Everyday Patterns for Shifting Systems
Connecting to place & being in place

This piece shares exploratory work we have been doing into everyday patterns, and the role and power of re-patterning in systems change. In our introduction we shared seven patterns we identified across our work and that of others that go some way to making visible active re-patterning for equity and powersharing. Here we examine the sixth one: **Connecting to place and being in place**.

To describe what is being re-orientated through this re-patterning we draw on eight different arenas of systems, and extend our visualisation of what is happening in systems as a living relationship between different interconnected parts.

This work was undertaken during a twelve month 'executive in residence' program at Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation (previously The Yunus Centre, Griffith University). We appointed the TSI / Auckland Co-Design Lab teams as our 'executive in residence', and set about jointly exploring the question, 'what can we learn from the work in South and West Auckland that could offer potential insights into growing the systemic foundations for civic innovation?'
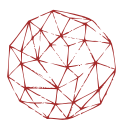
A note on language
This piece uses Māori language and concepts including:
Whānau - often translated as 'extended family', but its meaning is more complex. It includes physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

7 Emerging Patterns
signalling potentials for transformative systems & enabling wellbeing

Beyond Services
Moving beyond services as the first response of addressing needs, to a much broader ecology of support for wellbeing. This involves recognition and activation of natural and cultural networks and resources; and an activation of expertise and capital in different ways.

Starting Differently
How we start matters. If we are trying to achieve different kinds of outcomes, or bolder still, create change in a system we need to start differently. If our starting point looks like same as always, it's not going to take us to a different place.

Diversifying Evidence & Value
Challenging evidence and indicators makes explicit the values and worldview underpinning them, and creates room for indicators and measures of success developed through different lenses, cultural perspectives and alongside whānau.

Collective action & ownership
Focusing on what it would take to initiate systemic and collective action and ownership for wellbeing outcomes - from people, families, communities, services, programs and policies. Wellbeing becomes the responsibility of the collective, rather than the individual.

Whānau & relationships as the unit of wellbeing
Working with, connecting to, recording, conceptualising people in relation to their wider context, relationships, whānau. This means seeing wellbeing from a family and intergenerational perspective not just an individual one.
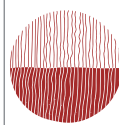
Connecting to place & being in place
Recognising and engaging the role of place and culture in creating and maintaining wellbeing, and potential of spaces in supporting the conditions for wellbeing, especially as places of healing and strengthening.

Right scale
Working within systems in ways that let us more fluidly move between big and wide and deep, understanding the connections between these and seeing them as equally important. This enables us to work across multiple levels at the same time

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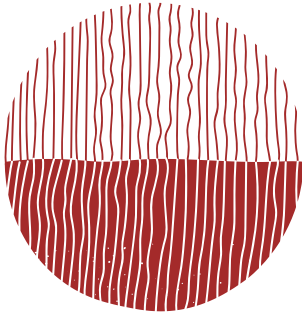
Connecting to place & being in place

Overview

While a recent wave of place-based policies have identified the importance of collaborating with communities in generating better outcomes, policies and programs still mostly consider place as a spatial or geographical category from which to shape specific responses. There may be an emphasis on integration and collaboration, however this is often still agency and service delivery focused.

This pattern engages with place as more than a 'container' for program or service delivery. In this pattern the physical and less tangible relational dimensions of place, relationships to place and connections within place are valued for wellbeing. The pattern recognises the role of connection and culture in creating and maintaining wellbeing and the potential of spaces as sites of connecting, healing and strengthening particularly when power is shared with communities in their design and use.

'Place' refers to a physical location, including the geography, land, people, institutions and infrastructure. It also refers to less tangible but powerful aspects of relationships, peoples, histories, stories, rituals, knowledge, energy, identity, meanings, spirit, lifeforce. The lens of place grounds us in the context of history including past harms and trauma, as well as the particular characteristics, strengths, capacities and cultures of a place and communities within it.

