

# Final Report



## Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield Community Hub Open Forums

JULY 2021



Baptist Churches  
of NSW & ACT

## Background

In 2020, Jamie Freeman and Kelly Crawford from the Baptist Association NSW & ACT were introduced to Vicki Sherry, CEO of Hopefield, through a connection made at the Baptist Association's regional affiliated ministry for Southern Sydney, Transform Southern Sydney (TSS). TSS saw the work of Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church and wanted to explore how this could be developed across the region as part of the Gen1K goal to see a thousand healthy churches throughout NSW and the ACT. It was during an initial meeting that Vicki shared her heart for the work of Hopefield and something she called a Community Hub.

The origins of Hopefield were as Tea Gardens Cottage, started in 1995 to facilitate connection between Gymea Baptist Church and community members. Since then, it developed into Southern Community Welfare and now Hopefield. The current services of Hopefield include:

- Counselling Services and Employment Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Speech Pathology
- Cognitive Assessments
- Case Management
- Work Development Orders
- Food Packages
- Christmas Hampers
- Training and programs for kids and adults
- Seasons for Growth

Jamie Freeman and Kelly Crawford from the Gen1K Mission Team were engaged as part of exploring the Community Hub opportunity. This connects with the initial stages of broader work being done at the Baptist Association on partnerships between church and community service organisations.

There are churches across the Baptist movement trying to figure out how to embed partnerships/ministries within the life of the church as they practice integral mission. They want to reconnect with the 'why' of their work, make changes to the 'how', and do a better job of working out the 'what' of their activities.

Another challenge to overcome is where Christian agencies experience mission drift through professionalisation and disconnect from their church origins. Jamie and Kelly wanted to explore the governance and cultural dynamics that help protect agencies from this drift and build strong fruitful partnerships into the future.

After further discussions with Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church staff, it was determined that the Association would run a series of forums, for attenders of Gymea Baptist Church, that would help to explore the current partnership between Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church. These forums would also help gather information that would be helpful for any next step the two entities might take and to ascertain appetite for future partnership work.

## Purpose and Objectives

A strong and flourishing partnership between a church and an organisation should show connection both in governance structures but also in the cultures of the church and organisation. The purpose of the forums was to better understand the current partnership between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield and to provide insight on where this connection could be fostered, for any future work to flourish.

Before moving forward into a new iteration of the Hopefield/Gymea Baptist Church partnership, the objectives of the forums were to better understand:

- The physical and emotional connection church attenders had with the work of Hopefield, as well as knowledge of the shared history.
- What knowledge and understanding existed of the local community and how that local community was defined.
- What ways people could see the lives of Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church intersecting.
- The strengths and gifts of people in the church.
- The appetite church attenders had to move forward in the partnership and participate in co-designing the next stage of partnership.

While we could see strong connection between the leadership of Hopefield and the leadership of Gymea Baptist Church (and this connection was evidenced through governance structures), we wanted to see if that same connection was felt by attenders of the church. We also wanted to see if church attenders saw ways that their own strengths and gifts could be used in the work of Hopefield.

We felt that engaging church attenders in this process would assist in building ownership over the partnership and enable future opportunities to have a good chance of success.

## Methodology

### *Pre-Forum Survey*

Prior to the forums, a survey was circulated amongst church members from Gymea Baptist Church. This was done through survey monkey and via hard copy. The hard copy responses were later entered into the survey monkey form. The purpose of this survey was to ascertain familiarity and connectedness to the work of Hopefield. It consisted of five questions related to length of church attendance, familiarity with the work of Hopefield, and connection to Hopefield. There were also a series of questions asking about church attenders' use of gifts and skills at Hopefield and whether Hopefield was seen as a priority for Gymea Baptist Church. For a full set of questions and results, please see *Appendix 1*.

## *Forums*

Three Forums were held:

- **Forum 1: Monday, 31 May 2021 (10:00am – 12 noon)**  
This forum had 16 attendees who were mostly older members of the church. There was one attendee new to the church who attended because she was interested in the work of Hopefield.
- **Forum 2: Monday, 31 May 2021 (7:30pm – 9:30pm)**  
This forum had 26 attendees who were in some form of leadership within Gymea Baptist Church and/or Hopefield.
- **Forum 3: Sunday, 6 June 2021 (12 noon – 2:00pm)**  
This forum had 28 attendees from a range of ages and involvement in the church and Hopefield.
- A fourth forum scheduled for Sunday 6 June was cancelled due to lack of registrations.

