's awesome."
(Community stakeholder)

"I think that the Linker Service can fit really in any program and complement it if they were to mesh them together or keep it as their own. The Linker Service can fit really in any program and complement it." (Linker)

*"Opening that up for more community and actually gauging the demand for the service (...)
There are so many people in the community that would benefit from this service."* (Linker)

At the Linker Network Reflection Session, the Linker Network members also highlighted that there are aspects of the model that are not always well understood beyond the Linker Network, including the breadth of support provided, the absence of strict timeframes, and the way Linkers work holistically with clients. Several participants suggested there is an opportunity to more actively communicate the impact and outcomes being achieved through the service.

Important aspects of the model Linker Network members felt were worth sharing more broadly included:

The service is not solely focused on financial support but responds holistically to client needs. ✓

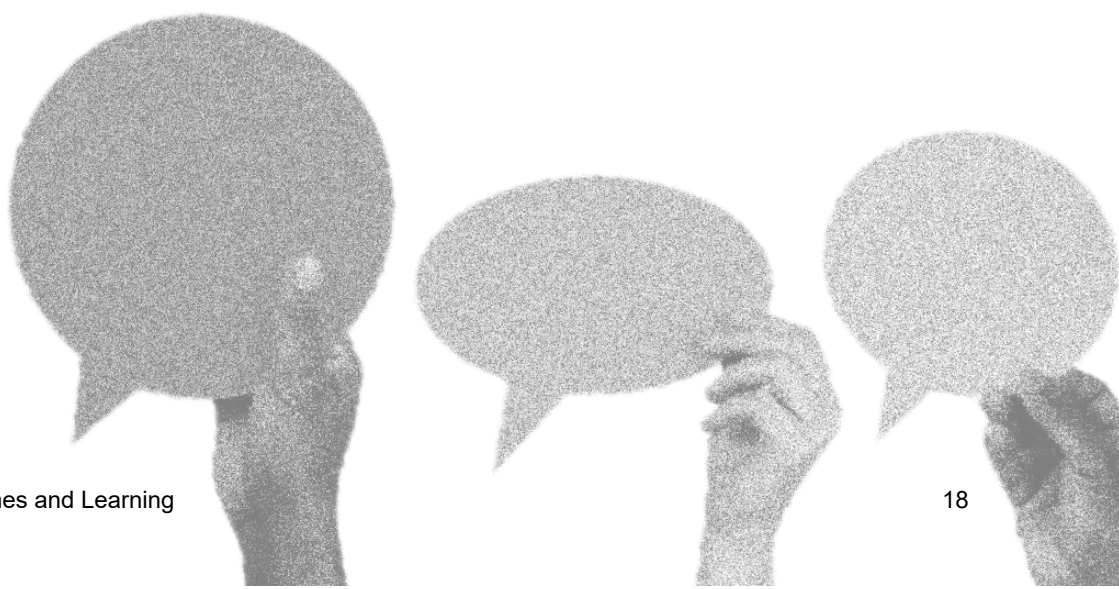
The flexibility of the model and absence of rigid timeframes. ✓

The success of a funding model that allows outcomes to be achieved without highly prescriptive KPIs. ✓

The outcomes and impacts being achieved for clients. ✓

The co-designed and client-led nature of the service. ✓

The central role of lived experience in shaping the model. ✓





There is an opportunity for stronger advocacy and systems influence.

While evidence of influence is already emerging, participants identified an opportunity to become more intentional about advocacy and systems change efforts. Discussions highlighted the potential for the Linker Network to use its collective evidence, stories and lived experience insights to influence policy, funding decisions and broader service system design.

“Pull the stories together in a targeted way to report and influence funders.” (Linker Network Reflection Session)

“(We could create) an advocacy and influencing strategy and establishing a working group around that.” (Linker Network Reflection Session)

Participants reflected that the Linker Network is uniquely positioned to identify systemic barriers affecting clients because of the breadth and depth of issues Linkers encounter in their work. There was a strong sense that these insights could be used more strategically to advocate for change, enhance the sustainability of the model and influence systems that contribute to client disadvantage. Discussions also highlighted opportunities to strengthen MEL practices to better capture longer-term client outcomes, service linkages and broader systems impacts to tell this story.





Questions and recommendations to guide future practice

The Year 2 Outcomes and Learnings Report highlights the considerable strengths of the Linker Service and demonstrates the value of a model that places relationships, trust and lived experience at the centre of practice. Across all evidence sources, the consistent message is that meaningful change occurs when clients are centred in practice and practitioners have the ability to 'flex' to meet their client's need. Doing so creates conditions where clients are not only able to navigate immediate challenges, but increasingly develop the confidence, agency and self-belief to advocate for themselves.