Being grounded in place encourages us to see people as whole, and in relationship to their environment, rather than through single issues/interventions. From this perspective
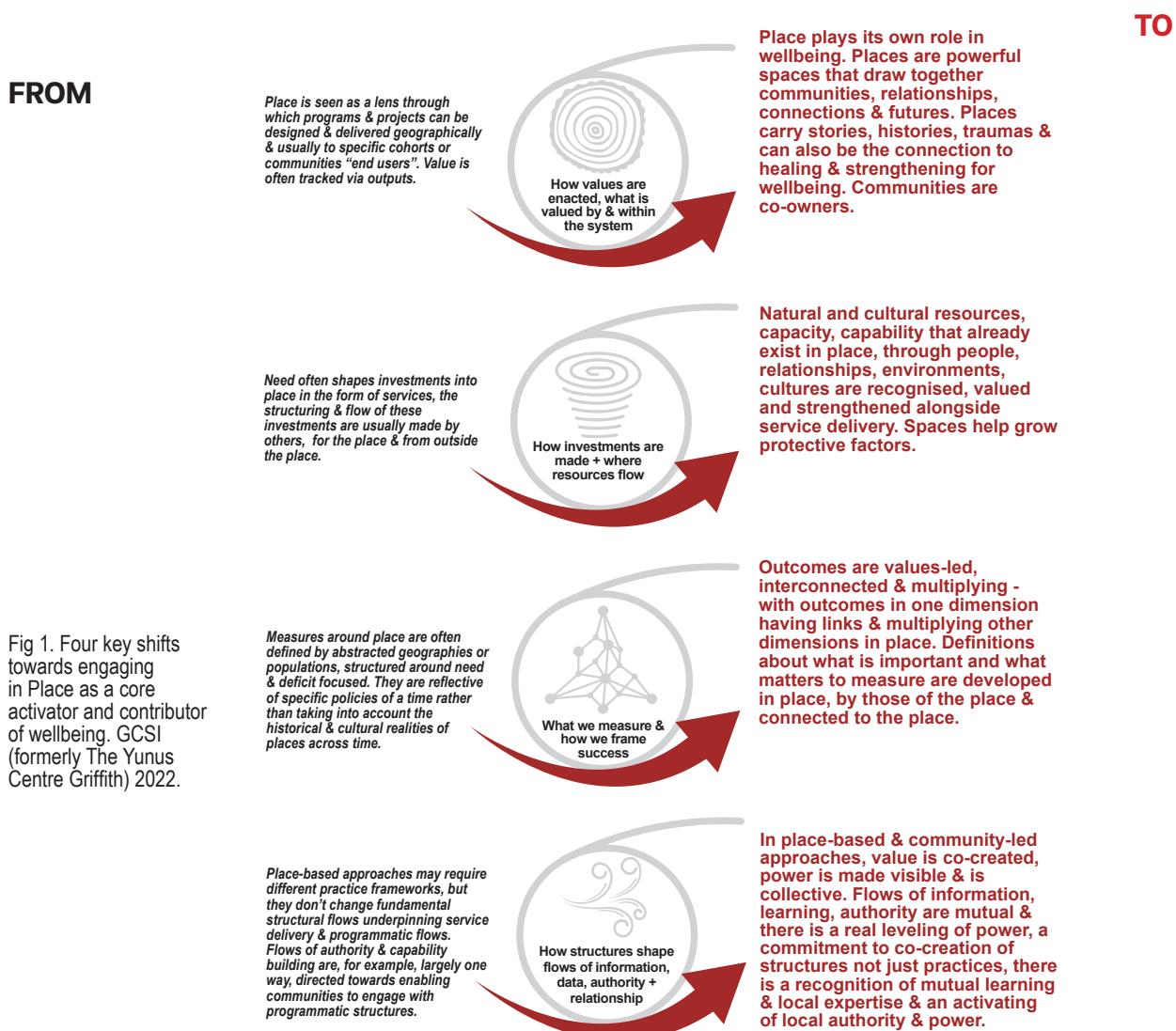

FROM

TO

Place is seen as a lens through which programs & projects can be designed & delivered geographically & usually to specific cohorts or communities "end users". Value is often tracked via outputs.

How values are enacted, what is valued by & within the system

Place plays its own role in wellbeing. Places are powerful spaces that draw together communities, relationships, connections & futures. Places carry stories, histories, traumas & can also be the connection to healing & strengthening for wellbeing. Communities are co-owners.

Need often shapes investments into place in the form of services, the structuring & flow of these investments are usually made by others, for the place & from outside the place.