## *Forum Activities*

There were four main activities and one brief final activity chosen based upon their likelihood to capture information related to the why and how of the partnership. The community mapping exercise and the strengths survey are also activities often used in relation to asset-based community development.

Activities consisted of:

- **Activity 1** - An awareness mapping exercise about the history of Hopefield and its current activities. The purpose of this activity was to revisit the 'Why', why did what is now known as Hopefield start in the first place? We wanted people to reflect on the shared history between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield to help solidify the connection between the two. We wanted to unearth stories and help connect church attenders to the purpose of Hopefield.
- **Activity 2** - A community mapping exercise where people were invited to identify different aspects of the community/ies that the church and Hopefield serve. The purpose of this activity was again to reconnect to the 'Why'. Are Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church seen as assets to the community? Who lives in the community? What might they be experiencing? Are these services still needed?
- **Activity 3** - A discussion around the intersection point between the life of Gymea Baptist Church and the life of Hopefield. The purpose of this activity was to understand what the non-negotiables of Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield are and to start to dream about 'how' they are connected. How would clients from Hopefield find their way into the life of the church? How would attenders of Gymea Baptist Church benefit from the expertise of the professionals of Hopefield? What might need to change about how the two interact for the whole picture to flourish?

- **Activity 4** - A strengths questionnaire called Head, Heart and Hands. Participants were asked to identify their strengths and the things they are passionate about. We did not take identifying details because we did not want people to feel they were signing up to something. Rather, we wanted to get a picture of the gifts and passions of the people in the church.
- **Activity 5** - A brief activity to help gauge the appetite to move forward in the partnership.

A spreadsheet of results from these activities can be found in *Appendix 2* of this report.

## Key Findings

1. The length of attendance correlates to the high level of familiarity with the work of Hopefield.
2. There was limited awareness of the origins of Tea Gardens Cottage and its purpose to facilitate connection between the church and community members.
3. There were high levels of awareness about the shared history of Hopefield (aka Southern Community Welfare) and Gymea Baptist Church.
4. There was strong agreement around the priority of Hopefield for Gymea Baptist Church and the need for the work it does in the broader community.
5. There was less awareness of some key issues facing the clients of Hopefield and the achievements of the organisation.
6. The majority of respondents connect to Hopefield through indirect methods.
7. There was an awareness of the changing nature of the broader community and that the church doesn't reflect these changes.
8. There is an awareness of local stories that could impact the idea of welcome and belonging.
9. There is need for further discussions with church members and Hopefield about who the community is that the church and Hopefield serve.
10. There are some shared beliefs or values that underpin the non-negotiables of both Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield.
11. Community members and Hopefield clients were two key groups missing from the discussion that would need to be included around the design of a Community Hub.
12. There are common strengths and passions amongst forum attendees that align with the concept of a Family Community Hub.



## Observations and Reflections

We have made a series of observations and reflections based upon the data gathered. While we have not listed all the results in these observations, we have made them available in the appendices to this report and encourage you to have a look at them if you have questions.

### *Observations from the Pre-Forum Survey:*

- a) The majority of respondents (74%) have been attending Gymea Baptist Church for over seven years. This length of attendance correlates to the high level of familiarity reported in the survey to the work of Hopefield. However, only 42% felt very connected to Hopefield while 48% felt "a little" connected. While this is still positive, it does show that there is room to connect people further to what Hopefield is doing.
- b) The majority of respondents connected to Hopefield through prayer (70%), donation of goods in the past 12 months (66%), and monetary donation in the past 12 months (58%). There were 8 respondents who said they volunteer regularly and 6 who stated that they volunteered as a once-off. There were also some people on Hopefield's Board who attended Forum 2.
- c) There were very strong agreements (over 93%) to the statements about the work of Hopefield being a priority to Gymea Baptist Church, the community needing Hopefield, understanding why the church support Hopefield, and connecting faith to the work of Hopefield. These should be celebrated as significant achievements. There was less agreement (44%) with people seeing ways they could use their gifts at Hopefield. 54% of respondents answered "I don't know" to this statement. This creates an opportunity to link more giftings to Hopefield's work.

