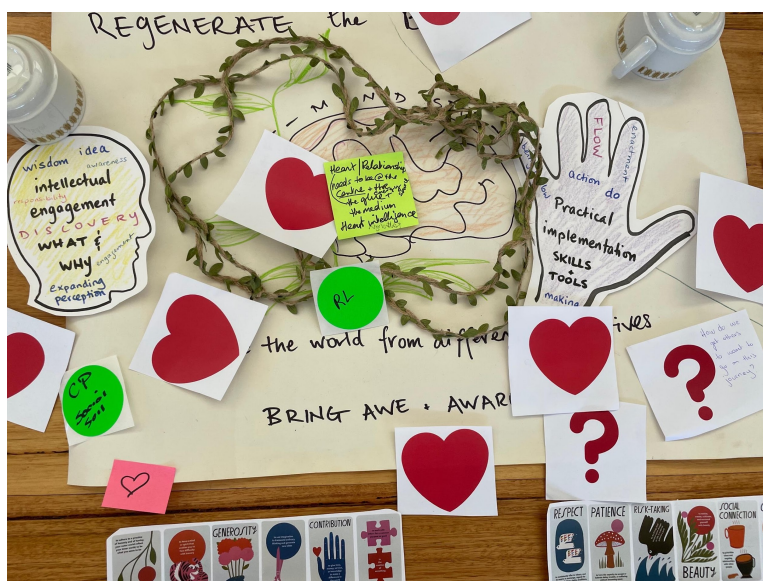


WELLBEING ECONOMY LEARNING CIRCLE

Learning Summary Report

April 2026



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Executive Summary

1. Overview & Purpose

This report centres on the evaluation and learning synthesis of the 'Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Pilot'. The Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle was a four-month pilot designed and delivered by the Castlemaine Institute (CI) to build the relational and conceptual infrastructure necessary for a local economic transition in Mount Alexander Shire. 17 community leaders, drawn from grassroots organisations, small business, local government, and community financial institutions, came together to work on three barriers identified in prior research:

1. Language and narrative: Wellbeing Economy concepts were not yet accessible or inclusive across the community.
2. Resourcing knowledge: There was limited shared understanding of the non-financial and financial capital available locally to support transition.
3. Collaboration models: There was no inclusive structure for diverse stakeholders to co-create change together.

An independent evaluation was conducted by Dr Melissa Kennedy (Deakin University) using a participatory, co-evaluation design including entry and exit surveys, learning experience surveys, in-depth interviews with all 15 non-Castlemaine Institute participants, and a participant review of this report. The evaluation was approved by the Deakin University Human Ethics Advisory Group (Project ID: 2025/HE000812).

2. Key Impact Findings

The pilot was highly successful in achieving its relational and conceptual goals. The evaluation identified six substantive findings around the key changes identified by participants as a result of the Learning Circle:

2.1 Connections and collaboration confidence grew substantially

This was the most consistent and striking result across all data sources. Participants feeling 'extremely connected' to other community members increased fourfold by the end of the Learning Circle (from 2 to 8 participants, over half of Exit Survey respondents). Confidence in reaching out to other groups for collaboration grew from 6% to 60% at the 'extremely confident' level in the Exit Survey. Two interview participants identified the broadening and deepening of relationships as their single 'most significant' change, with new connections translating into tangible outcomes including identifying new opportunities for grant applications.

2.2 Increased confidence to take action based on values

Six participants (40%) of interviewed cohort members identified the theme of increased confidence to act on their values as their most significant change. This manifested across personal, professional, and community dimensions: participants described changes ranging from taking more risks in community leadership, to applying values-led thinking within MBA studies, to integrating wellbeing principles into their own work and personal lives. This

finding is particularly insightful because it points to the role that place-based initiatives like Learning Circles can play in connecting personal values to broader systems change efforts.

2.3 Conceptual broadening with an 'application gap' in resourcing

Participants' definitions of the Wellbeing Economy shifted meaningfully from health and wellbeing concepts or alternative economic measures toward place-based, systems-level thinking, encompassing collective action; governance; and care for people and environment. All participants increased their confidence in identifying Wellbeing Economy concepts and groups in the Shire (with the exception of 1 participant who already rated 'extremely confident' in identifying what a Wellbeing Economy is at the beginning of the Learning Circle).

However, a meaningful distinction emerged between identifying Wellbeing Economy concepts and applying them to attract funding or develop resourcing models (entry and exit Survey Q5b). While 'moderately confident' responses on this practical application grew substantially (from 1 to 11s, out of a total of 15 respondents), no participant reached 'extremely confident'. This application gap directly maps onto one of the pilot's original barriers and indicates where the next phase of work needs to go – cultivating and directing resourcing, including financial and non-financial capital, towards local Wellbeing Economy transition initiatives.

2.4 'A-ha' moments from frameworks and models

One third of interview participants observed major conceptual breakthroughs from specific frameworks introduced in the pilot; including Place-Based Capital, 'Doughnut Economics', Cornerstone Indicators, the Diverse Economies Iceberg, and Inner Development Goals. For several, these were not simply new facts but genuine 'unlearnings': revisions to deep assumptions about capital, economic growth, and what counts as value. One participant described moving from 'Ugh, capital feels yucky' to finding a vocabulary that let them engage stakeholders they had previously felt unable to reach.

2.5 Facilitation quality and inner work as a model for place-based learning

Around a quarter of interview participants identified the design and facilitation of the pilot itself, including inner development work, poetry, grounding practices, and the creation of a psychologically safe learning space, as their single most significant learning. The Castlemaine Institute's own modelling of care and wellbeing (including within the team) was explicitly noted by some participants as a learning they took into their own lives and organisations. This suggests the pilot is not only teaching about a Wellbeing Economy but enacting one in its methods.

2.6 Cohort vs. community readiness

A consistent pattern across the data was the distinction between the cohort's internal growth and participants' views of the wider community. While confidence in community readiness did grow (from 0 to 4 participants at 'extremely confident'), 6 participants remained unchanged at 'moderately' or 'somewhat' confident. This is not scepticism, most of

these participants were already at a moderate baseline, but it does signal that systemic change requires sustained investment well beyond a single cohort pilot.

3. Operational Realities & Pilot Learnings

The project team's reflections, alongside participant feedback, identified several factors to consider for future funding and program design.

3.1 Place-based work requires relational resourcing

The project team's most significant learning was the scale of emotional, relational, and care labour involved in delivering place-based work within one's own community. Cohort recruitment, individual support, navigating reputational complexity, and sustaining team wellbeing all carried costs that were not fully accounted for in the initial budget, yet were critical to the pilot's 100% participant retention rate. As one team member reflected, this work requires someone whose full-time role is local partnerships, with genuine flexibility to respond to people as they enter your 'sphere of care'.

3.2 The diversity and inclusion tension in relationship-centred approaches

The project team also identified that another most significant learning was how to uphold diversity and inclusion principles in relationship-centred approaches. This was noted as a genuine dilemma that warrants transparent discussion with funders. While relationship-centred cohort building builds on existing trust and alignment in the community and is highly effective at generating the depth of learning demonstrated in the Learning Circle, however it carries inherent risks for broader diversity and inclusion. The cohort was strong but not maximally diverse. Future iterations need explicit guidance on cohort composition, bridging approaches for participants on the margins of established networks, and clarity about 'who this program is for' at the outset.

3.3 Structural and technical friction points

Some interview participants found the variance in platforms (Miro, WhatsApp, Signal) and shifting modes (online/hybrid/in-person) created barriers to engagement rather than flexibility. The 'co-budget' activity, while valuable, could have been clearer in purpose and sequencing. Pod (small group) success was variable, largely driven by scheduling and capacity constraints rather than the format itself. A couple of interview participants noted a desire for greater clarity around program integration and intended outcomes/purpose. These are addressable design issues that can be easily modified for future learning programs.

3.4 Financial access enabled participation

Three interview participants explicitly noted that the sliding-scale financial support for attendance was significant to their ability to participate and to feeling their time was valued. For a pilot working with grassroots organisations, carers, and people in part-time or precarious work, this is not a minor operational detail, it served as an equity mechanism that directly affected who could access the pilot.

4. Strategic Recommendations

The following recommendations are for the Castlemaine Institute as well as current and future funders. These recommendations may also be relevant to other communities using learning and relational approaches to economic systems transformation.

4.1 Continue and iterate

Castlemaine Institute should run a second Learning Circle with embedded evaluation. The pilot has demonstrated sufficient proof of concept across relational, conceptual, and behavioural domains to warrant further iteration(s) focused on refinement. The second iteration should include the development of a Theory of Change to align purpose, goals, measures and outcomes.

4.2 Budget explicitly for relational infrastructure

Relational and care work, including cohort recruitment, individual support, team wellbeing, and the hidden labour of place-based facilitation, should be costed as core program delivery, not administrative overhead. Future funding proposals should include a dedicated 'relational infrastructure' line.

4.3 Deepen economic systems literacy and close the application gap

Future iterations and curriculum should build on participants' appetite for understanding how local economies can be remade in practice, potentially using local community organisations as live case studies within the curriculum. Program outcomes should focus on building capacity in Wellbeing Economy resourcing models, community wealth building, and potentially philanthropic grant writing, using Wellbeing Economy framing, which was the area of lowest confidence gain.

4.4 Address diversity and inclusion proactively

Future Learning Circle design should include explicit guidance on cohort composition and bridging strategies. Consider how the program can reach participants who are not already embedded in progressive community networks and clarify the relationship between relationship-centred approaches and the program's equity goals.

4.5 Refine measurement approach

Future evaluations of these learning programs would benefit from a move from numerical confidence scales toward qualitative rubrics for assessing shifts in understanding and capacity. It is suggested to conduct interviews in two phases: most significant learning at program completion, and most significant change 6–12 months later, to allow time for outcomes to emerge and consolidate.

4.6 Sustain the learning infrastructure

The Learning Circle demonstrated its value as a piece of ongoing community infrastructure, not a one-off event. Participants and the project team alike noted the rarity and importance of structured time for community leaders to think together. Funding for place-based systems change work and field building approaches should reflect this by supporting continuity rather than isolated pilots.

5. In Summary

The Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle pilot demonstrates that structured community learning, when well-held and relationally centred, can shift mindsets, build cross-sector connections, and increase confidence for values-led action in a regional community context. Participants from grassroots groups to Council to community financial institutions all derived significant value, and the 100% retention rate is itself evidence of the pilot's quality.

The findings also reveal that this kind of work carries real costs, relational, emotional, and structural, that must be honestly resourced if it is to be sustained and extended.

The Learning Circle model is not peripheral to economic transition in Mount Alexander Shire; it is already part of how that transition is happening.

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This research was conducted on Djaara Country, the unceded lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung (Djaara) People. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the longstanding knowledge systems on this Country that centre collective wellbeing and care for Country.

We would also like to acknowledge the Learning Circle participants who contributed their valuable time and insights to this evaluation study. Your contribution and commitment to exploring how to make better economies together for people, place and planet are deeply appreciated.

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I. Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Overview

I.1 Background and Aims

This report centres on the evaluation and learning synthesis of the ‘Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Pilot’. The Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle was a four-month pilot of a place-based learning model that focused on bringing community leaders together to ‘learn, connect, and build shared resources and understanding to support outcomes for the wellbeing economy’¹. The Wellbeing Economy is an economic model that has gained global attention, inspiring grassroots action to government reform. The Wellbeing Economy reframes the purpose of the economy away from pursuit of conventional growth i.e. GDP, to an economy that foregrounds the needs of people and planet (WEALL²).

The Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle was designed and piloted by the Castlemaine Institute³, a place-based not-for-profit research and learning organisation. Previous research and consultation by the Castlemaine Institute^{4 5}) on the local Wellbeing Economy identified three main barriers to its broader adoption in the community:

- i) the language and narrative around wellbeing economy not being accessible or inclusive;
- ii) a lack of understanding of the resourcing/capital in the local area to support and sustain Wellbeing Economy initiatives;
- iii) a lack of inclusive models to bring diverse stakeholders together to co-create change.

To explore these barriers in greater depth, the Learning Circle pilot focused on the centring of community experiences around the language, resourcing and collaboration enablers of a local Wellbeing Economy. To anchor the content in a practical way, participants worked on iteratively developing a case study of a project or initiative they were involved with throughout the course of the Learning Circle.

I.2 Learning Circle format and content

The Learning Circle was delivered in a hybrid (mix of in person and online) and flexible format to support participants to attend amongst their various professional, voluntary and caring responsibilities. The 6 core Learning Circles were facilitated by the Castlemaine Institute (led by Melina Chan and supported by Randi Wagner) and included guest workshops from subject matter champions on topics around: the Wellbeing Economy (Warwick Smith, Centre for Policy Development); Diverse and Community Economies (Dr Melissa Kennedy, Deakin University); Capital in the Wellbeing Economy (Meaghan Burkett,

¹ [Community Wellbeing Economy, Castlemaine Institute](#)

² [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#)

³ [Castlemaine Institute](#)

⁴ [Mount Alexander Shire Council](#)

⁵ [Castlemaine Institute](#)

Centre for Community Capital); and Storytelling for Social Impact (Alex Kelly, Economic Media Centre). The workshops blended theoretical content (such as the role and purpose of 'economy') with practical strategies for identifying and scaling up local Wellbeing Economy efforts, along with exploring the necessary relational and communication skills required to support change efforts.



Core Learning Circles

To support the integration of program content and enhance the opportunity to learn and connect across difference, all participants were allocated into small peer learning groups called 'pods'. Pods met at a regular cadence outside of the programmed sessions with some prompts and guided activities, while also allow space to connect on a personal level, and discuss all aspects of the Learning Circle experience.