How investments are made + where resources flow

Natural and cultural resources, capacity, capability that already exist in place, through people, relationships, environments, cultures are recognised, valued and strengthened alongside service delivery. Spaces help grow protective factors.

Fig 1. Four key shifts towards engaging in Place as a core activator and contributor of wellbeing. GCSI (formerly The Yunus Centre Griffith) 2022.

Measures around place are often defined by abstracted geographies or populations, structured around need & deficit focused. They are reflective of specific policies of a time rather than taking into account the historical & cultural realities of places across time.

What we measure & how we frame success

Outcomes are values-led, interconnected & multiplying - with outcomes in one dimension having links & multiplying other dimensions in place. Definitions about what is important and what matters to measure are developed in place, by those of the place & connected to the place.

Place-based approaches may require different practice frameworks, but they don't change fundamental structural flows underpinning service delivery & programmatic flows. Flows of authority & capability building are, for example, largely one way, directed towards enabling communities to engage with programmatic structures.

How structures shape flows of information, data, authority + relationship

In place-based & community-led approaches, value is co-created, power is made visible & is collective. Flows of information, learning, authority are mutual & there is a real leveling of power, a commitment to co-creation of structures not just practices, there is a recognition of mutual learning & local expertise & an activating of local authority & power.

place isn't just a specific site to "deliver into", it's a core activator and contributor of wellbeing. Approaches such as place-making recognise this power of place to connect, heal, tell stories and build connection to story of place, how ever this doesn't often carry over into government and service dominated sites. For example seeing education, health or community spaces within our communities as healing and strengthening entities in their own right, not just places to deliver services from.

A key shift in this pattern is in seeing these spaces as formed with community, not for community. "Formal" staff of such sites working in partnership, power sharing with community rather than owning and controlling spaces. This disruption of where expertise sits is connected to the shift away from a focus on deficit services to "fix" people, and more towards activating or strengthening the local social and cultural infrastructure that is in place (and is closely related to our first pattern, Beyond Services). The examples shared for this pattern look specifically at the detail of how this might be enacted in traditional services spaces.

Places and spaces are not neutral, and not just containers for initiatives or actions. We need to work intentionally to actively ensure places can be genuine channels for wellbeing. Recognising and reflecting on how places are shaped by and in turn shape people's lives is a good starting point.

Adding a more socially, culturally and ecologically rich understanding of place in the design of initiatives and how they are situated in spaces could also deepen the focus and measurement towards what really matters to people and families.

"Good" looks different in different places. We may even start to evaluate place-based initiatives on questions such as 'how are the stories of this place recognised and valued in the work', 'how have communities shaped this space' 'how welcome do families feel in this space', and 'how do babies play here'. That in turn may support deeper learnings towards better outcomes in place.

Embedding the Pattern: what might it take?

Systems
Systems that recognise place as playing a critical role in wellbeing, drawing together communities, relationships, connections to land & ecologies & futures

Structures
- Recognising & including local, place-based support structures (formal & informal) into the structuring of wellbeing policy & investment frameworks
- Investing in networks of local leadership to create platforms for power sharing, coordination, connection, skill building, mobilising, participation, innovation & learning at a local level.

Practices
- Shifting policies, KPIs, contracts, funding agreements to prioritise what matters to, strengthens & promotes healing in place
- Genuine co-creation of & power sharing in 'back-stage' structures & flows as well as 'front-stage' practices & processes (eg. contracts & funding agreements are also co-created)

Values
- Start with values of place & people of places
- Mutuality & shared agendas are key to better outcomes

Spaces + Interactions
- Spaces actively reflect commitments to mutual learning, power sharing & collaboration in place
- Reflecting relational engagement in spaces & interactions rather than reflecting transactional approaches to people & place
- Facilities staff can catalyse wellbeing in spaces & interactions, by intentionally reflecting what matters to families & communities in a particular place

Behaviours
- Intentionally recognising & engaging with existing resources in place
- Engaging with social & cultural support structures & anchor institutions to grow long-term wellbeing
- Focusing & measuring on what matters to communities, what strengthens, heals & builds towards wellbeing in place