### *Reflection*

You can probably sustain the current level of volunteering into the future, especially with people from Forum 1, who identified more traditional forms of involvement in Hopefield in their Venn diagram activity. If the Community Hub idea continues, it would be worthwhile considering how people can be involved without necessarily being a formal volunteer. It would increase connection and potentially help with telling the story of the partnership to others.

### *Observations from Forum Activities:*

(Please note - activity data can be found in *Appendix 2* of this report)

- d) Apart from the very beginning origins of Tea Gardens Cottage, in all three forums there were high levels of awareness about the shared history of Hopefield and Gymea Baptist Church. There was also high awareness of the offerings of Hopefield. There were slightly higher awareness levels from Forum 1 and 2 participants, possibly reflecting the length of time at the church and leadership roles.

When asked how they felt about Hopefield, upon hearing a statement on the re-branding from Southern Community Welfare, one person said,

"[There is] still more to be done. Southern Community Welfare [the name] didn't encompass everything that the organisation did. It could be broader in its influence."

Another said,

"[It] impacts your heart."

- e) There was less awareness in all three forums of some of the achievements of Hopefield as well as the feedback that clients gave about the services or their personal concerns. There was also less awareness of the level of homelessness in the Sutherland Shire and of the referral pathways for Hopefield.

Upon hearing about the Hopefield clients who identify as isolated from family/friends or community, one workshop participant said,

" People have moved here recently and don't have family support. [It] depends on what part of the Shire you live in."

Another person said, "We need to get busy. We have a huge opportunity," when they heard that most referrals come from community services and not from the church.

The very positive thing that came out of this activity is that people seemed genuinely interested in the history of the partnership, the work of Hopefield, and the information about clients. There was a desire to learn more and expressions about getting more involved. One person expressed about Christmas Hampers,

"Christmas hampers are the best thing that have come out of our church".

### *Reflection*

People seem to have a solid understanding of the offerings of Hopefield but perhaps more could be done to tell the stories of what Hopefield is achieving as well as the feedback from clients and others in the community. These stories can also help connect new members into Hopefield's work as it seems like the deep understanding of Hopefield was coming from people who had attended the church for more than seven years.

There is a potential correlation between people not knowing the stories or personal reflections from Hopefield's clients and not making the connection between the use of their own strengths and gifts in Hopefield's work.

- f) In Activity 2, participants were asked to list things about their community such as the people in it, the businesses, key modes of travel, barriers, etc. It was an opportunity for participants to reflect on who is in their community, what assets the community has, what community members might need, and the boundaries of the community.

A key observation from Activity 2 was that there are significant geographical/physical 'boundaries' within the Shire made up of key bridges, the

Royal National Park, and the Tasman Sea. During a discussion about boundaries of the community, one participant reflected that perhaps they are not a part of the community because they live beyond that boundary. No matter how Hopefield and Gynea Baptist Church define the community/ies they serve, physical boundaries will affect the accessibility to services and community activities.

In Forum 3, there was a more extensive discussion around place and whether the Shire was a place of welcome. One participant from Forum 3 said,

“The Shire people are really stand-off-ish. As a military kid, it has been the hardest place for me to make friends.”

Another participant in Forum 3 said,

“We are not welcoming enough of people who have come to this country.”

While another commented that the church doesn't reflect the changing nature of the community.

### *Reflection*

The overwhelming conversation that emerged from all three forums was about the changing nature of the ethnic makeup of people in the Shire. There was acknowledgement that more families are moving into the area to try to get more space and there was also discussion that although the Shire might still be predominantly Anglo-Saxon, there are growing CALD communities.

We also recognise that Gynea Baptist Church is drawing people from a broad area and that this area perhaps looks different to the community Hopefield serves. This could have implications for the development of a Community Hub.