1.3 Optional touchpoints

An optional Sensemaking workshop was held at the end of the pilot (led by CI member Jodi Newcombe and Melissa Kennedy). The purpose of the workshop was to check understandings and reactions to the different concepts and frameworks that participants were introduced to in the pilot, as well as sense make around what resonates for them, their initiative or community in actively shaping project outputs i.e. language and resourcing guides for a local Wellbeing Economy. A Miro board was created from the physical diagrams and responses and shared back to the group. Verbal and written responses were summarised into key themes and used to support the language and resourcing guides.



Sensemaking Workshop Example

To enhance learning and connection opportunities, additional optional learning touchpoints were offered as part of the pilot.



Optional Touchpoints

Optional learning activities included a session with Alison Whitten from REGEN Melbourne on their implementation of the Doughnut Economics Model; the opportunity to be part of a Treaty for Victoria Self-Reflective Kitchen Table conversations for allies; facilitated co-working days at the Castlemaine Institute to allow Learning Circle participants to further connect and work on their individual case studies and a Learning Circle celebration and share back to the wider community.

1.4 About the participants

17 participants joined the Learning Circle representing:

- individuals and grassroots organisations (12)
- local anchor institutions (Council and Community Financial Institution) (4)
- private business (1)

Participants represented a broad range of initiatives and organisation such as sustainability, local democracy, visual art, social infrastructure, philanthropy, wellbeing and social equity. Two members of the Castlemaine Institute were also participants in the Learning Circle as stewards of two separate initiatives. As part of the participatory design of the evaluation (see section 2 below), the author of this report, Dr Melissa Kennedy, also participated in Learning Circle activities, but is not included in the above tally.

2. Evaluation Approach

2.1 Evaluation Design

The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the key learnings and experiences of the Learning Circle participant cohort, alongside the core Castlemaine Institute Project Team who designed and implemented the Pilot (4 participants). This evaluation takes a 'place-based' approach⁶. Place-based approaches usually involve diverse stakeholders working collaboratively on complex issues. As a result, they are usually characterised as dynamic, highly relational and participatory⁷. Key evaluation criteria for place-based approaches focus on:

- Outcomes/change – changes expected to arise from the work
- Process – quality and reach of engagement and activities
- Principles – effectiveness of intended approach
- Learning – ability to learn from data and evaluation and adapt the work (Dart 2018)

Given the emphasis on participation in place-based approaches, co-evaluation is an important aspect in evaluation design. Co-evaluation is a form of participatory evaluation that 'involves all relevant actors in a project in an iterative evaluation practice and adapts methods of participatory action research for evaluation purposes'⁸. Taking a co-evaluation approach means that the project goals and objectives, key evaluation questions, methods and measures are jointly discussed and recorded at the project's outset and frequently reviewed, as well as beyond the life of the project⁹. Participatory approaches to evaluation also challenge traditional roles of evaluators as neutral to active participants¹⁰.

Evaluation questions

The following evaluation questions and methods were jointly formulated with the Castlemaine Institute, in seeking to understand:

- 1 What has changed for individuals and organisations from their participation in the Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Pilot? What were the most significant changes?
- 2 How did participants experience the Learning Circle format and delivery? What were the most significant learnings?
- 3 How did the Castlemaine Institute Project Team experience, learn from, manage and adapt the process?
- 4 How did the learning circle process contribute to learning mindsets and principles (ways of working together) for place-based innovation?

⁶See Dart (2018)

⁷1 See [Dart \(2018\)](#)

⁸ See [Kieslinger, B., Schürz, S., Mayer, K., & Schaefer, T. \(2022\)](#)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ See [Plottu, B and Plottu, E \(2009\)](#)

2.2 Evaluation Methods

Table 1 below, sets out the key evaluation questions against the place-based evaluation criteria, methods and participant groups.

Evaluation question	Evaluation Criteria	Methods	Participant Group
1. What has changed for individuals and organisations from their participation in the Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Pilot?	Change Learning	Comparison of entry (baseline) and exit survey data Most significant change/learning opt-in interviews (45mins)	Learning Circle Participants
2a. How did participants experience the Learning Circle format and delivery? 2b. What were the most significant learnings?	Process Learning	Midpoint and End of program survey (10 mins each) Most significant change/learning opt-in interviews (45mins)	Learning Circle Participants
3. How did the Castlemaine Institute Project Team experience, learn from, manage and adapt the process?	Learning	Written reflections 1 hour group interview	Castlemaine Institute Project team
4. How did the Learning Circle process contribute to learning mindsets and principles (ways of working together) for place-based innovation?	Process /Principles	Most significant change/learning interviews (45mins) Midpoint and End of program survey (10 mins each)	Learning Circle Participants

Table 1: Evaluation questions and methods

Entry and Exit Surveys

An entry (baseline) survey was conducted prior to the first Learning Circle in July 2025, with key questions repeated upon the Pilot completion in November with the purpose of assessing any changes or shifts for participants as a result of the Learning Circle. In

particular, the survey sought to establish the cohort's level of existing knowledge of the Wellbeing Economy and how it applies to the Shire; along with an indication of current connections, commitment and openness to enabling a Wellbeing Economy in the community.

The surveys were a mix of open text responses and rating scale responses (i.e. Likert scale rating of levels of confidence from a choice of 6 levels ranging from 'Not confident at all' to 'Extremely confident'). For analysis, 'moderately confident' and above are treated as positive confidence categories. 'Neutral' and 'prefer not to say' responses are discussed explicitly where shifts occurred.

Responses to the survey were anonymous, with 16 Learning Circle participants fully completing the entry survey (94%) and 15 (88%) fully completing the exit survey. 14 (87%) of the survey respondents provided linking IDs, allowing individual comparisons of shifts between the entry and exit surveys and the monitoring of change at both individual and aggregate levels.

Learning Experience Surveys

Learning experience surveys were conducted at the midpoint and endpoint of the Learning Circle. The purpose of the survey was to understand the participant learning experience, such as opportunities provided for new learning and the effectiveness of the learning format. Similar to the entry and exit Surveys, the learning experience surveys were a mix of open text and rating scale responses.

The sample for the learning experience surveys were smaller than the entry and exit survey, with 7 (41%) of participants completing the midpoint and 6 participants (35%) completing the endpoint survey. This small sample therefore limits the generalisability of the results. In contrast to the entry/exit survey, the results for the learning experience surveys are reported at the aggregate level only as linking information was not requested.

Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews (approx. 45 mins) were conducted with all Learning Circle participants, apart from the Castlemaine Institute representative (n=15), at the culmination of the pilot, from November 2025 – January 2026. The interviews were conducted by Dr Melissa Kennedy, with participants having the option to be anonymous in the reporting. The focus of the semi-structured interviews was to understand what the major learnings were and changes that participants derived from the Learning Circle, partly drawing on the 'Most Significant Change/Learning' evaluation technique¹¹. The following is an outline of the interview guide:

- Tell me how/why you got involved in the Learning circle
- Can you tell me about any i) learnings or ii) changes you feel have resulted from your involvement with the Learning Circle?

¹¹See [Dart, J., Pinwill, S., & Bishop, A. \(2021\)](#)

- From your point of view, which do you think is the most significant, or the most important change – or learning?
- What were things like before the change or learning?
- What happened?
- What's different now? (the situation after the change or learning)
- Why did you choose this change or learning in particular? e.g. Why was it significant for you?

Additional questions:

- How is the Wellbeing Economy concept or language resonating with you? How useful is it for this community?
- Is there anything else you wish to share?

Interview recordings were transcribed manually and coded using NVIVO software for analysis across the following themes:

- i) Motivations
- ii) Learnings/most significant learning
- iii) Changes/most significant change
- iv) Wellbeing Economy Language
- v) General Feedback

All Learning Circle participants were provided a with a copy of their interview transcript for checking and verification.

2.3 Participant Involvement

As part of the co-evaluation approach, a draft of the Learning Summary report was provided to participants for their input and further development. This followed by a meeting in March 2026 to deliberate on the responses and actions in refining the final report.

2.4 Expected Contribution

Along with understanding the experiences and learnings from the Pilot cohort, the insights offer a broader contribution. It is anticipated that evaluation findings will be instructive for understanding how community co-learning models support place-based innovation, as well as providing a deeper understanding of how the Wellbeing Economy framing is resonating and working at a community level.

2.5 Limitations

Limitations to the data should be acknowledged. While a copy of each participant's baseline (entry) survey response, was purposively omitted at the exit survey in order to not influence responses, participants may have benefited from having their entry survey response visible for more context and to assist with their reflection.

Sample size is another consideration. While the entry and exit survey experienced high completion rates (94% and 88% respectively); the learning experience surveys, received a much lower response rate (41% midpoint and 35% endpoint). Therefore, these responses are reflective of a small sample of participants and limits generalisability.

2.6 Ethical approval

This evaluation study attained ethical approval from Deakin University Human Ethics Advisory Group Project ID: 2025/HE000812.

3. Summary of Key Findings

A summary of findings is presented against each of the evaluation questions.

3.1 What has changed for individuals and organisations from their participation in the Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle Pilot?

As summarised in the Executive Summary (section 2), the following key changes as a result of the Learning Circle were identified by participants:

3.1.1 Connections and collaboration confidence grew substantially

This was the most consistent and striking result across all data sources. Participants feeling 'extremely connected' to other community members increased fourfold by the end of the Learning Circle (from 2 to 8 participants, over half of Exit Survey respondents). Confidence in reaching out to other groups for collaboration grew from 6% to 60% at the 'extremely confident' level in the Exit Survey. Two interview participants identified the broadening and deepening of relationships as their single 'most significant' change, with new connections translating into tangible outcomes including identifying new opportunities for grant applications.

3.1.2 Increased confidence to take action based on values

Six participants (40%) of interviewed cohort members identified increased confidence to act on their values as their most significant change. This manifested across personal, professional, and community dimensions: participants described changes ranging from taking more risks in community leadership, to applying values-led thinking within MBA studies, to integrating wellbeing principles into their own work and personal lives. This finding is particularly insightful because it points to the role that place-based initiatives like Learning Circles can play in connecting personal values to broader systems change efforts.

3.1.3 Conceptual broadening with an 'application gap' in resourcing

Participants' definitions of the Wellbeing Economy shifted meaningfully from health and wellbeing concepts or alternative economic measures toward place-based, systems-level thinking, encompassing collective action; governance; and care for people and environment. All participants increased their confidence in identifying Wellbeing Economy concepts and groups in the Shire (with the exception of 1 participant who already rated 'extremely confident' in identifying what a Wellbeing Economy is at the beginning of the Learning Circle).

However, an important finding emerged between identifying Wellbeing Economy concepts and applying them to attract funding or develop resourcing models (entry and exit survey Q5b). While 'moderately confident' responses on this practical application grew substantially (from 1 to 11, out of a total of 15 respondents), no participant reached 'extremely confident'. This application gap directly maps onto one of the pilot's original barriers and indicates where the next phase of work needs to go – cultivating and directing resourcing,

including financial and non-financial capital, towards local Wellbeing Economy transition initiatives.

3.1.4 'A-ha' moments from frameworks and models

One third of interview participants observed major conceptual breakthroughs from specific frameworks introduced in the pilot; including Place-Based Capital, 'Doughnut Economics', Cornerstone Indicators, the Diverse Economies Iceberg, and Inner Development Goals. For several, these were not simply new facts but genuine 'unlearnings': revisions to deep assumptions about capital, economic growth, and what counts as value. One participant described moving from 'Ugh, capital feels yucky' to finding a vocabulary that let them engage stakeholders they had previously felt unable to reach.

3.1.5 Facilitation quality and inner work as a model for place-based learning

Around a quarter of interview participants identified the design and facilitation of the pilot itself, including inner development work, poetry, grounding practices, and the creation of a psychologically safe learning space, as their single most significant learning. The Castlemaine Institute's own modelling of care and wellbeing (including within the team) was explicitly noted by some participants as a learning they took into their own lives and organisations. This suggests the pilot is not only teaching about a Wellbeing Economy but enacting one in its methods.

3.1.6 Cohort vs. community readiness

A consistent pattern across the data was the distinction between the cohort's internal growth and participants' views of the wider community. While confidence in community readiness did grow (from 0 to 4 participants at 'extremely confident'), 6 participants remained unchanged at 'moderately' or 'somewhat' confident. This is not scepticism, most of these participants were already at a moderate baseline, but it does signal that systemic change requires sustained investment well beyond a single cohort pilot.

3.2a How did Learning Circle Participants experience the Learning Circle format and delivery?

3.2a.1 Collaboration over content

The learning experience surveys showed that participants highly rated the collaboration opportunities, personal learning goals, opportunities for deeper understanding (e.g. through study groups/pods), effective learning formats and better connections with and greater understanding of others in the cohort and their work. Connection to cohort was the most frequent theme in the open-ended survey text on what participants liked most (5 responses or 83%) followed by new knowledge (1 response or 17%) in the endpoint survey. Similarly, in the interviews, the relational aspects of the Learning Circle were identified most frequently by participants about what they liked most or found beneficial.

3.2a.2 Appreciation for considered design and delivery

Design and facilitation aspects, program flexibility e.g. balancing of load with individual capacities and the pods were also standout themes in the interviews around what

participants liked or found beneficial. A couple of participants also brought attention to the Castlemaine Institute's role modelling of care and wellbeing, plus the extra opportunities or engagements (e.g. REGEN Melbourne Workshop or Treaty conversations) and the opportunity to put learnings directly into practice. The provision of financial support was also recognised by 3 interview participants.

3.2a.3 Opportunities to go deeper

Perceptions of new learning opportunities were mixed at the end of the Learning Circle according to a small sample of learning experience survey participants, with one participant noting a desire for deeper shared learning and understanding.