The report also demonstrates that the Linker Network has matured into a collaborative learning community. Strong partnerships, a culture of openness and shared problem-solving, and a commitment to reflective practice have enabled the Linker Service model to evolve in response to emerging needs while remaining grounded in its core principles. Importantly, these findings suggest that the strength of the Linker Service lies not only in what it delivers, but in how it works.

As with any evolving initiative, the findings also identify opportunities for continued improvement. Below, we outline a set of questions, informed by our key findings, to help guide the Linker Service into the year ahead.

1. How might we begin to name and share strategies for moving clients from dependence to empowerment? (Connected to Findings 1 and 3)

Suggested Actions: Allocate time during the Linker Community of Practice to share and document key strategies and approaches that support client self-sufficiency and empowerment. Use quarterly short learning loops to reflect on data from logs and wellbeing tracker, strengthen shared learning, and identify best practice. Identify key resources and stakeholders beyond the Linker Network to support Linker capability building in this area.

2. How might we better understand a client's journey within and beyond their time in the Linker Service? (Connected to all Findings)

Suggested Actions: Continue the end-of-year client impact interviews, including interviews with clients who have concluded the Linker Service to better understand their experiences beyond the service. Introduce a client rubric to capture clients' experiences of the Linker Network principles in practice. Consider involving clients in end-of-year reflection sessions.

3. How might we intentionally enshrine the culture of learning, sharing, and adaptation across the Linker Network? (Connected to Finding 2)

Suggested Actions: Use quarterly short learning loops to further strengthen a culture of evidence-informed learning, knowledge sharing, and continuous practice improvement. Include question in Wellbeing Tracker to assess network wellbeing, in addition to Linker wellbeing. Continue creating opportunities for Linker Network members to connect, build relationships, and learn from one another.



4. How might the Linker Network support ongoing capability building for working in less structured, more flexible spaces? (Connected to Findings 2 and 3)

Suggested Actions: Allocate time within key learning forums (e.g. Community of Practice and short learning loop sessions) to share and document effective strategies for working flexibly in less structured practice environments.

5. How might we identify and name the different ways lived experience contributes to practice, design, evaluation, and operations over the course of a year in the Linker Service? (Connected to Findings 3 and 4)

Suggested Actions: As a network, develop a shared understanding of what is meant by lived experience within the Linker Network. Update the Service Blueprint to clearly articulate how lived experience is embedded and enacted across practice.

6. How might we mobilise as a Linker Network to intentionally shape our approach to and priorities for our systems influencing work? (Connected to Finding 5)

Suggested Actions: Consider establishing a working group of Linker Network members with an interest in systems influencing to define shared goals, priorities, strategies, and approaches for this area of work.

Appendix A

Linker Service MEL Plan

Introduction

About this document

This document outlines the Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan that will guide our MEL activities in the first year of delivering the Linker Service.

Following the release of our final report in 2026, and a series of subsequent MEL planning discussions, several agreements were made regarding MEL implementation. These updates are reflected in this document (updated July 2026). In summary, the key changes include:

- Including client participation in principles rubric scoring activity to better understand client experience
- Include closed client participation in annual client impact interviews to better understand longer-term impact of Linker Service for clients
- Formalise and integrate quarterly short-learning loop sessions with the Linker Community of Practice to support ongoing sharing, learning, and practice development
- Share short-terming loop summaries with Linker partners for discussion and practice development
- Update Linker wellbeing tracker to assess perceptions of network health
- Embed revision of service blueprint as a part of annual reflection and sense-making workshop
- Exploring the use of Case Studies and *Significant Instances of Systems or Policy Influence (SIPSIs)* to understand the Linker Network's contribution to change.

About the Linker Service

In 2022, Wyatt and several co-design facilitators undertook extensive consultation with older women and single parents, following which they identified the opportunity for a co-design process. Across 2023, five organisations (Wyatt's 'Partners') and lived experience experts co-designed and prototyped the Linker Service.

The aim of the Linker Service is to support people holistically to navigate services and systems. Its vision is that sole parents/carers and women over 50 experiencing financial hardship thrive, not just survive. Key to the model is the establishment of a role called a Linker.

The delivery of the Linker Service has now commenced and is funded until June 2029. It is being delivered by the 'Linker Network' – Wyatt, the five Partners and the Linkers.