- g) We also wanted to note that there were common local stories that people shared regarding the Sutherland Shire, such as the Cronulla riots, the first contact with Aboriginal people at Kurnell, Puberty Blues, ScoMo, the Sharks Grand Final, Bushfires, etc. It may be worth a further discussion on how these stories shape the area to be what it is today and how they relate to the idea of welcome.
- h) In Activity 3, there were many items listed in the circle for Gynea Baptist Church and what would be considered a non-negotiable. These included items you would typically expect to see like the ordinances, a Sunday service, Bible teaching, proclamation of the gospel, and local and global mission. It also included things like playgroups, men's and women's ministries, youth ministry, Catalyst, commitment to strategies to raise awareness and prevention of domestic violence, Kids Hope, SRE, pastoral care, and tea/coffee. It was clear that Gynea Baptist Church does a lot and that people think these activities are important. Diagrams from the discussions at the three forums can be viewed in *Appendix 3* of this report.

There were fewer non-negotiables in Hopefield's circle. These consisted of the various professional obligations and accountabilities Hopefield must fulfill. It also included maintaining a Christian identity and being relevant to the community (caring for needs and maintaining presence at a grassroots level). The participants



in Forum 2 also felt that Hopefield should remain accessible and affordable, maintain quality staff and work with those experiencing domestic violence.

### *Reflection*

It is good to see that people care about the ministries of Gymea Baptist Church however in co-design of the Community Hub, you may want to question whether all those activities are non-negotiables.

- i) There are some shared beliefs or values that underpin the non-negotiables of both Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield. These include a commitment to people being introduced to Jesus and to seeing lives changed through Jesus. It also includes a shared value in healing or restoration. This emerged most strongly in Forums 1 and 2 but there was a shared commitment to some understanding of discipleship as an underpinning value for Gymea Baptist Church in all three workshops, expressed as:
- “becoming followers of Jesus”
  - “lives changed”
  - “being ambassadors”
  - “as I am sent, so you are sent”
- j) Part of Activity 3 involved a discussion around the intersection point of Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield. We asked how the two interacted and what could be in that intersection point in the future. While some of what emerged in that discussion was around activities or events where people could interact, such as playgroups and Christmas Carols, there was discussion in Forum 3 around what values would characterise the interactions. Particularly this included honesty, authenticity, and integrity. In addition, participants in Forum 3 started to talk about what it would look like for attenders from Gymea Baptist Church to be present at events or activities that were already happening in the church facility rather than to run a new program.

In the intersection point, participants in Forum 1 listed prayer, financial support and volunteering as well as telling the story of what is happening at Hopefield. These represented perhaps more traditional ways of participation in the activities of Hopefield. Not surprisingly, Forum 2 participants (leadership) discussed governance as being a part of that intersection as well.

### *Reflection*

We wanted to note that there are two key groups missing from this discussion. These are community members and Hopefield clients. You could put those two groups into the same category (local community). While it would not have been appropriate to have local community members (who are not attenders of Gymea Baptist Church or Hopefield staff) as part of these forums, it would be advantageous to invite them into consultation around the Community Hub. We recognise there is a third circle in the Venn Diagram from Activity 3, which consists of the local community. What are their values and non-negotiables?

- k) The forum attendees have many strengths, some of which were captured on the strengths survey. The questions asked on this survey (head, heart, and hand

strengths) were chosen to try to draw out interests and passions that people may not list when they talk about their jobs or training. We wanted to learn about the interests people had in life activities, which could help provide direction to what activities would bring people from Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield together.

The most common strengths and passions listed were parenting, grandparenting, moving/travelling/living in different cultures, nature, homelessness, craft, cooking, IT/computer skills, and gardening.

There were also unique and very personal strengths listed, which could be of great support to clients of Hopefield such as:

- Experience of divorce
- Teenage pregnancy
- Giving up a child for adoption
- Struggles of depression
- Communicating with people who have communication difficulties
- Heart listening
- Welfare background - out of home care kids/homeless/child development
- Domestic violence and empowering women

For a full list of strengths, please see the spreadsheet in *Appendix 2* and the online responses in the spreadsheet in *Appendix 4*.