Relatedly, a small number of interview participants also discussed the opportunity to go deeper on the content or make it more relatable (2), with one participant suggesting the use of local community group examples as case studies for deeper learning as part of the content delivery e.g. applying the Place Based Capital framing to an existing community group.

3.2a.4 More opportunities to connect

Open-text responses to the endpoint learning experience survey expressed a desire for more knowledge about the cohort and opportunities to share and workshop individual work/initiative case studies. 4 interview participants also noted they wished for more knowledge or opportunity to engage with the cohort, with 2 identifying a wish to do more collaborative work on the case studies.

3.2a.5 Structural and technical friction points

Some interview participants found the variance in platforms (Miro, WhatsApp, Signal) and shifting modes (online/hybrid/in-person) created barriers to engagement rather than flexibility. The 'co-budget' activity, while valuable, could have been clearer in purpose and sequencing. Pod (small group) success was variable, largely driven by scheduling and capacity constraints rather than the format itself. A couple of interview participants noted a desire for greater clarity around program integration and intended outcomes/purpose. These are addressable design issues that can be easily modified for future learning programs.

3.2a.6 Financial access enabled participation

Three interview participants explicitly noted that the sliding-scale financial support for attendance was significant to their ability to participate and to feeling their time was valued. For a program working with grassroots organisations, carers, and people in part-time or precarious work, this is not a minor operational detail, it served as an equity mechanism that directly affected who could access the program.

3.2a.7 Clear behavioural and mindset intentions emerged

Participants in the endpoint learning experience survey reported intent to amplify existing Wellbeing Economy practices, collaborate more, engage politically, experiment with non-financial exchange, and prioritise self-care.

3.2b. What were the Most Significant Learnings?

In order to assess the impact of the Learning Circle, participants were asked to list their key learnings and then select the one learning that they felt was most significant. The most significant learnings according to the interview participants themselves are thematically grouped as follows:

3.2b.1 *Connections and Relationships*

3 interview participants highlighted the theme of 'connections and relationships' as their most significant learning (supporting the survey findings above). For these participants, new connections and relationships facilitated the uncovering of new knowledge about capacity in the community and unlocking of opportunities to work together across scales.

3.2b.2 *Design and Facilitation*

4 interview participants responses fell under the theme of 'design and facilitation' as their most significant learning, detailing how a well-held, inclusive facilitation process helps unlock inner and collective capacity.

3.2b.3 *'A-ha moments'*

5 interview participants experienced major 'a-ha' moments from different frameworks and models presented in the Learning Circle, ranging from the use of models like 'Doughnut Economics', to 'unlearnings' about the economy more generally.

3.3 How did the Castlemaine Institute Project Team experience, learn from, manage and adapt the process?

3.3.1 *Challenges of emergent work and upholding team wellbeing*

Midpoint reflections from team members (2) identified the challenges that emergent work brought, particularly around managing the size of the cohort and needing to adapt content and delivery in line with group needs and capacities (such as providing more face to face or hybrid opportunities to connect and further weave the cohort). Challenges also provided opportunities for layers of learning, including thinking of ways for more targeted future cohorts e.g. around impact domains. Reflections also centred on how to uphold team wellbeing, particularly at times when personal wellbeing was challenged.

3.3.2 *Place-based work requires relational resourcing*

The project team's most significant learning interview (n=4) centred on the scale of emotional, relational, and care labour involved in delivering place-based work within one's own community. Cohort recruitment, individual support, navigating reputational complexity, and sustaining team wellbeing all carried costs that were not fully accounted for in the initial budget, yet were critical to the pilot's 100% participant retention rate. As one team member reflected, this work requires someone whose full-time role is local partnerships, with genuine flexibility to respond to people as they enter your 'sphere of care'.

3.3.3 The diversity and inclusion tension in relationship-centred approaches

The project team also identified that another most significant learning was how to uphold diversity and inclusion principles in relationship-centred approaches. This was noted as a genuine dilemma that warrants transparent discussion with funders. While relationship-centred cohort building builds on existing trust and alignment in the community and is highly effective at generating the depth of learning demonstrated in the Learning Circle, however it carries inherent risks for broader diversity and inclusion. The cohort was strong but not maximally diverse. Future iterations need explicit guidance on cohort composition, bridging approaches for participants on the margins of established networks, and clarity about 'who this program is for' at the outset.

3.3.4 The value of learning as a methodology to bring people together

The final most significant learning noted by team members was the valuing of time together shown by participants, particularly as many of the cohort were working across many roles in the community. The Learning Circle acted as a container for developing relationships and working together around a common purpose, with the methodology of learning itself noted as being significant for enabling place-based system change.

3.4. How did the learning circle process contribute to learning mindsets and principles (ways of working together) for place-based innovation?

Finally, interviews with participants highlighted how the Learning Circle contributed to learning mindsets and principles and mindsets for place-based innovation across the following themes.

3.4.1 Challenging previously held assumptions

The Learning Circle challenged previously held assumptions (such as capital or the economy) and as one participated noted, it fostered 'relearning' amongst grassroots groups. In doing so, the Learning Circle shows its potential in acting as a critical part of the infrastructure for place-based innovation through its role in challenging thinking and assumptions and holding and exchanging knowledge and experiences for continual learning.

3.4.2 Seeing the value of inner work for outer change

While participants noted various levels of comfort with 'inner work' practice, participants noted it as a strength of the Learning Circle and 'a pivotal moment for the group'. The role of the Castlemaine Institute in modelling inner work approaches was particularly emphasised.

3.4.3 Openness to collaboration and new ways of working across groups and organisations

Participants shared how the Learning Circle further enhanced or facilitated new openness for collaboration across groups and organisations, as well as new ways of working such as coalescing on key issues facing the community rather than duplicating efforts. As a participant shared, the Learning Circle helped to facilitate 'understanding [what others do]... and how we can collectively we can create change'.

4. Recommendations

4.1 For the Castlemaine Institute & other communities

1. The Learning Circle pilot acted as critical part of the infrastructure for place-based innovation. Explore opportunities for how continual learning can be held in communities.
2. Do not underestimate the importance of making time and space for people in the community to come together around a purpose. Budget accordingly for resourcing this effectively, such as time and expenses for cohort building activities.
3. Develop guidance for diversity and inclusion considerations in relationship-centred approaches that can help inform cohort composition.
4. Emergent place-based work has hidden or uncosted demands such as care or relational work, which needs to be factored into funding.
5. Run another Learning Circle and evaluate it again. Include a Theory of Change to underpin the next program design. Consider assessing changes in perceived levels of confidence via a qualitative rubric rather than numerical rating. Conduct most significant learnings and most significant changes interviews in phases, starting with most significant learning at the completion stage and most significant change 6 – 12 months after to allow time for potential outcomes to emerge.

4.2 Learning Curriculum /Content

1. Build upon place-based, systems thinking potential for Wellbeing Economies by further developing literacy of economic systems and how they can be remade at the local level aligned with values.
2. Develop capacity in building resourcing models around a Wellbeing Economy (e.g. community wealth building) or applying from grants using a Wellbeing Economy or Community Wealth Building framing.
3. Use a local example of a community organisation or initiative to ground the content in a relatable way and provide an opportunity for the cohort to collaborate.

4.3 Learning Circle Process

1. Allocate time at the beginning for substantial cohort introductions.
2. Asynchronous or hybrid modes bring distinctive challenges – with some participants appreciating the flexibility and others preferring face to face learning and connection. Be clear upfront on how the Learning Circle will aim to balance its intended outcomes with the diverse needs and capacities of the group.
3. Support Learning Circle participants to weave in initiatives/organisations around topics such as the Wellbeing Economy, or approaches such as learning mindsets or principles for place-based innovation.
4. Design and Facilitation approaches such as the pods are effective tools for collaboration (depending on the cohort) but may require further support or participant input in their development, such as assessing people's availability at intake.

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Appendix

I. Entry and Exit Survey

An entry (baseline) survey was conducted prior to the first Learning Circle in July 2025, with key questions repeated upon the pilot completion in November with the purpose of assessing any changes or shifts for participants as a result of the Learning Circle. In particular, the survey sought to establish the cohort’s level of existing knowledge of the Wellbeing Economy and how it applies to the Shire; along with an indication of current connections, commitment and openness to enabling a Wellbeing Economy in the community.

The surveys were a mix of open text responses and rating scale responses (i.e. Likert scale rating of levels of confidence from a choice of 6 levels ranging from ‘Not confident at all’ to ‘Extremely confident’). Responses to the survey were anonymous, with 16 Learning Circle participants fully completing the entry survey (94%) and 15 (88%) fully completing the exit survey. 14 (87%) of the survey respondents provided linking IDs, allowing individual comparisons of shifts between the entry and exit surveys and the monitoring of change at both individual and aggregate levels.

1.1 Wellbeing Economy definitions evolved to emphasise place-based and system level thinking

A number of core themes attached to Wellbeing Economy carried through from baseline to the exit survey such as people, planet, equity and fairness, health and wellbeing, alternative measures and community. As shown in the word cloud below (Figure 1) however, definitions of Wellbeing Economy shifted by the end to include:

- Increased centering of place in Wellbeing Economy definitions
- Collective action and systems thinking, from local to planetary levels.



Figure 1. Word cloud comparison of Wellbeing Economy definitions

The following are some representative comments from the exit survey:

- A place-based economy that centres the wellbeing of people and planet rather than just financial growth.

- An ecosystem that’s intentional, specific and broad that illuminates the working network connections of care and wellbeing for people and planet of a place.
- The systems, policies and infrastructure required to ensure that everyone in our community is safe, happy, active, connected and looking after our environment
- Systems and investment that provides better outcomes relating to education, health, connection, activity, arts, sustainability and innovation.
- An economy collectively governed to meet society’s needs

This suggests that by the end of the Learning Circle, participants expanded their conceptual thinking, with more of a focus on place, collective action and systems-level thinking.

1.2 Strong positive shifts in identifying the Wellbeing Economy, mixed confidence around identifying funding models

The vast majority of participants demonstrated increases in confidence in identifying the Wellbeing Economy between the entry and exit surveys, particularly in questions 4a and 4b.

This included identifying:

- what a Wellbeing Economy is (Q4a)
- Wellbeing Economy groups/initiatives in the Shire (Q4b)
- novel funding and resourcing models for a Wellbeing Economy (Q4c)

For question 4a, all respondents to this question (except 1, who already rated ‘extremely confident’ at baseline/entry) moved one or two levels of confidence higher around identifying a Wellbeing Economy. For question 4b, all respondents to this question recorded positive shifts in identifying Wellbeing Economy groups/initiatives in the Shire by the end of the Learning Circle (see Figure 2 below).

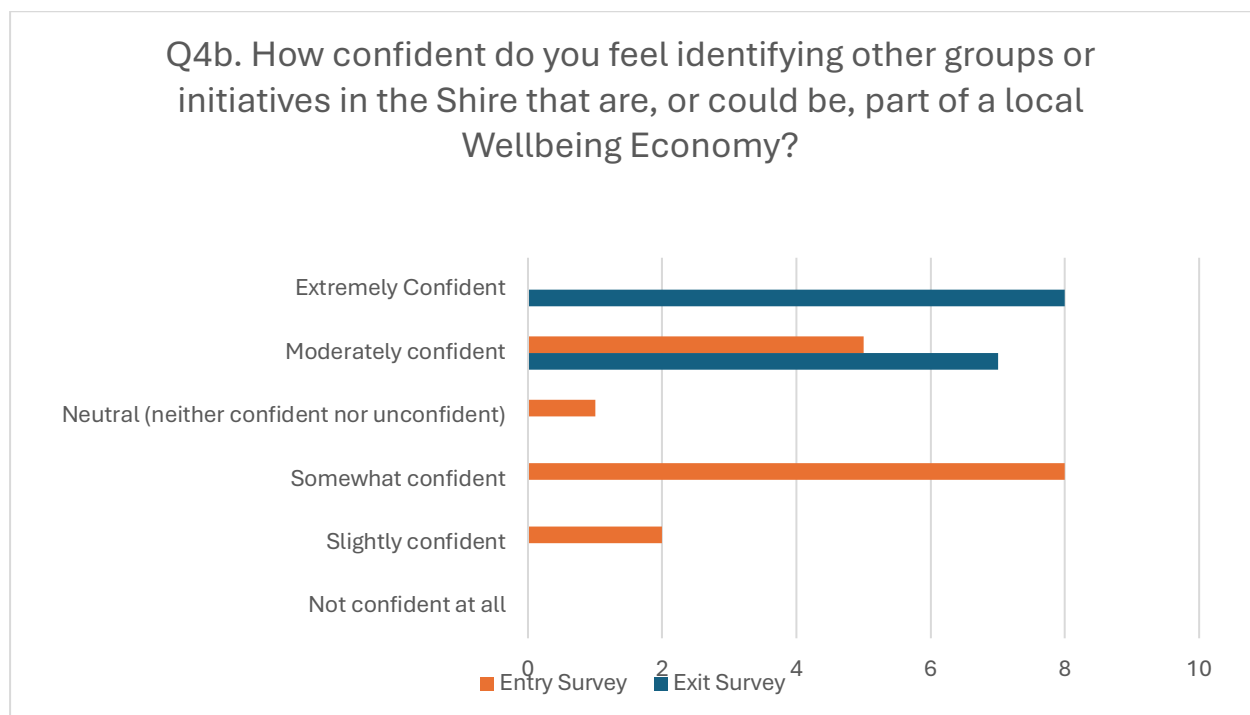


Figure 2. Shifts in levels of confidence identifying other groups or initiatives in the Shire that are, or could, part of a local Wellbeing Economy

At an individual level, all respondents noted an increase between surveys of either 1 or 2, with 8 respondents recording an increase of 1 and 6 noting an increase of 2 on the rating scale.