The Linker Service's delivery will be guided by a list of principles that were developed through the co-design of the service model. This extensive list has been consolidated into five overarching principles:

- We centre lived experience in our work.
- We prioritise the wellbeing and safety of our clients and Linkers.
- We are committed to the cultural safety and security of our clients and Linkers.
- We are holistic in our practice and walk alongside our clients.
- We advocate for human rights and social justice through our work.





About the Linker Service's MEL

The purpose of MEL in delivering the Linker service is to:

- Generate evidence-based learnings for the adaptation and improvement of the Linker Service.
- Identify if we are achieving positive change for clients and the Linker Network.

The MEL will harvest learnings and impact data from all Linker Service activities between July 2025 and June 2026. This data will be used to assess (positive and negative) impact for clients and the Linker Network as well as to assess the Linker Network's adherence to its principles.

The MEL will not evaluate the co-design process that preceded the implementation or the Linker Service nor compare the Linker Service to other similar programs.



The Questions Guiding Our MEL

The following questions were designed to guide MEL activities in the first year of the Linker Service's delivery.

We developed these questions using a process to identify the Linker Service's primary MEL audiences and their information needs. We define primary audiences as stakeholders who need the MEL findings and will use them in decision-making. The Linker Network and the Wyatt Board were identified as the primary audiences for this MEL Plan.

Table 1. MEL questions

Key Questions	Sub-questions
[Impact] Question 1: To what extent are we making a difference for clients and the Linker Network as a result of our work?	1.1. To what extent are we creating (positive or negative) changes for clients?
	1.2. To what extent are we creating (positive or negative) change for the Linker Network? • Linkers and Linker Managers • Partner Organisations • Wider Sector • Peer Worker • Volunteers • Intake Worker
	1.3. Have we created any unintended (positive or negative) change as a result of our work?
[Process] Question 2: Did we achieve what we set out to do in our first year of delivering the Linker Service?	2.1. What is working well in our delivery of the Linker Service?
	2.2. What is not working as well in the delivery of the Linker Service?
	2.3. How well are we adhering to our practice principles?
	2.4. Are we delivering the Linker Service as intended in the Linker Service Model?
	2.5. To what extent are we adapting the Linker Service based on our learnings?
[Learning] Question 3: What are we learning from our work?	3.1. What are we learning about clients' needs and the barriers they are facing?
	3.2. What are we learning about ourselves and what it takes to do this work well?
	3.3. What are we learning about the Linker Service and our ability to meet clients' needs?
	3.4. What are we learning about the broader community support system?



Our MEL Approach and Activities

Approach

We will apply a mixed methods approach to our MEL. We will primarily draw on qualitative data and triangulate, where possible, using quantitative data. In line with the principles of the Linker Service, our MEL will adopt a culturally aware, trauma informed and strengths-based approach. All our data collection activities and tools will need to be reviewed and approved by the Linker Network (including our Partner the KWW Aboriginal Corporation who brings a cultural lens to our work) and by our lived experience experts.

We will weave a principles-focused evaluation approach into our MEL, measuring the **way** we work in addition to the impact we make. To do so, we have developed a rubric that can be used to self-assess our adherence to our principles (see Attachment 1).

Activities

Data collection

Adaptation tracker. We will maintain an adaptation tracker to capture and collate any changes we make to the delivery of the Linker Service. This data will be used to assess the extent to which we are practising continuous learning (Question 2.5). We will thematically analyse this data to understand what sorts of adaptations we are making and why.

Administrative data. We will collect certain client and staff data to assess if we achieved what we set out to in our first year (Question 2). We will capture: the number of client referrals to and from the Linker Service; the number of clients joining the Linker Service and key demographics; the number of clients who pause or transition out of the service the Linker Service; Duration of client engagement, and Linker and Linker Peer Worker retention data. This quantitative data will also be coupled with demographic data to understand which cultural, linguistic and target cohort groups that clients come from.

Client feedback opportunity. We conduct short pulse check with clients who pause or conclude the Linker Service. This feedback opportunity may also be used whenever a client would like to provide feedback about the Linker Service. The client feedback opportunity can be conducted conversationally or submitted via a digital survey tool. We will thematically analyse answers to understand what kinds of impact we are making for clients as well as their perspective regarding what does and doesn't work about the Linker Service (Questions 1.1., 2.1., 2.2. and 2.3.).

Group reflection and note-taking. We have multiple touchpoints for group reflection and sense-making, such as Partnership Meetings, Communities of Practice, annual reflection and sense-making workshop, and team meetings. Where relevant, the discussion at these meetings can be incorporated into the adaptation tracker, impact log and learning log. Other notes from the group reflection may be thematically analysed as part of understanding the Linker Service's impact, process and learnings (Questions 1, 2 and 3). These notes may also be used to contextualise entries in the adaptation tracker, impact log and learning log.