Mindsets
- Recognising the power of place & its role as a starting point for wellbeing
- Place & space is more than geography - they are connectors of people, history, land & story
- The qualities of places and spaces are integral to wellbeing
- Co-creation, collaboration & power sharing are key to working with place & need to be enacted not just verbalised
- Valuing manaakitanga (hospitality, care for each other, wellbeing for community) through space in place
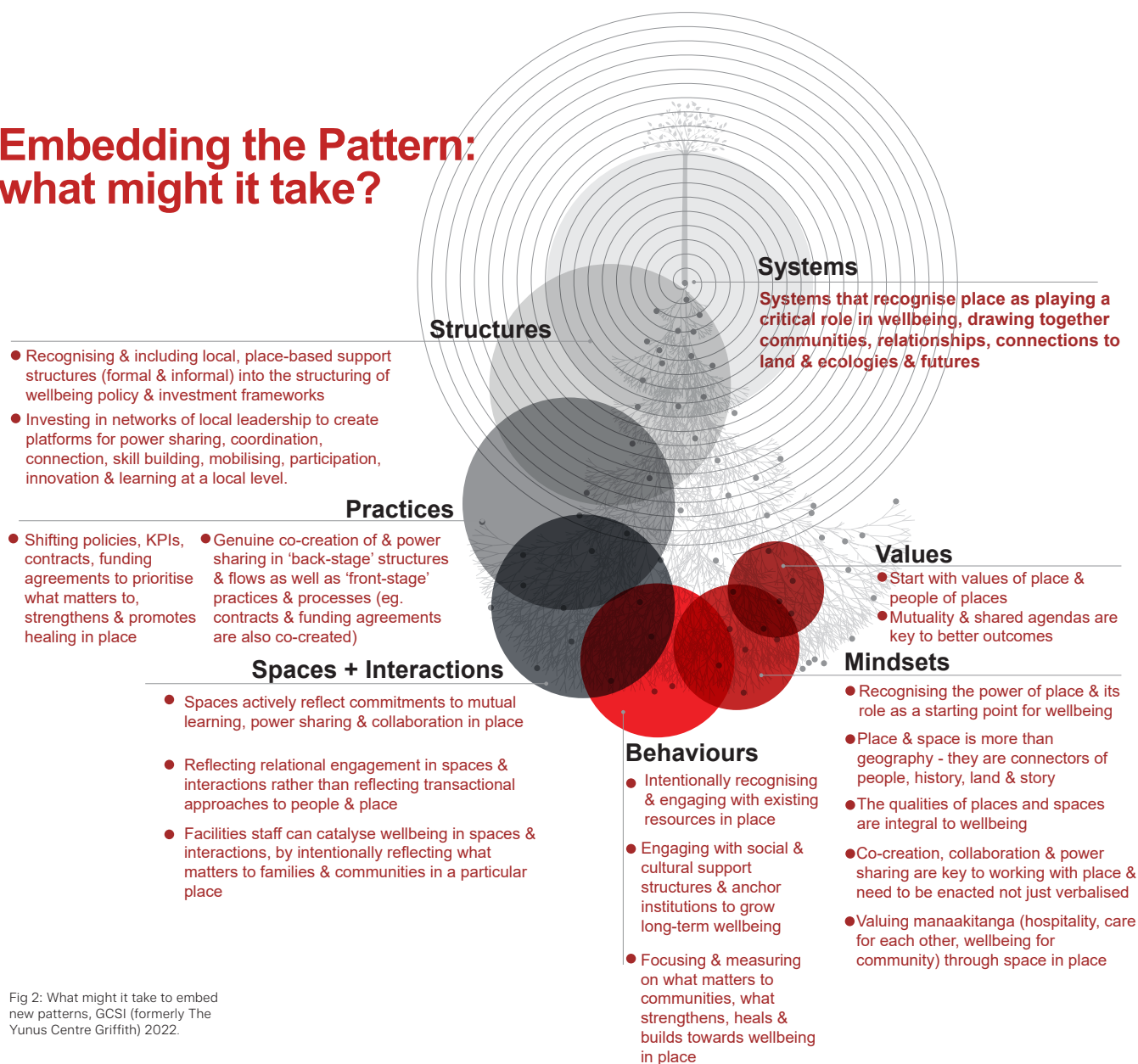
Fig 2: What might it take to embed new patterns, GCSI (formerly The Yunus Centre Griffith) 2022.