There was mixed confidence to question 4c. (Fig 3 below) on identifying novel funding and resourcing models for a Wellbeing Economy, with 4 respondents noting no shift in confidence, 1 recording a ‘neutral’ (change from ‘not confident’ and 1 noting a negative shift from ‘moderately’ to ‘somewhat’). On the other hand, 5 respondents recorded a positive shift of 1 level on the rating scale. 2 participants shifted positively by 2 levels and 1 participant by as much as 3 levels (i.e. from ‘slightly’ to ‘extremely’ confident).

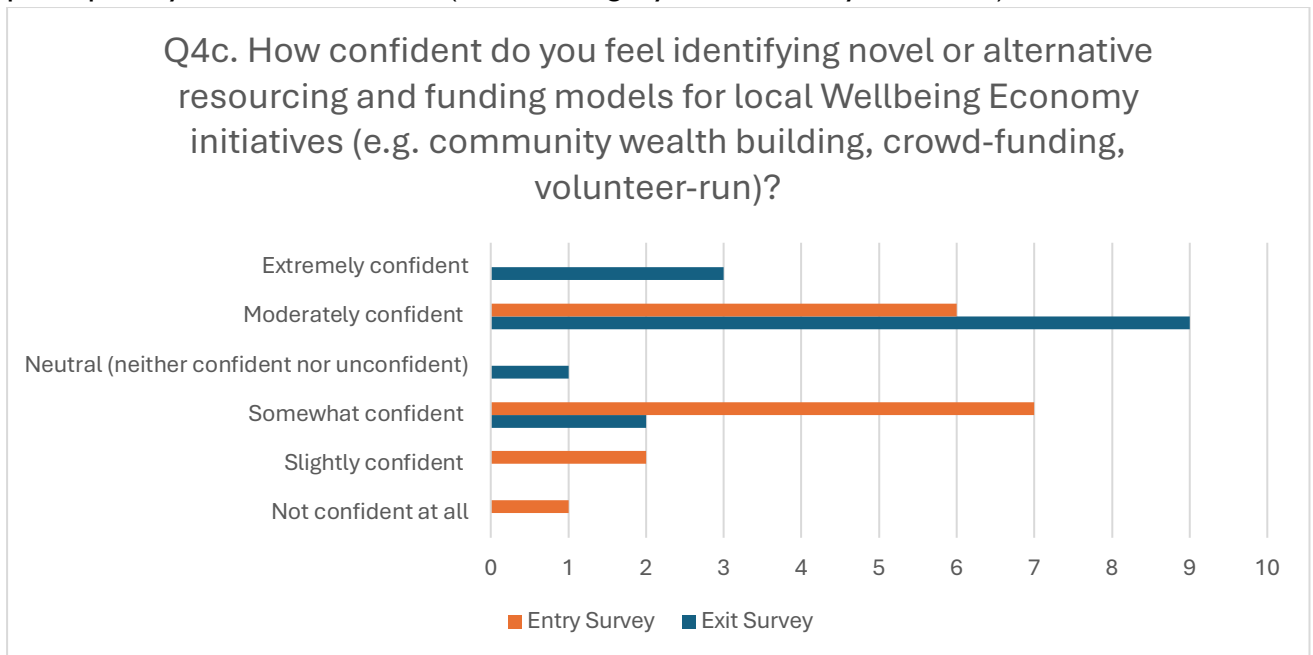


Figure 3. Shifts in levels of confidence identifying novel or alternative resourcing or funding models for local Wellbeing Economy initiatives.

1.3 Participants became more confident applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology, but are slightly less confident in applying the language to attract funding and resourcing

Positive increases were identified in confidence levels around applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology to initiatives participants are involved in (Q5a, Figure 4 below). Where there had been no ‘extremely confident’ responses at baseline on applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology, the exit survey recorded that 4 (27%) participants now felt ‘extremely confident’. This was accompanied by a substantial increase from 1 to 10 respondents (67% of participants) identifying they were ‘moderately confident’ by the end of the Learning Circle.

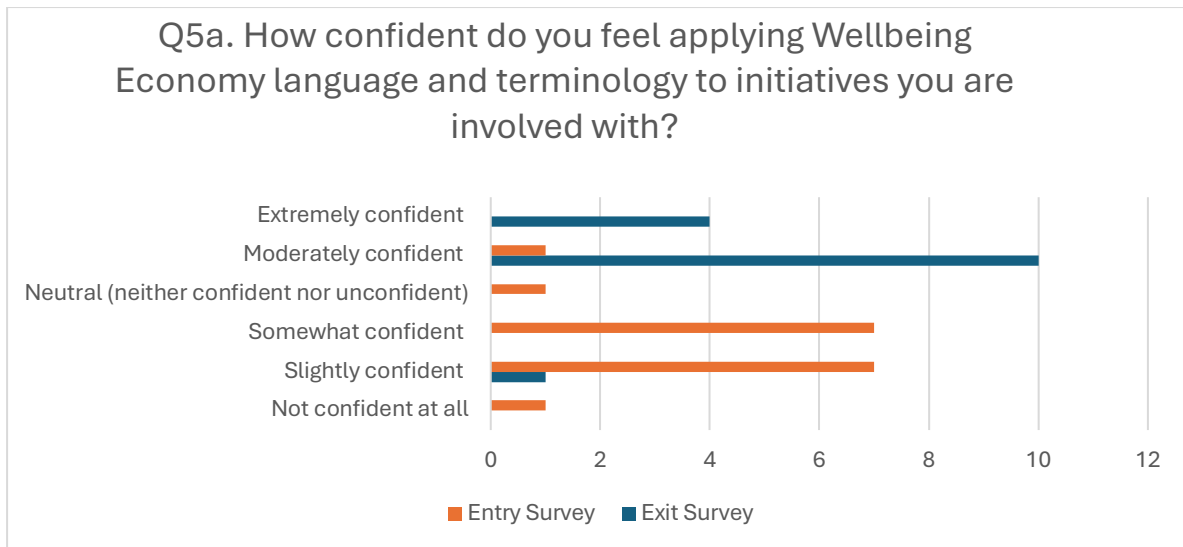


Figure 4. Shifts in confidence in applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology

While no participant below recorded an ‘extremely confident’ response to applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology to their initiatives to attract funding or develop resourcing models (Q5b, Figure 5 below), ‘moderately confident’ responses grew substantially from 1 to 11 participants (73% of participants). At an individual level, 2 participants recorded no change (remaining ‘somewhat’ and ‘moderately confident’), and 1 shifted to ‘neutral’ (from ‘not confident’).

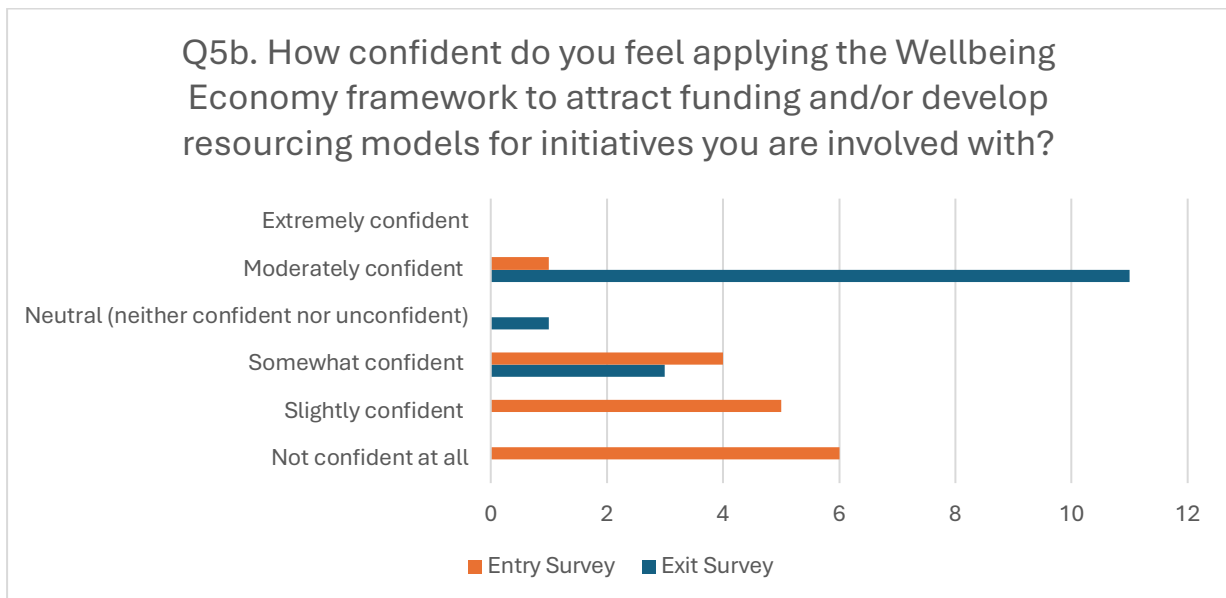


Figure 5. Shifts in confidence in applying Wellbeing Economy language and terminology to attract funding/develop resourcing models

This suggests that while the majority of Learning Circle participants shifted positively in practical applications of Wellbeing Economy language and terminology, confidence in

applying the language to attract funding and resourcing is slightly less strong, providing an opportunity for further capability building.

1.4 Connections and collaboration confidence grew substantially

The question on ‘How connected do you feel with community groups in the Shire?’ (Q6) demonstrated notable increases in Figure 6 below, with responses from participants feeling ‘extremely connected’ increased fourfold (from 2 to 8 responses or 53% of total participants).

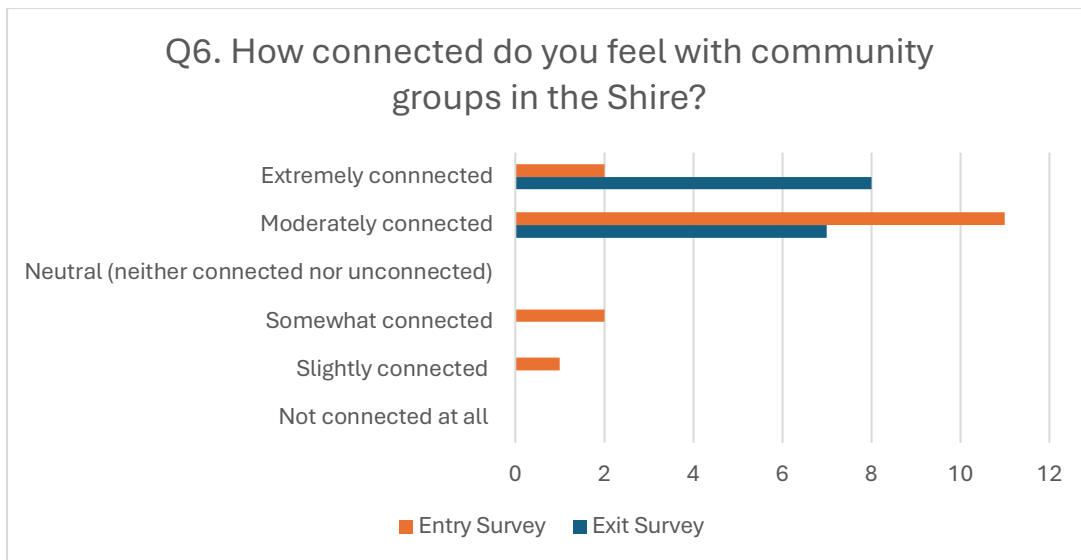


Figure 6. Shifts in levels of connection with community groups

Responses to Q7a. on ‘Levels of confidence in identifying a diverse range of community groups in the Shire’ showed that ‘extremely confident’ grew fivefold, from 2 to 10 or 67% of respondents, with all respondents feeling either moderately or extremely confident at the end of the Learning Circle.

Shifts in confidence to reach out to other community groups for potential help or collaboration grew substantially in Q7b. (see Figure 7 below), with the majority of respondents feeling ‘extremely confident’ (9 responses or 60%), compared to 1 response at baseline (6%). While at the individual level, 2 respondents recorded no change (remaining at ‘moderately’), the majority of respondents (9) moved forward 1 level, with 2 respondents moving forward 2 levels, and 1 respondent moving as high as 3 levels (from ‘not confident at all’ to ‘moderately’).

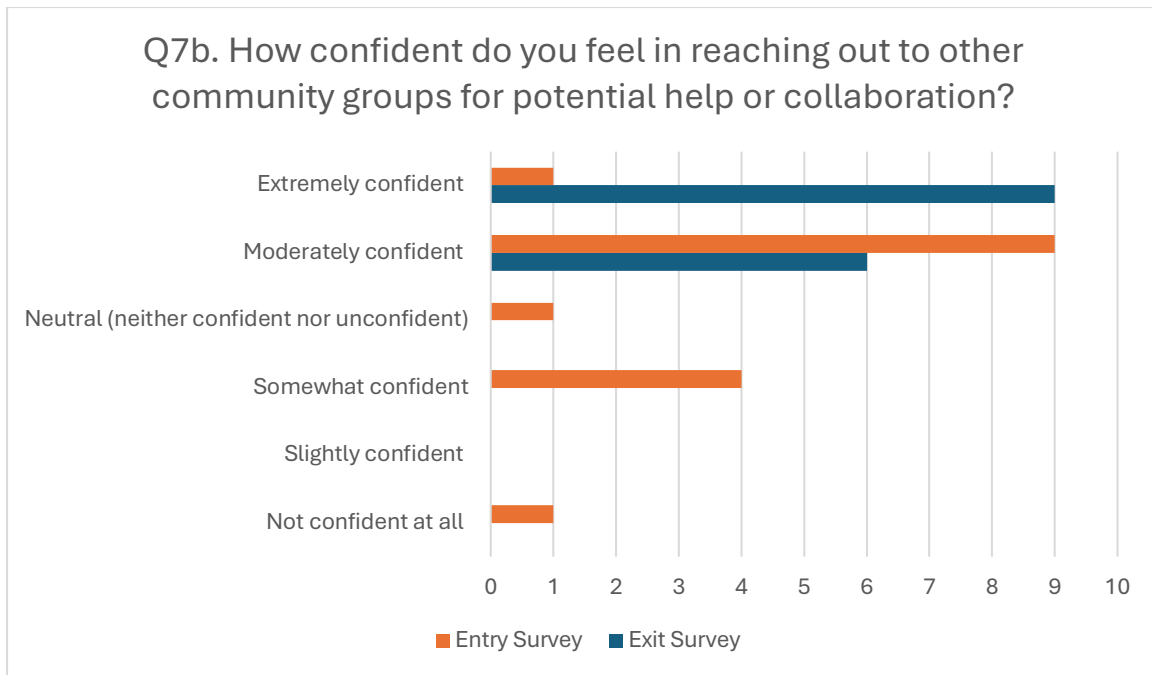


Figure 7. Shifts in levels of confidence in reaching out to other community groups for potential help or collaboration

This implies that the Learning Circle helped to substantially shift relationships and collaboration opportunities amongst participants.