Impact log. We will maintain a centralised repository of observed positive or negative change as a result of the Linker Service. These impact entries will be thematically analysed to understand what sort of change we are making and for whom (Question 1). The impact log will be populated by the Linker Network on an ongoing basis.



Learning log. We will maintain a second centralised repository similar to the impact log to note down any significant learnings we have had in the delivery of the Linker Service. These learning entries will be thematically analysed to understand what we are learning about client needs, ourselves and the system in our first year of delivery (Question 3). The learning log will be populated by the Linker Network on an ongoing basis.

Linker Network Wellbeing Trackers: On a quarterly basis, Linkers will complete a brief 'Wellbeing Tracker' ahead of a community of practice. This tool will track perceptions of wellbeing and experience of support within the Linker Network.

Rubric Scoring: The Linker Network (including clients from Year 3) will participate in principles rubric scoring as a part of annual evaluation activities.

Partnership health assessment. The Linker Network will complete elements of the the VicHealth Partnership Analysis tool once in the year. This partnership health assessment data will be used to understand the kind of impact the Linker Service is having for the Linker Network (Question 1.2) and to gauge what is and is not working in the delivery of the Linker Service (Questions 2.1. and 2.2.).

Semi-structured interviews. We will conduct semi-structured interviews with the Linker Network, clients (including active and concluded) as well as other stakeholders. Other stakeholders may be service providers, community leaders, other Wyatt or Partner organisation staff as well as service volunteers. The number of other stakeholders to be interviewed and who these stakeholders are will be determined closer our MEL reporting period in May and June 2025. These interviews will be conducted in person, online or over the phone depending on the interviewee's preference. Interview data will be thematically analysed to understand the impact of the Linker Service in its first year as well as whether we achieved what we set out to do (Questions 1 and 2). All interviews will be undertaken prior to our reporting, likely across April and May 2025.

Case Study or SIPSI: In Years 2–5, we will begin integrating tools to help capture the 'ripples of change' generated through the Linker Service Model. This may include developing case studies of participants or volunteers, or documenting a *Significant Instance of Systems or Policy Influence (SIPSI)* to better understand the Linker Service Model's and Network's contribution to shifting the policies and practices of other stakeholders. See Attachment 2 to engage with our MEL toolkit.

Sense-making

Quarterly 'short learning' loops: on a quarterly basis, evaluation partners will harvest data from the adaptation, impact, and learning logs in addition to the Linker Wellbeing tracker to identify key learning and practice themes from the previous quarter. A summary document, including discussion questions, will be prepared and shared at the Community of Practice. Following this, the document and summary of CoP discussions will be shared with the wider Linker Network.

End of year reflection workshop. A full day in-person workshop will be held with the Linker Network and our lived experience experts. This workshop will be used to sense-check preliminary evaluation findings that will inform the Year 3 Outcomes and Learning Report (see How we report on our MEL findings). At this workshop, we will co-develop evidenced-based recommendations for future service and MEL delivery, in addition to updating the Linker Service Blueprint.



[Impact] Question 1: To what extent are we making a difference for clients and the Linker Network as a result of our work?

Table 2. Data collection table - Impact

Sub-questions	Focus	Indicators	Method	Source
1.1. To what extent are we creating (positive or negative) changes for clients?	Positive or negative change for clients	1) Clients are reporting progress against client goals	8) Client feedback opportunity	13) Clients
		2) Clients are reporting increased knowledge of available supports and services	9) Impact interviews with clients	14) Clients
		3) Clients are reporting increased uptake of support services	10) Interviews with the Linker Network	15) The Linker Network
		4) Clients are reporting feeling empowered	11) Interviews with other stakeholders	16) Other stakeholders
		5) Clients are reporting increased community involvement	12) Impact log	17) The Linker Network
		6) Linkers and Linker Peer Workers are reporting client progress against goals		
		7) Linkers and Linker Peer Workers are reporting increased client uptake of support services		
1.2. To what extent are we creating (positive or negative) change for the Linker Network? (Linkers, Linker Manager, Volunteers, Partner Organisations)	Positive or negative change for the Linker Network	18) Linkers, Linker Peers and Intake Officer reporting achieving personal development goals	22) Group reflection notes (at team, Community of Practice or Partnership meetings)	26) The Linker Network
		19) Linkers, Linker Peer Workers and Intake Officer self-assessment on personal wellbeing		27) The Linker Network
		20) Linker Network partnership health self-assessment	23) Interviews with the Linker Network	28) The Linker Network
		21) Linkers, Linker Peer Workers and Intake Officer self-assessment on job satisfaction (including opportunity to make realistic decisions for clients)	24) Impact log	29) The Linker Network
			25) Partnership health assessment	