Examples of 'Connecting to & being in place' patterns in context

In **Te Paataka Koorero o Takaanini** (The Takaanini Community Hub), the public spaces have been deliberately designed so staff space and public spaces are shared. The kitchen space conventionally located in a back room only available to staff, is out front as a common space. Spaces are reconfigurable so that whānau can influence the shape of the space in ways that suit their needs in the moment. Whānau and staff work together to co-design what might be in the Hub, staff understand the space is a shared space for and with community. Mana whenua, the tribes local to the area, were involved throughout the development of the Hub, have been part of decision-making about its design and have choosen what of their stories, history and knowledge become part of the Hub as well as how it will be shared.

Whānau are able to be and act differently in this community space. They are active in determining how the space is used and contribute to it as a shared space where they belong. For example people come and make their lunch, offer tea to others and even restock the fridge. Whānau can use the space to organise and lead their own interactions and activities, an indoor play area actively prioritises connection and play as a form of learning for children and families.

The space opens itself up to different forms of connection, participation and innovation. Space becomes available for multiple social and cultural outcomes, not just primary service delivery or transactional delivery. Whānau participation, sense of welcome, belonging and contribution are some of the indicators of success. The shape of the space was informed by the vision of mana whenua as well as insights and aspirations shared by community members about what a community space that reflected them looked and felt like.
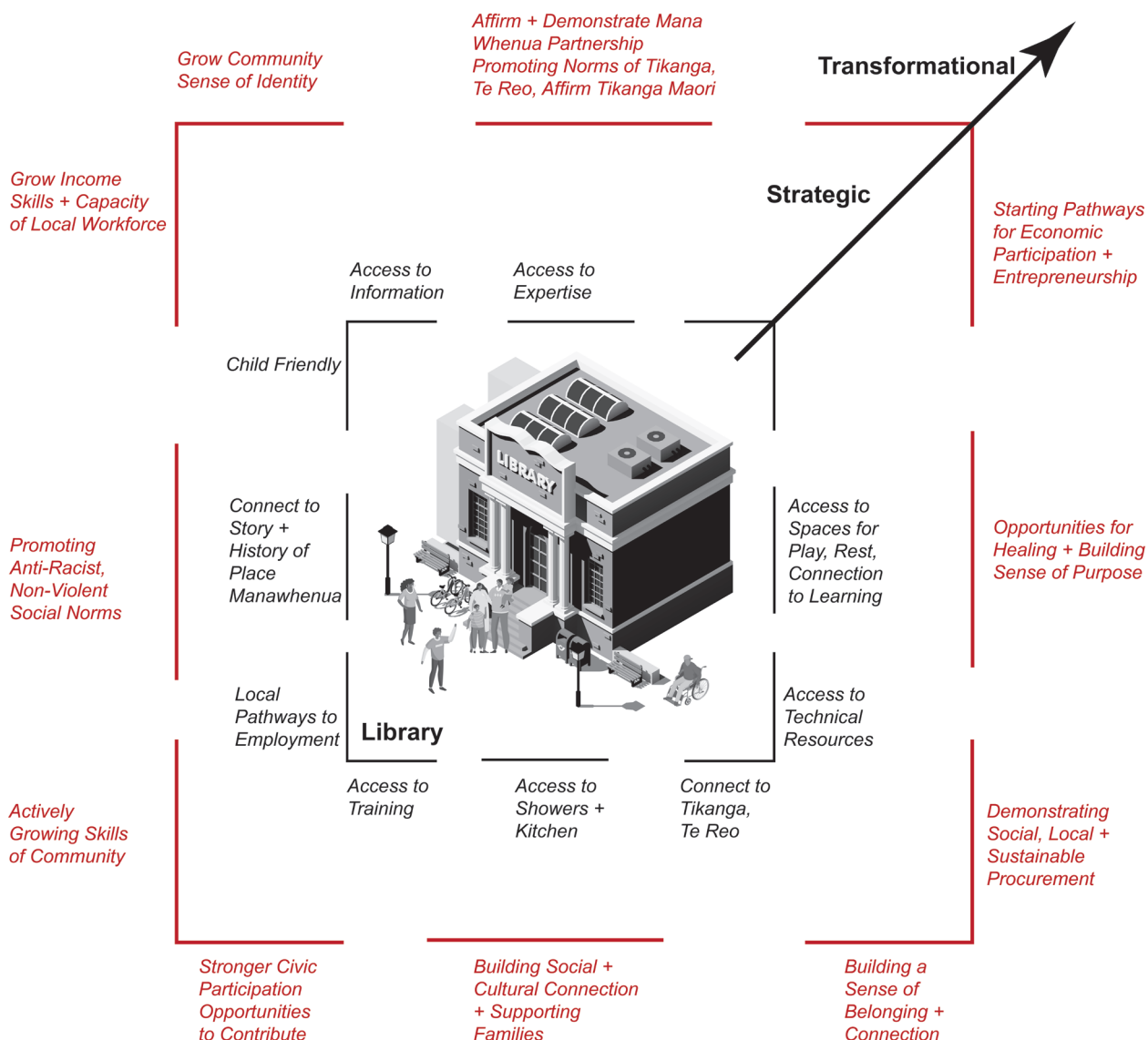