1.5 Personal and community learning mindsets showed some gains, although were accompanied by some uncertainty

Participant confidence in their own curiosity and open-mindedness to learn with and across different perspectives (Q7c., Figure 8 below) was largely stable but had some small gains. This is likely due to the already high rating provided at baseline, with 4 participants (27%) recording ‘extremely’ confident and 10 (67%) ‘moderately confident’, with 1 ‘slightly’ (7%) and 1 ‘neutral’ (7%). At the exit survey, 6 participants recorded ‘extremely confident’ (40%), 8 ‘moderately confident’ (53%) and 1 ‘Prefer not to say’ (7%).

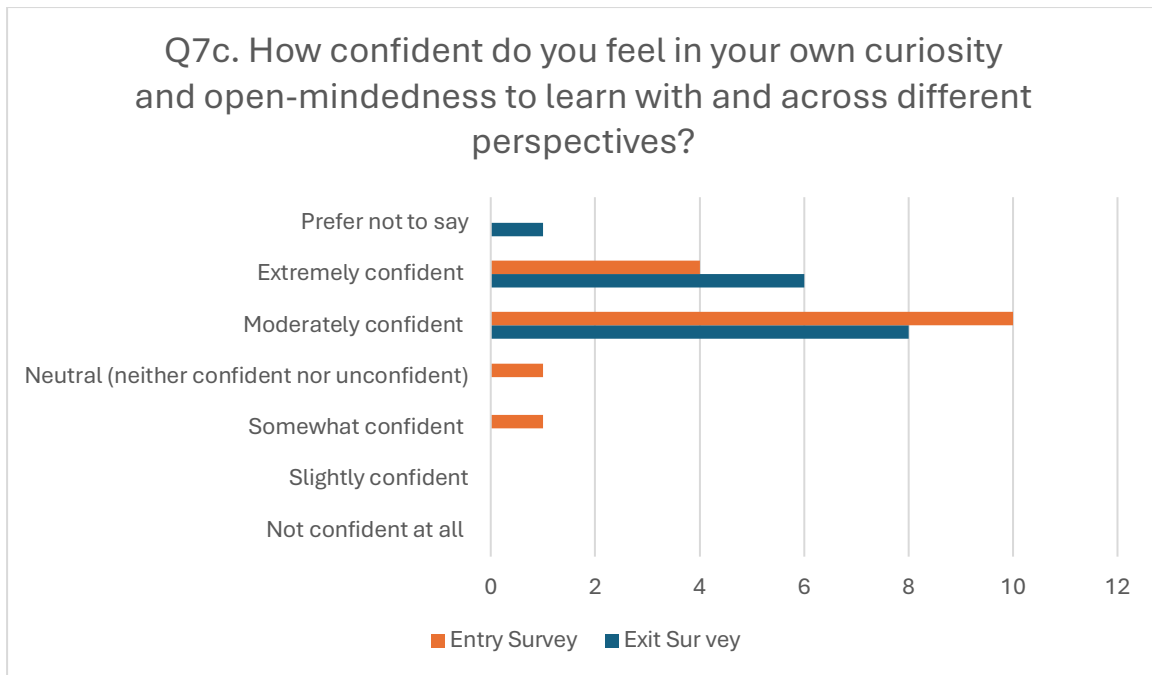


Figure 8. Shifts in levels of confidence in own curiosity and open-mindedness to learn with and across different perspectives.

At an individual level for Q7c., the majority of respondents (7) recorded no change. 4 respondents shifted positively up 1 level, and 1 respondent shifted up 2 levels. Interestingly, in an usual pattern from most other responses, 1 respondent downgraded their response from ‘extremely’ to ‘moderately’ and 1 respondent changed from ‘extremely’ to ‘prefer not to say’.

This suggests that while personal learning mindsets showed some gains, the already high responses provided at baseline afforded relative stability. There were two notable shifts away from ‘extremely confident’ at baseline which indicates how the Learning Circle may have challenged perceptions of confidence at the start of the Program.

Confidence around the curiousness and open-mindedness of the community more widely to learn with and across different perspectives (Q7d) showed a more mixed response as shown in Figure 9 below. Responses in the ‘moderately confident’ category, however increased from 6 to 10 (67% of participants), and ‘extremely confident’ grew from 0 to 2 (13% of participants).

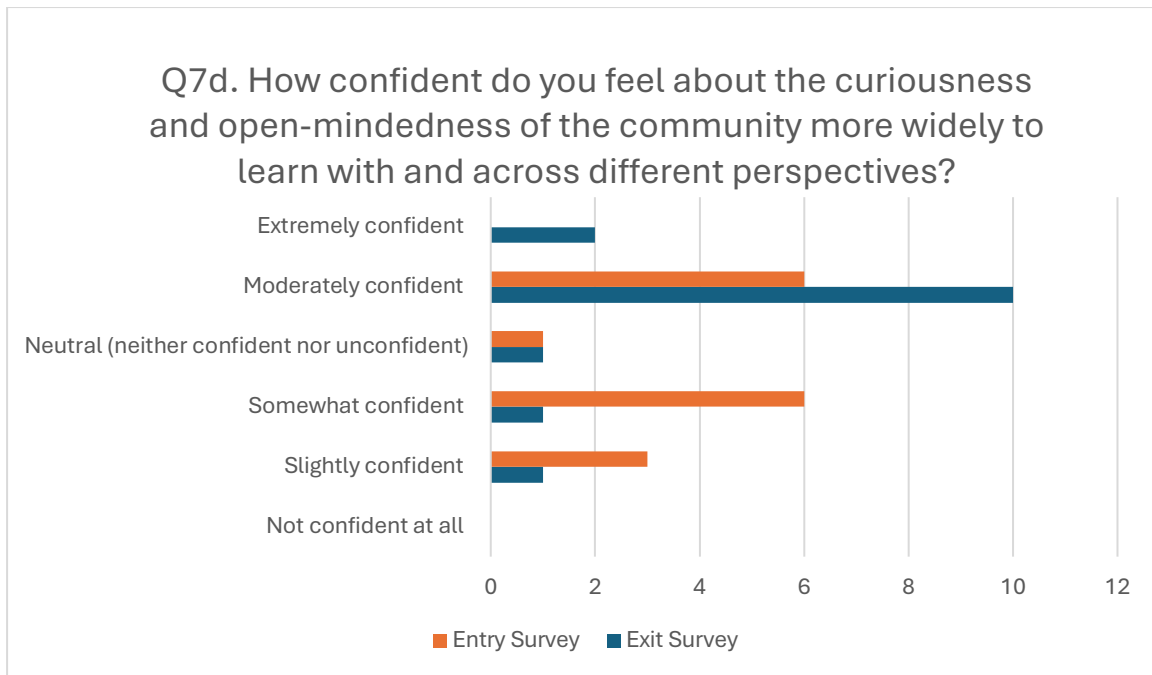


Figure 9. Shifts in levels of confidence in curiosity and open-mindedness of the community more widely to learn with and across different perspectives.

This indicates that confidence increased for community learning mindsets, however there was uncertainty for a small proportion.

1.6 Perceptions of community readiness to work together increased for the majority, but remained unchanged for a proportion

Some increases in confidence in the readiness of the community to work together in an adaptive, place-based way in the long term, was demonstrated in Q7e. (Figure 10 below), with aggregate responses in the ‘extremely confident’ category growing from 0 to 4 (27% of responses).

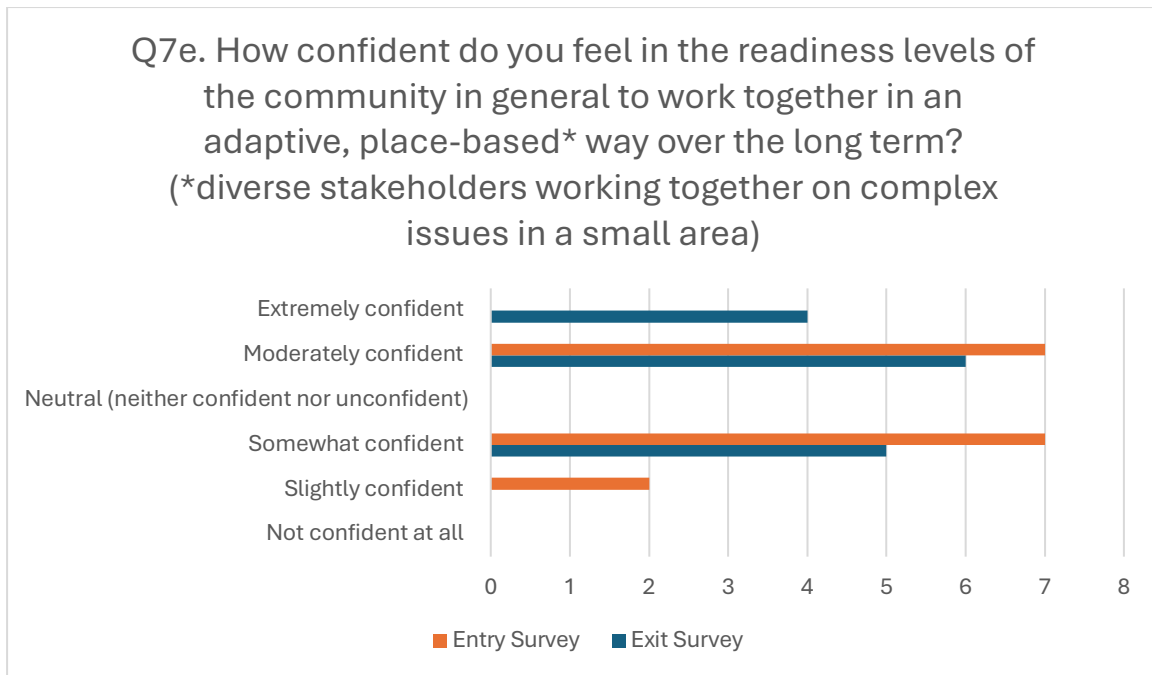


Figure 10. Shifts in levels of confidence in readiness levels of the community in general to work together in an adaptive, place-based way over the long term.

At an individual level, 6 respondents noted an increase of 1 level, with 2 respondents noting an increase of 2 levels. 6 respondents however recorded no change (moderately (2), somewhat (4)).

This suggests that perceptions of community readiness to work together has grown in confidence for many participants but remained stable for others, indicating less confidence in wider community readiness.

1.7 Growing confidence in organisation/initiative connections, commitment and openness to enabling as Wellbeing Economy but some polarities exist

From an organisational/initiative perspective (Q8.), there were improvements in 'extremely confident' across every organisational/initiative measure. As seen in Figure 11 below, the largest gains in 'extremely confident' were in Q8a. on awareness of a diverse range of groups in the community (likely as a result of their participation in the Learning Circle), shifting from 2 to 9 responses (or 60% of total responses).

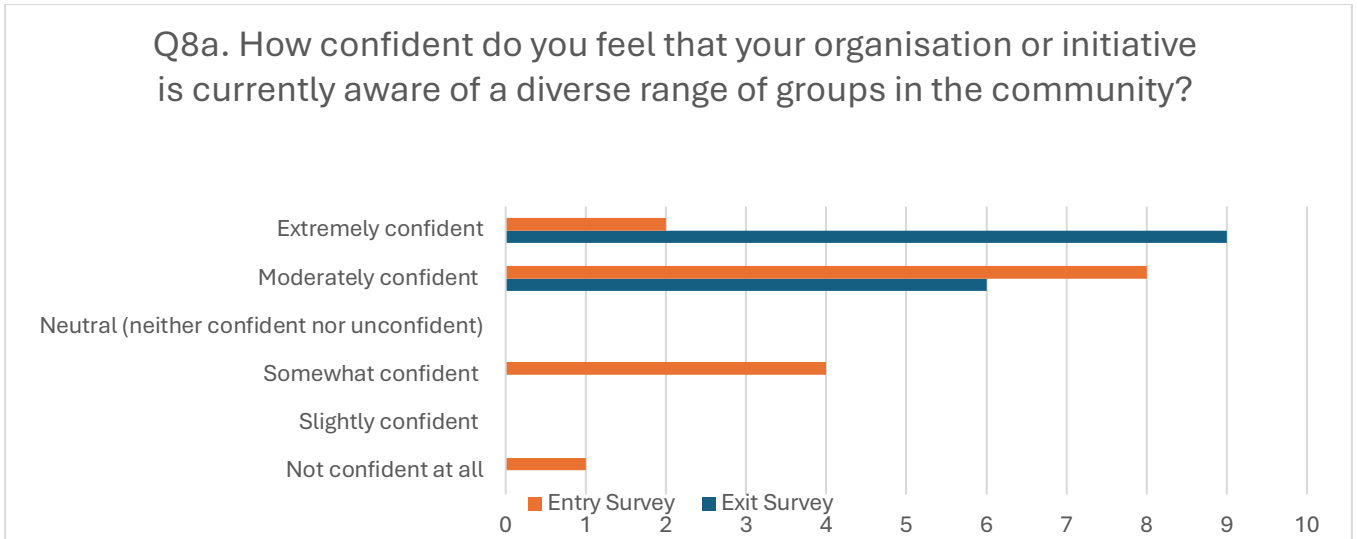


Figure 11. Shifts in levels of confidence of organisation/initiative awareness of a diverse range of groups in the community.