Sub-questions	Focus	Indicators	Method	Source
1.3. Have we created any unintended (positive or negative) change as a result of our work?	Positive or negative change for others	30) Demonstrated examples of increased Lived Experience leadership at Wyatt and Partner organisations as a result of the Linker Service 31) Demonstrated examples of changing policies and practices as Wyatt and Partner organisations as a result of the Linker Service 32) Demonstrated examples of other programs within Wyatt and Partner organisations adopting lessons from the Linker Service 33) Demonstrated examples of other organisations adopting lessons from the Linker Service 34) Demonstrated examples of other philanthropies adopting lessons from the Linker Service	35) Interviews with the Linker Network 36) Interviews with other stakeholders 37) Impact log	38) The Linker Network 39) Other stakeholders 40) The Linker Network

[Process] Question 2: Did we achieve what we set out to in delivering the Linker Service?

Table 3. Data collection table – Process

Sub-questions	Focus	Indicators	Method	Source
2.1. What is working well in our delivery of the Linker Service?	Enablers for our work, examples of promising practices	41) See 1.2. 42) Number of referrals (disaggregated by demographics and target region) 43) Number of clients entering service (disaggregated by demographics and target region)	49) Client feedback opportunity 50) Client referral, intake and transition out data 51) Group reflection notes (at team, Community of Practice or Partnership meetings)	56) Administrative and project data 57) Clients 58) The Linker Network
2.2. What is not working as well in the delivery of the Linker Service?	Barriers to our work	44) Number of clients transitioning out of the service (disaggregated by demographics and target region) 45) Retention rate of Linker Service staff 46) Demonstrated examples of Linkers and Linker Peer Workers adopting lessons from the Linker Service to create positive outcomes for clients 47) Client feedback about Linkers and Linker Peer Workers	52) Impact interviews with clients 53) Interviews with the Linker Network 54) Staff retention data	



Sub-questions	Focus	Indicators	Method	Source
		48) Number and type of invitations to share learnings from the Linker Service	55) Wellbeing Tracker	
2.3. How well are we adhering to our practice principles?	Adherence to our principles	59) Linker Network self-assessing against principles rubric 60) Clients reporting Linkers' and Linker Peer Workers' adherence to principles	61) Client feedback opportunity 62) Impact interviews with clients 63) Group reflection notes (at team, Community of Practice or Partnership meetings) 64) Wellbeing Tracker	65) Clients 66) The Linker Network
2.4. Are we delivering the Linker Service as intended in the Linker Service Model?	Comparison of Linker Service delivery to the co-designed Linker Service model	67) See 2.1. and 2.2. 68) Recruitment of Linker Peer Workers and Linker Volunteers?	69) Comparative analysis against Linker Service Model 70) Interviews with the Linker Network	71) Linker Service Model 72) The Linker Network
2.5. To what extent are we adapting the Linker Service based on our learnings?	Extent to which we are practising continuous learning	73) Demonstrated examples of learnings being converted into adaptations of the Linker Service delivery 74) Demonstrated examples of learnings being converted into adaptations of the Linker Service model	75) Adaptation tracker 76) Interviews with the Linker Network	77) The Linker Network



[Learning] Question 3: What are we learning from our work?

Table 4. Data collection table - Learning

Sub-questions	Focus	Method	Source
3.1. What are we learning about clients' needs and the barriers they are facing?	Any learnings and adaptations related to clients	78) Group reflection (at team, Community of Practice or Partnership meetings) 79) Learning log	80) The Linker Network
3.2. What are we learning about ourselves and what it takes to do this work well?	Any learnings and adaptations related to the Linker Network's practices	81) Group reflection (at team, Community of Practice or Partnership meetings) 82) Learning log 83) Wellbeing Tracker	84) The Linker Network
3.3. What are we learning about the Linker Service and our ability to meet clients' needs?	Any learnings and adaptations related to Linker Service Model and delivery	85) Group reflection (at Community of Practice or Partnership meetings) 86) Learning log	87) The Linker Network
3.4. What are we learning about the system?	Any learnings about the broader service system	88) Group reflection (at Community of Practice or Partnership meetings) 89) Learning log	90) The Linker Network



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