- l) At the end of the forum session, we read out three statements and asked participants to stand in a spot for "yes", "no" or "maybe". All participants in Forums 1 and 3 responded with a "yes" for the following two statements:

"I am very happy for partnership between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield to continue."

"I believe there is appetite to further develop the partnership between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield."

The majority of participants in Forum 1 and all participants in Forum 3 also confirmed they would be willing to further work on the development of the partnership.

These are very positive results with participants not only wanting to see things continue but also showing willingness to take ownership over the next stage of the process.

- m) While participants in Forum 2 (with Section Leaders) were all supportive of the partnership between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield continuing, there was more hesitation about their own involvement. Ten people were unsure about whether there was appetite to further develop the partnership and seven did not know whether they would continue to be involved. One person said,

"Burnout. A few people do most of the work."

This sentiment was echoed in Activity 4, when someone said,

“I have lots of skills but I do not have time to share with others. People are happy to give money/food but not their own time in the Sutherland Shire.”

### Reflection

It is interesting to note the clear difference in the responses from Forum 2 participants about involvement in future partnership development. There is more hesitancy to be involved because of time constraints and there were comments made about who was doing the work. This is a warning not to spread current leadership too thin and to engage more people from Forums 1 and 3 as potential leaders in the development of the Community Hub and its ongoing structure.

### Recommendations

Based on our observations and reflections, we have a few recommendations for next steps:

- a) Based upon Activity 1, we would recommend continuing to find ways to share specifics about what Hopefield is achieving and information from client feedback that informs the experiences of life in the Sutherland Shire. How information from Hopefield's Annual Report could be worked into the content of the church service? Can you have a monthly spot to share a story and a reflection on what it means for the church?
- b) We think there is more work to be done around connecting people's gifts and passions to their involvement with Hopefield. This could form part of a co-design process on the Community Hub and we would recommend expanding on the data that was gathered to encourage people to think about the rhythms of life where they could use their giftings in partnership with the Community Hub.

We would also like to note that a Family Hub does seem appropriate for GyMEA Baptist Church as many of the gifts and skills that people identified in themselves had to do with parenting, grandparenting, and some form of caring.

- c) Further to the discussion of people finding ways to use their gifts and passions as they do life within the Community Hub, it would be good to explore what support might be needed for people as they do this. We note that in Activity 4 around giftings and passions, people were vulnerable in highlighting the life experiences that they could share with others.

If this is to be explored further, we would recommend thinking through trainings around emotional safety, boundary setting, vulnerability and good communication. This is an exciting avenue, especially given the professional expertise of Hopefield staff. It may also help more church members connect with the supports that Hopefield has to offer.

- d) We would recommend further discussions with church members and Hopefield about who the community is that the church and Hopefield serve? Are these different or is it the same community? Can GyMEA Baptist Church identify an

immediate community around the church in which it is an asset and for which it desires community flourishing while also recognising that it is equipping people for discipleship in a broader area? How many people in the church have felt this tension of welcome in the Shire and what would it look like for Gymea Baptist Church, Hopefield, and the Family Community Hub to lead the way in changing that narrative for new arrivals to the community?

- e) We would recommend a discussion around whether activities of Gymea Baptist Church are as important as the values that underpin them. For example, is Kids Hope a necessary outwork of local mission, or if the Family Community Hub becomes a priority, could this change?

We would also recommend there may need to be an entirely different set of values around the intersection space between Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield (the Family Community Hub). This is because the Family Community Hub is an expression of Gymea Baptist Church and Hopefield but is not entirely either one of those two entities. It will have its own values and vehicles to deliver those values. It could also have a governance structure that is unique.

- f) We recommend engaging with the local community (also consisting of Hopefield clients) in further consultation about the Family Community Hub.
- g) We would recommend finding ways to develop new leaders when it comes to the Family Community Hub development and the potential governance structure. Are there people who have not typically been involved in leadership but who could add their passion and skills to this project? How can you involve church members, Hopefield staff and community members in leadership around the Hub?

## Conclusion

We believe that the Community Hub Open Forums accomplished what was intended for them, to help create ownership over the next stages of work and to draw out insights that would be beneficial for a co-design process. We very much appreciated being able to play some part in the journey of partnership that you are on, and we are excited for your next steps.