The least gains in ‘extremely confident’ were evident in Q8e. on how confident participants felt that their organisation or initiative is currently ready to work together with the community in general in an adaptive, place-based way over the long term, with a small increase of 2 responses as demonstrated in Figure 12 below, amounting to 27% of responses.

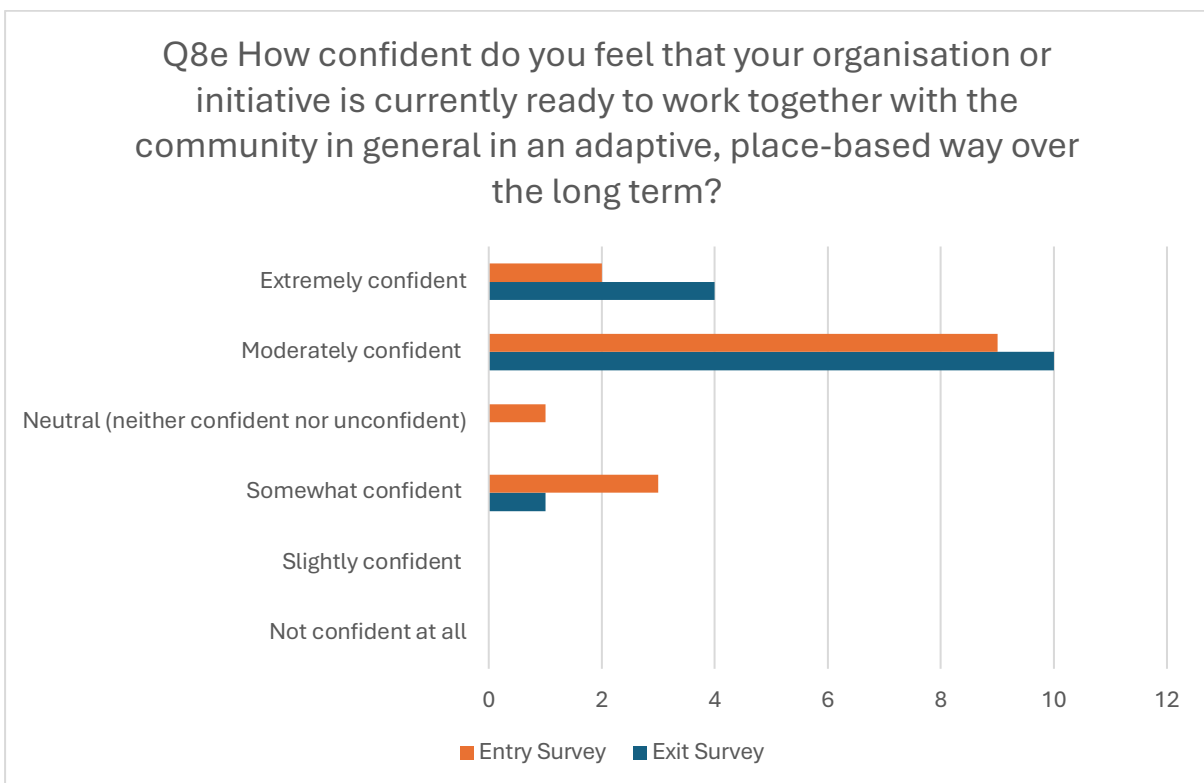


Figure 12. Shifts in levels of confidence of organisation/initiative readiness to work with the community in general in an adaptive, place-based way.

Some polarities in shifts were noted amongst questions at the individual level. For instance:

- Q8b. Organisation/initiative connecting with a diverse array of community groups – declined in confidence for 1 participant, grew in confidence by 3 levels for 1 participant, and by as many as 4 levels for another participant
- Q8c. Organisation/initiative maintaining strong, respectful working relationships with a range of cross sector and community members and organisations – declined in confidence for 1 participant, grew in confidence by 3 levels for 1 participant
- Q8d. Organisation/initiative curiosity and open-mindedness to learn with and across different perspectives – declined in confidence for 2 participants; grew in confidence by 3 levels for 1 participant

This suggests that initiatives/organisations are at various stages of engagement and readiness around Wellbeing Economy efforts, however confidence grew for the majority as a result of the Learning Circle.

2. Most Significant Changes according to participants

The Most Significant Changes for Learning Circle participants identified during the interviews are detailed thematically below, with findings on Most Significant Learnings detailed in section 5.

2.1 Increase in confidence to take action based on values

Six Learning Circle participants highlighted confidence to take action based on values as the most significant change that arose for them as a result of the Learning Circle.

For one participant, the REGEN Melbourne explanation of the Doughnut Economics model as a ‘hug’ was a pivotal moment, due to its emphasis on care and activating hope. This is an approach that was deeply aligned with the participant’s own philosophy and values. Liking REGEN’s action and monitoring tool as a ‘hug’, provided confidence in the possibility of relational approaches. As Participant 1 below explained, taking this collective and care-centred approach helped to ‘create steps along the way’ in making broader change and build ‘the solidity of what we see as progress’. By having their values and relational ethos backed by other models, Participant 1 noted an increase in their own confidence:

I’m taking a lot more risks! ...I was always very reserved and had trouble communicating. I still have trouble communicating but I don’t let it stop me – WELC Interview Participant 1

For Participant 5 below, their most significant change was also connected with new-found confidence in applying their values to their university course and seeing how ‘values-led has a place’. They drew on an example of how they applied their experience of the Learning Circle to a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) they were undertaking, noting how the Learning Circle was ‘generous ...values driven, and reflective’ and provided:

crossover between what I was doing at uni and what we’re learning, but with a really different lens...I found that really helpful in building my confidence in the course, being able to articulate how I might see things differently and that that also has value... the change [was] that building my confidence and that values-led has a place

... I think that came out of the Learning Circle experience, feeling backed up, supported. WELC Interview Participant 5

For Participant 2, their change was noted as more subtle, but part of building towards major career change. Participant 2 was working on adapting their professional practice for 'more meaning...and contribution to the community', with the Learning Circle playing a role in that shift:

It sort of all links to other things. Because one of the most significant changes will probably be that I leave my salaried job. WELC Interview Participant 002

For Participant 6, their most significant change arose from cohort discussion with other more longstanding community group leaders. After learning about how these other groups operated, they were able to see how they could negotiate remaining true to their values whilst acting collectively in change efforts.

the most significant change from my perspective is my ability to maybe be in that process, still hold true what I value – the benefit of people and planet anchor...
...WELC Interview Participant 6

For Participant 3, the incorporation of wellbeing principles into their life was something that was bolstered through the Learning Circle:

I'd say the first one [incorporating wellbeing principles] is the most significant change, because it impacts personally and professionally. I feel even more valid in prioritising working four days a week and not five. Because working on home is an investment, yeah in not just me and my garden. It's good for my mental health to have that day of working in the garden, doing what I'm doing at home. But it's also it's beyond me and my property. It's also making connections out into community and it's that role modelling of wellbeing. WELC Interview Participant 3

Similarly for Participant 14, the Learning Circle facilitation prompted them to implement changes in their personal-work life around slowing down.

it really made me reflect on the gentleness and slowness with which the Wellbeing Economy Learning Circle program was implemented. So one is a way of learning and sharing knowledge and being together. As I mentioned, I hadn't experienced it in that way before and it was just beautiful. I think to me that really represents the Wellbeing Economy, a Wellbeing Economy approach to learning and facilitation... I guess in terms of changes before and after... I like to think and hope that I was on that trajectory to just slowing down a bit more and doing things more gently but I don't know. But I certainly can say that this experience has helped, or will help me get to that place. Like I think it's going to be a probably a life challenge when you're working in a grind culture, but it's certainly helped me clear the weeds out of that path and see it a bit more clearly. WELC Interview Participant 14

As the above quotations show, the Learning Circle helped positively change confidence in Learning Circle participants to foreground their values in taking action in different aspects of their lives, whether it was through their work with community groups (Participant 1 and Participant 6), integrate wellbeing principles more deeply into their personal lives (Participant 3 and Participant 14) or backing their values in their educational/professional pursuits (Participant 2 and Participant 5).

2.2 Broadening and Deepening of Connections and Relationships

Two participants identified the connections and relationships fostered during the Learning Circle as the most significant change for them.

For Participant 15, the change arose from a broadening and deepening of relationships, leading to opportunities for collaboration:

The power of doing things together and the relationships that are built with the commitment. Everyone kind of genuinely went along with it, like it wasn't there was a lot of you know people sort of pushing back, people leaned into it and gave it a good go. So I think the doing of that sort of stuff, in a regular structured way with the same people, just builds deeper relationships than you would otherwise have....

...I hadn't met [Learning Circle Participant] before - but now I feel like we have a really solid relationship – I met up with her and we talked and put in a grant application and that kind of thing .I hadn't really met [other Learning Circle Participant] before and who is doing really good work at Council. WELC Interview Participant 15

For another participant who is heavily involved with a well-established community group and already connected with people, this change was surprising to them:

I think it's probably the connection with people, which is strange to me yeah, Because I feel very connected with people. I feel like that's most of my job with [community organisation]. But this was different and there's something really significant about the difference of getting pulled out of your work setting to have these discussions. And I would say that the pod is particularly significant for that. That was really good. WELC Interview Participant 7

As Participant 7 explained, the opportunity to discuss their work with others provided valuable opportunities to look at their initiative in a different way, with the pod (small learning group) being an important part of the Learning Circle.

For the above participants, the Learning Circle resulted in changes to their connections and relationships in the community, whether in a practical way (such as pursuing a funding opportunity) or the opportunity to draw on new connections and relationships to evaluate their own initiative from different perspectives.

3. Learning Experience Survey

A learning experience survey was conducted at the midpoint and end of the Learning Circle. The purpose of the survey was to understand the participant learning experience such as opportunities provided for new learning and the effectiveness of the learning format.

Note:

The sample for this survey was smaller than the entry and exit survey, with 7 participants completing the midpoint (41%) and 6 participants (35%) completing the endpoint survey. This limits the generalisability of the results. Further in-depth explorations of the participant learning experience from the interviews are detailed in section 4 below. In contrast to the entry/exit survey, the results for the learning experience survey are reported at the aggregate level only, as linking information was not requested.

Participant perspectives on question 1 (Fig 13 below ‘New learning opportunities’ were somewhat mixed, with interestingly 5 participants (71%) rating this slightly higher at the midpoint rather than the endpoint with 3 participants (50%). This suggests that participants were seeking further opportunities or that their expectations shifted towards the end.

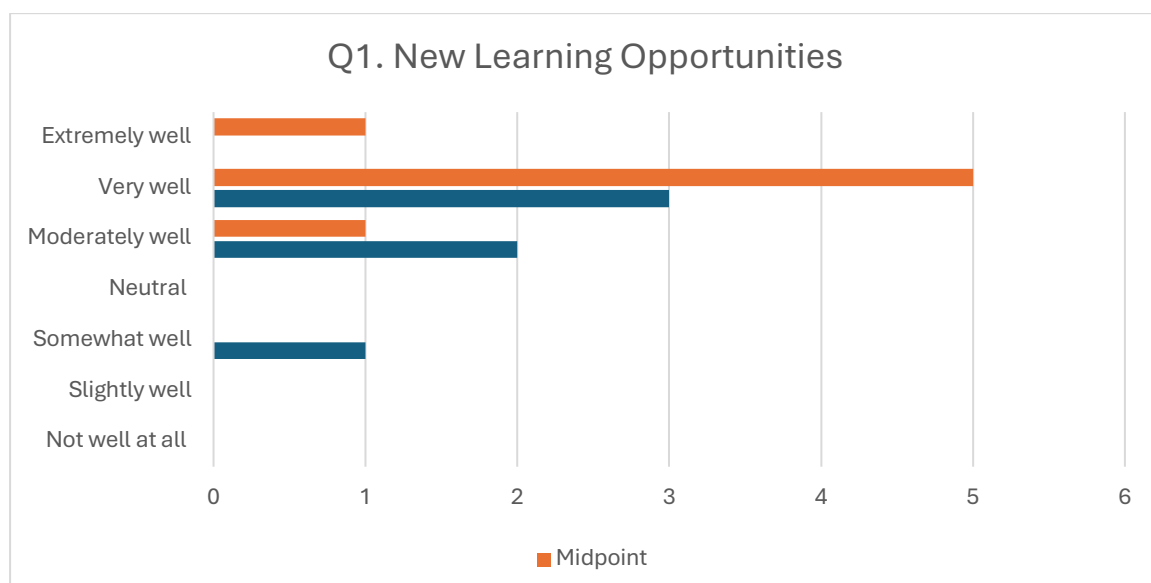


Figure 13 Learning Experience Survey - New Learning Opportunities

Responses for collaboration opportunities (Figure 14 below) in the endpoint survey clustered around the top of the scale, rating ‘moderately well’ and ‘very well’ (33% and 67% respectively), in comparison to the midpoint survey, where 1 respondent had rated ‘slightly well’. No participant selected ‘extremely well’ at the endpoint however, compared to 2 (29%) at the midpoint.