Fig 3. Shifting from strategic use of spaces in place towards transformational activation for wellbeing in place. GCSI (Formerly The Yunus Centre Griffith) 2022.

Developing a public space in this way required starting with values and relationships, and working out how those values and relationships could be expressed in the space as well as the development of the space. It required working very differently with decision-makers and designers (including architects and planners), sharing power and decision-making.

This requires staff to relinquish their sense of control and sense of ownership over the space, and invest in the time and capability for working with, connecting with, and building trusted relationships with community and co-creators of the space. It also requires a tolerance for potential mess and for things to be tested and iterated to see what works. It requires a shift to different kinds of measures and indicators of good, not just tracking costs, numbers or service and programmatic related outputs. Specifically it means valuing the return on investment of public spaces that create social connection, model pro-social practices, build connection to identity and culture and enable learning in a diversity of ways.

Rethinking Space in Place

When Plunket, an early years health service, refurbished its premises in Manurewa it prioritised a welcoming space over a clinical setting. This included someone to welcome people into the space, redesigning the common area as a place for families and babies to connect, play or rest. Spaces originally used for clinical staff only became open access spaces for families whether they were using the clinical services or not. The space was designed to reflect the value of manaakitanga, welcome, care and hospitality.

This shift in the way things were configured and resourced reflected Plunket's move to understanding one of the most critical factors in the impact of their service was how welcome families felt in the space. Did they feel like they belonged there, that they could be themselves, be honest about who they were and how they were going, and safely share their experiences as parents? And that this experience was enabled from how the space was arranged as well as the behaviours and interactions within them. This prioritisation of manaakitanga demonstrated that Plunket cared about parents and their experiences, and that this was the primary role of Plunket. Services and clinical support came after this.

Starting with manaakitanga enabled Plunket to build trust, rapport and connection with families that might otherwise not have attended or returned. It enabled them to help families build connections between each other. It embodies the concept of service and being in service to families and communities. It puts value on the small interactions and ways of behaving together as humans that are critical to our relationships and wellbeing but often engineered out of service delivery.

This shift required the organisation and team to completely rethink their role, and be willing to re-allocate spaces and resources, including giving up "private" spaces. It meant a sharing of spaces and power in a more equal way with families, rather than families only fitting into the places and spaces of the service as delivered. It required being willing to value spaces and interactions as much as clinical expertise in creating the environments for sharing and building healthy and strong parenting practices. It was a physical way of prioritising the relationship with people over the transaction of a service.

Conclusion and what's next

Patterns help to make visible or describe the different ways of working that are important to getting different outcomes. It's easy for us to talk about how we think things should work and be different (e.g community-led, partnerships, powersharing). We are hopeful that by trying to go more deeply into the kinds of interconnected changes and patterns that these shifts represent we can make more visible some of the "how" of change. The seven patterns we identify, including *Connecting to place & being in place,* are transitional patterns - starting points that reflect learning about ways of working that are more likely to create the possibility for different outcomes and greater equity.

Keep an eye out for our introduction to the seventh pattern - and the eventual combined set. You can find patterns published so far on our blog. We'd love to know if you recognise these patterns, can see examples of these patterns in your work, or can help us to extend our understanding of these patterns. Equally we would love to work with others to identify additional transitionary patterns that are helping to give further weak signals for systems change towards equity.You can reach out at gcsi@griffith.edu.au.