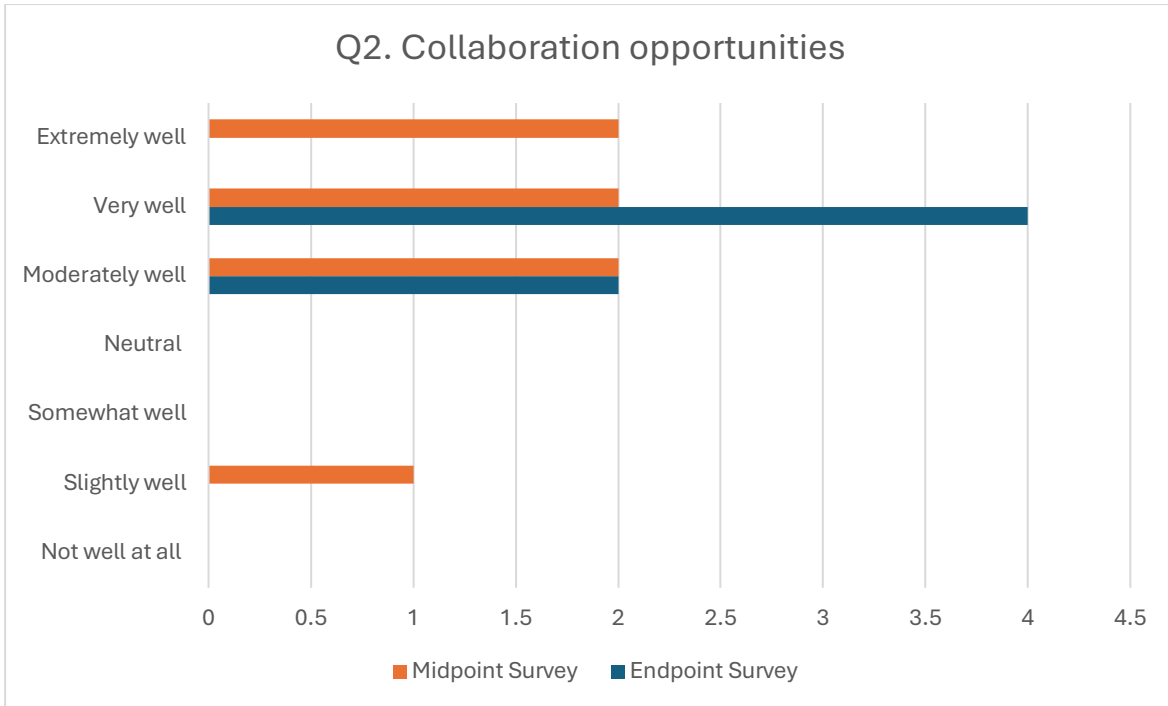


Figure 14 Collaboration Opportunities

At the end point ‘personal learning goals’, also clustered around the top of the scale, rating ‘moderately well and very well’ (both 50%), compared to responses that included ‘somewhat’ and ‘neutral’ in the midpoint (Figure 15 below) . No participant selected ‘extremely well’ at the endpoint however, compared to 2 (29%) at the midpoint.

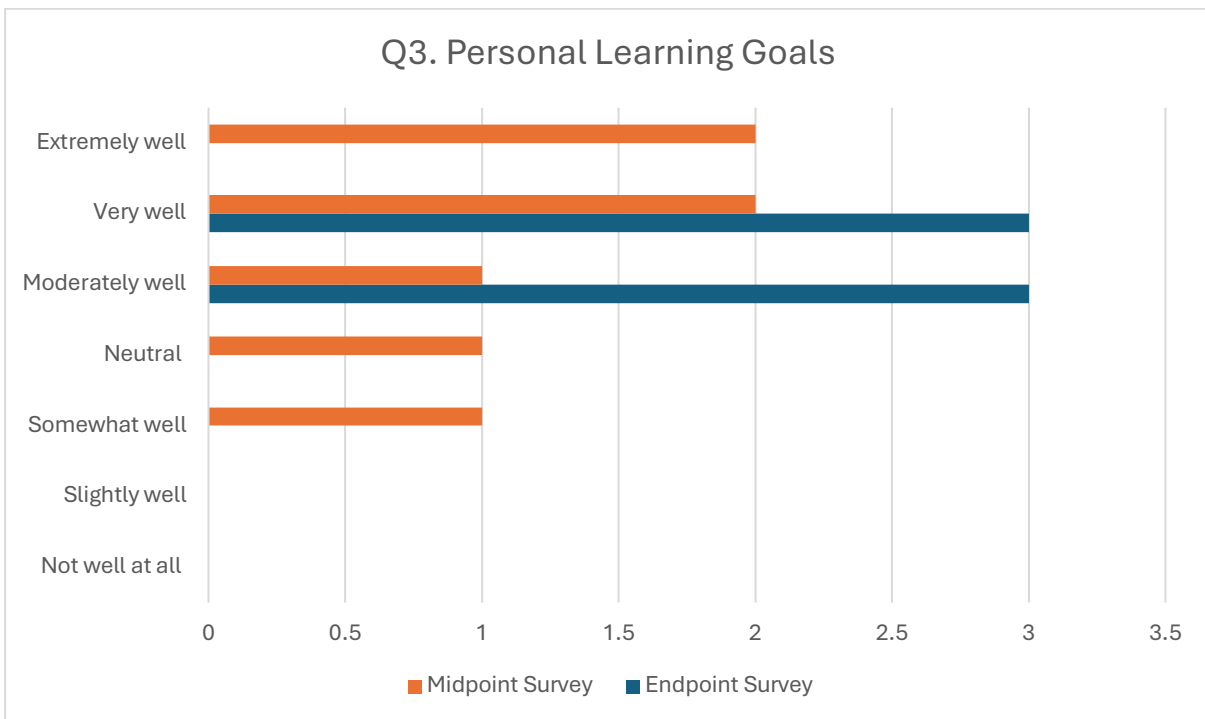


Figure 15 Personal Learning Goals

Responses on opportunities for deeper understanding through the study groups (or pods) (Figure 16 below) clustered around the top of the scale in the endpoint, ranging from

'moderately' to 'very well' (67% and 33% respectively), which is suggestive of the variable experiences of each pod (e.g. highly engaged pods vs pods which struggled to meet due to time or personal factors). No participant selected 'extremely well' at the endpoint however, compared to 2 (29%) at the midpoint.

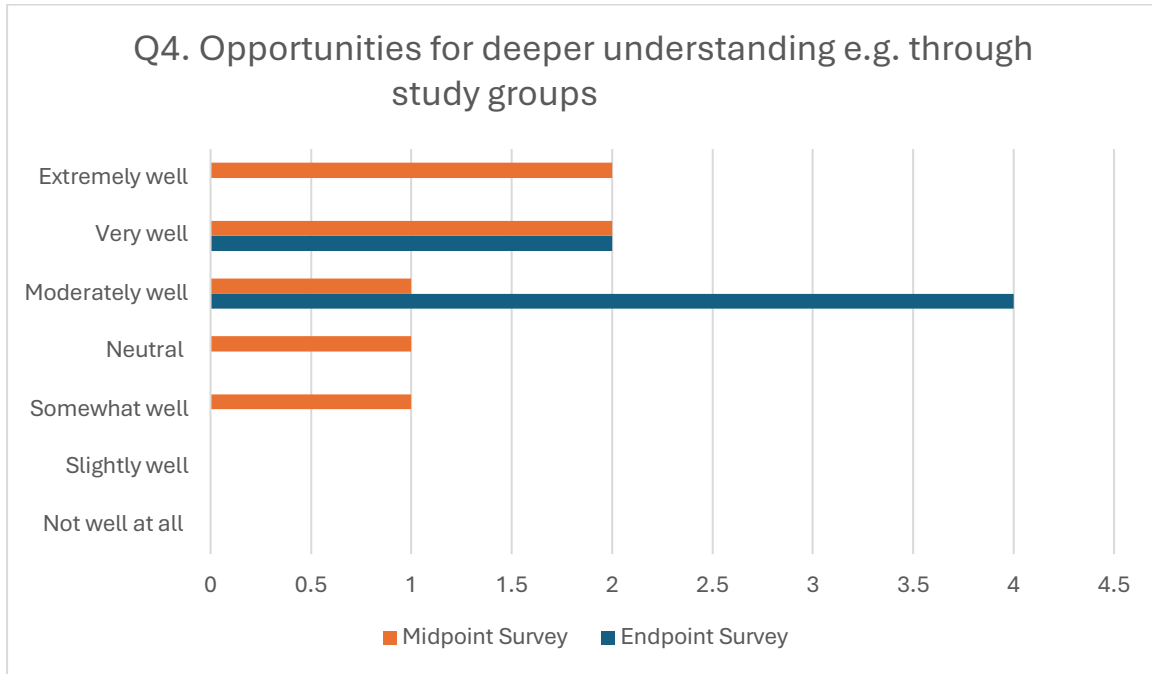


Figure 16 Opportunities for deeper understanding

For 'effective learning formats' (Figure 17 below), at the endpoint, respondents clustered around the top of the scale, rating between 'moderately' (2 responses, 33%) and 'very well' (4 responses, 67%) compared to a response that included 'somewhat well' in the midpoint. No participant selected 'extremely well' at the endpoint, compared to 3 (53%) at the midpoint.

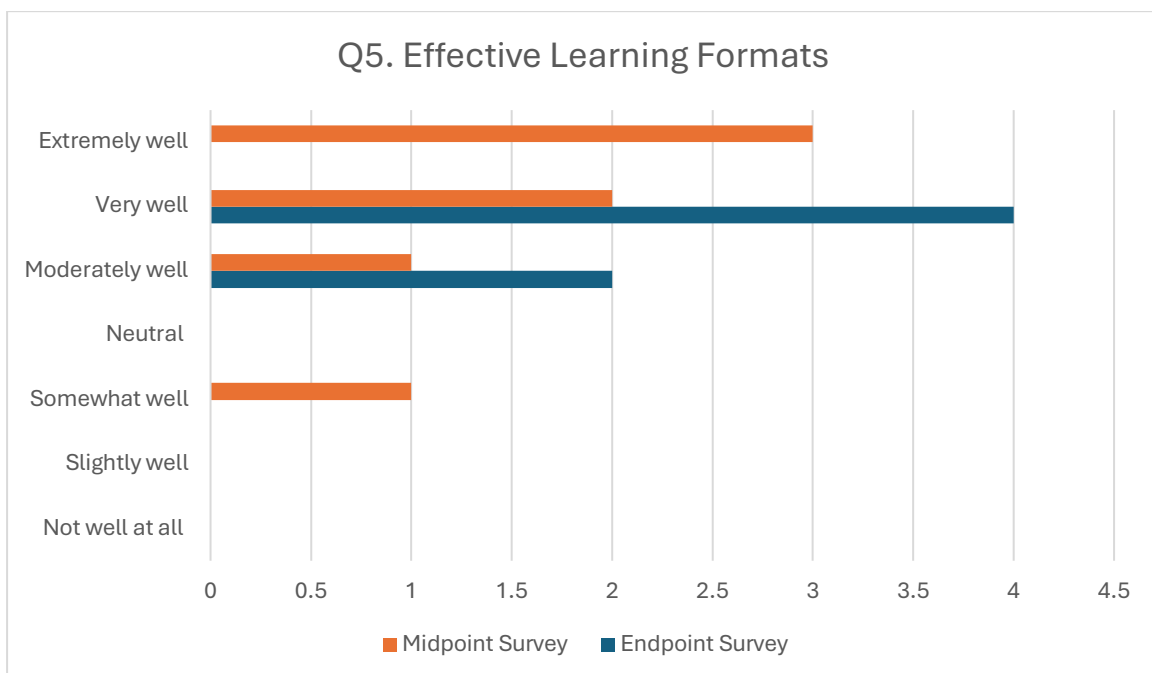


Figure 17 Learning Experience Survey - Effective learning formats

For better connections with and greater understanding of others in the cohort and their work' (Figure 18), respondents clustered around the top of the scale. Responses to 'very well' doubled from midpoint to endpoint (from 2 to 4 responses or 67% of total responses), and tracked away from 'not well at all', as identified by 1 participant in the midpoint. No participant selected 'extremely well' at the endpoint, compared to 2 at the midpoint (29%).

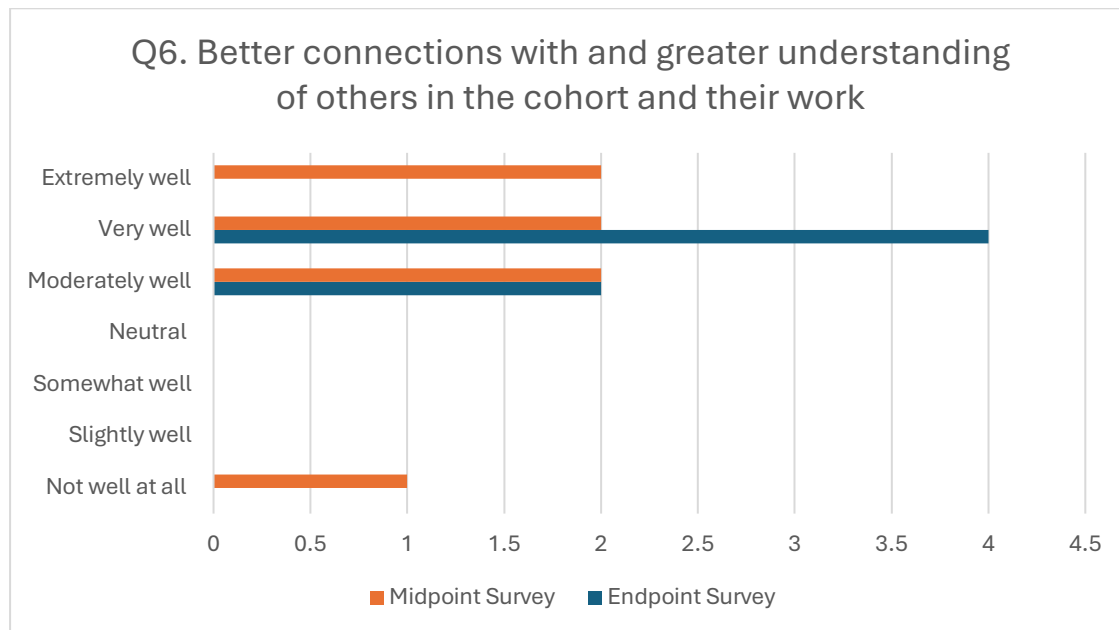


Figure 17 Better connections with and greater understanding of others

Open text responses:

Cohort connection was the most common open text theme on what Learning Circle Participants valued most in the endpoint survey (5 responses). The following are some representative comments:

- Connecting with others in our shire and working together in our pods to build relationships and talk about our learnings.
- Connections with others, self care focus.
- Meeting new local people who are active, learning and supportive in contributing, in their volunteer roles, to our Castlemaine communities.
- Getting to know others. Relationships established makes it easier to work together or call on help. People are already making connections.
- Feel more connected to like-minded community members.

Other noted strengths identified in the open text of both in the midpoint and endpoint surveys:

- Balancing of load with individual capacities – well paced and considerate of people's personal demand
- Positive Facilitation Experiences – appreciation of inclusive, well-held spaces (e.g. grounding practices, attention to comfort and safety)

- Pod Experiences – helped build connections, although some pods had barriers to potential (e.g. time)

Desired areas for further attention or what participants would change (raised in midpoint and endpoint open text)

- More information around each participant and their backgrounds
- More opportunities to share and workshop individual work/initiatives
- Desire for deeper shared understanding and learning
- Participant input into pod design
- Mapping out next steps

Clear behavioural and mindset intentions emerged in the endpoint survey, with participants reporting intent to amplify Wellbeing Economy efforts (4), collaborate more (2), engage politically (1), and prioritise self-care (1). This is all suggestive of participants intention to put Learning Circle knowledge and experiences into practice.

4. Interview Insights on Learning Experience

Below are representative comments from the interview reflections relevant to the learning experience across the following themes: (i) what participants liked or found beneficial, (ii) what didn't work for some participants (iii) What some participants wanted more of.

4.1 What some participants liked or found beneficial:

The relational aspect of the Learning Circle was identified by over half of the interview participants (8) as something they particularly liked or found valuable as exemplified in the below quotes.

It's almost like a support network or a bolstering about sharing frustrations and sharing ideas and having a cohort of people you can brainstorm solutions with like that stuff is just so valuable. WELC Interview Participant 8

For me it was really just about cementing relationships, and an opportunity to talk through those kind of opportunities that embracing a Wellbeing Economy brings. WELC Interview Participant 13

Six participants detailed the Learning Circle Design or Facilitation as something that that stood out to them, with three participants later identifying the Learning Circle design and facilitation as their most significant learning (see section 5 below). Participants appreciated activities such as meditation, 'grounding and anchoring' into the space, the creation of a 'safe' space and the inclusion of poetry. As the following quotes attest:

Yeah I had a sense that it felt energising to be in the room that yeah I just wanted to be in that space with these people having these conversations, so and felt safe to be there. I think what they created was just, what you guys all created in that space, is gold, I so appreciate it– WELC Interview Participant 3

I think the inclusion of poetry, it's beautiful you know that kind of assisted different language that that speaks to things that you know our everyday language can't-
WELC Interview Participant 2

Closed linked to Learning Circle Design is Program flexibility, whether in terms of being considerate of demands on individual capacity or the flexibility of the Learning Circle to adapt in line with the needs of the group. For instance, one participant appreciated not having to proceed with the concept of a pitch.

Well a learning to me, I actually found that like the idea of a case study (pitch) really stressful. That was the one bit I'm still like, 'I don't want to do another case study', because I do feel like we're constantly presenting ourselves to the Council and the government. And I was just blown away with the responsiveness and the Program changed and picked up on that. WELC Interview Participant 7

Also linked to facilitation is care and wellbeing role modelling undertaken by the Castlemaine Institute team as something two participants expressed as valuable; both inside the Learning Circle as well as putting it into practice in their own lives and organisation:

I think if I hadn't seen [CI team member] role modelling that, be here as you can and we won't poke, and we won't force you... I felt confident to be in that room –
WELC Interview Participant 3

I really learned from the Castlemaine Institute, how they kind of valued their own wellbeing and health and care for each other. So I think they really modelled tuning into their own needs and listening to themselves but supporting each other and trying to think about what is sustainable for themselves personally and as a group. I think it got me to think more about my own needs and capacities as well, definitely something I took away... WELC Interview Participant 6

Another participant highlighted the extra opportunities and engagements that were provided such as the REGEN Melbourne workshop, Treaty kitchen table conversations and use of the co-working space as beneficial (WELC Interview Participant 005).

The provision of financial support was also explicitly noted by some participants (3) as facilitating their involvement and recognising their time:

The other thing is I really appreciated how this learning circle offered support. Having that that sliding scale, yeah it meant a lot to me. I'm single income and needing to even justify with my child about 'why you are doing this stuff you're not getting paid for it'. Yeah like well actually I did. WELC Interview Participant 3

It was quite important to me to be paid for that time, so I thought it was amazing that that offered, cause I only work part time and I work in few different jobs so taking time out from those things for me means I'm not losing income, so it was good, a really amazing part of the process. WELC Interview Participant 8

The pods were highly appreciated by some members of the Learning Circle, although as the Learning Circle experience survey showed (2.1), this experience was variable across the dynamics of the particular pod composition and elaborated further below. For those that the pod worked well for, they remarked:

There's something really significant about the difference of getting pulled out of your work setting to have these discussions. And I would say that the pod is particularly significant for that. That was really good. WELC Interview Participant 7

The idea of having smaller pods as part of this to meet up was a really good approach and something that we're hoping to keep going...I know some other groups that I've heard of doing that as well.. but it's already led to just really positive relationships with other people in the community, just by having this workshop and meeting these people in a pod environment. WELC Interview Participant 014

Other participants (3) highlighted that they found the opportunity to put theory or learnings gleaned from other groups into practice:

It's been translating a lot of the theory that I've been working on for the last few years and seeing it in action. WELC Interview Participant 13

I think the work we have done in the has just given us the capacity to take that next step. I don't think we would have got there this quickly if it wasn't for the learning circle. WELC Interview Participant 14

So I think those two examples really for me gave me more motivation to try and practice and apply and talk about some of that in our group, but again and I think yeah sometimes it's just about planting seeds and gently bearing in mind where the group is at. WELC Interview Participant 6

4.2 What didn't work for some participants

While flexibility in fitting the Learning Circle around people's capacity and lives was appreciated by some participants (above), others struggled with the variance in modes and platforms used to deliver the Program:

I guess I found it a bit tricky that it kept changing, like the iterations keep changing every week... There were a lot of extra platforms to have to have to learn. For the pod, I had to learn 'Signal'. I never used Signal. Then there was the voting thing, then there was Miro and something else... but it's just so many, everything was in a different type of platform and for me that wasn't accessible....I thought we were getting together in a group because we can share person to person around things and there wasn't enough of that. I think some of those things that were just on platforms I just didn't engage with, and I probably would have loved the content but it just made a barrier... WELC Interview Participant 4

The group used WhatsApp and personally I don't use those apps and found it really annoying when somebody would read someone else's message and it would ping... I would perhaps prefer a more focused message about something rather than the chat going on backwards and forwards... WELC Interview Participant 9

As identified in the learning experience survey, the pod experience was less successful for a couple of participants due to scheduling and capacity demands on the group. As Participant 9 reflects:

In our group that the pods didn't function particularly well...for a whole range of circumstances, people with a whole range of commitments throughout the day and the evening, meant I think we got together twice physically... WELC Interview Participant 9

4.3 What some participants wanted more of:

More cohort connection was identified in the learning experience surveys and elaborated on in the interviews by a number of participants (4):

But there still would probably be 1/2 to 2/3 I still don't know what their main project is, they might have said, but it wasn't... I think that's a bit of a missed opportunity, like that practical – 'hey that person is doing this thing, and this is like yeah'. WELC Interview Participant 15

I felt that I connected with some people, but I didn't get a chance to connect with all of them and I wanted more of that opportunity to sit down with that person as well. WELC Interview Participant 3

Related to this was a desire for more dedicated time to develop in-depth knowledge of each others' case studies as an entire group (rather in asynchronous platforms or activities), as exemplified in Participant's 4's quote.

Some people have ideas that were emerging, mine was like that and I didn't feel like I had many opportunities to [share outside of the pod]. WELC Interview Participant 4

For Participant 7, who was part of a more established community group, they suggested that using an example from the community for everyone to work through, could have perhaps made some of the learnings more applied and relatable:

it would have a great I think to just take a few of our projects...and just for us all to work through it. 'Cause I get it but then if I think about it too much then I still get lost in all that language. I would have loved to have like all our brains how would we put [community organisation] into this. WELC Interview Participant 7

Another participant expressed the desire to go deeper on the content, such as the Wellbeing Economy 101 Workshop by having the opportunity to reflect and engage more as part of the programming.

A couple of other participants expressed a preference for more sessions, but with tighter spacing in between to capitalise on momentum and cement learning, but also acknowledged the timing constraints.

Clarification was also sought by participants on a few key aspects. For instance, the co-budget activity generated confusion for one participant, particularly around its sequencing in the Learning Circle:

I don't know if I missed the timeline trajectory, but I think I'd missed that was maybe gonna be towards the end. And I think for me I felt maybe that as a group it could have been better utilised. WELC Interview Participant 6

Two participants expressed uncertainty around the integration of the content:

because we didn't do that many exercises, I don't know that it has stuck in there as well as some types of learning I have done in the past. WELC Interview Participant 12

The link between the outside the room content and the in room activities. I didn't always see the link there. Like here is a set of things we worked on, here's how we develop them, going onto the next. WELC Interview Participant 15

Two participants raised uncertainty around the overall purpose or intended outcomes of the Learning Circle

I felt the clarity of the purpose and the why. WELC Interview Participant 13

The sort of all learning journey might have been visible, but not clear if that makes sense. WELC Interview Participant 15

5. Most Significant Learnings according to participants

Similar to Most Significant Changes (section 2 above), Learning Circle participants were asked in the interviews to discuss the key learnings resulting from their involvement with the Program, followed by deeper exploration on what one learning was most significant to them.

The Most Significant Learnings are detailed thematically as followed:

5.1 Connections and relationships grew, uncovering new knowledge about capacity in the community and unlocking opportunities to work together across scales

As well as featuring in most significant changes (above), and highlighted as a key area in the entry and exit surveys; connections and relationships also featured in most significant learnings as highlighted specifically by three participants.

Participant 5 identified how the Learning Circle facilitated new knowledge about others in the community and their work, leading to strengthened connections and relationships, with the pod noted again as a key facilitator of connection.

I just think I was sort of quite isolated, I didn't have the relationships and then what changed, I mean you know the pod, being in the pod, being in the learning circle. I think there was some relationships I had there that strengthened and then there were other people that I got to meet, just connections in terms of the work that they're doing, and also just how this work you know the Foundation work aligns with much of the way that they work and think and things that they're doing. WELC Interview Participant 5

Participant 9 noted how the Learning Circle uncovered for them new capacity in the community that was hidden to them:

the enormous capacity of people around the table for change, positive change and it's really pleasing to see that people are doing these things. Because it is largely invisible at the moment...I'm now more cognisant of a much broader range of activities in Castlemaine and I'd probably be keen to make some linkages there. Not quite sure what or how yet. I just think my thinking has been very isolated and now I can probably think in a bit more broader terms, because I have seen a broader range of skills knowledge and ideas in the Castlemaine community. WELC Interview Participant 9

For the above participant, not only was their knowledge about broader community capacity widened, but their own thinking was also expanded.

For Participant 12, representing a community financial organisation, a significant learning was related to new knowledge around local groups, leading to the opportunity to work across a larger scale and systems:

We are starting to realise that a lot of the major significant changes that need to happen are at a bigger scale, so getting to know the groups working on that, on a bigger scale – a Shire-wide scale, has really opened my eyes to how a little bit of funding could have proper systemic change, as opposed to you know running one little event in a little town, which is really important at the same time...but I guess understanding things like 'Really Locally' who are working on democracy which is such an amazing thing...at like a bigger scale. Like understanding those groups that are trying to make systemic change...has been huge for me and I think, them being aware of us...together we can grow impact and Castlemaine Institute as well...but thinking Shire wide, if we can work together we can make a bigger impact. WELC Interview Participant 12

As the above quotes suggest, learnings derived from the pilot, provide opportunities to strengthen connections as well as enable collaboration at the individual (Participant 9), organisational (Participant 5) and systems levels (Participant 12).

5.2 A well-held, inclusive facilitation process helps unlock inner and collective capacity

Four participants contributed to the theme of Learning Circle design and facilitation as their most significant learning.

For Participant 8 below, the value of balancing inner wellbeing with outer action was noted and seen as beneficial for the community.

I think the biggest learning is how valuable it is to bring a diverse group of people together in a facilitative way to talk about issues and solutions. Which is kind of that deliberative democracy stuff and how incredibly valuable that is for those individuals actually, and how it is motivating and satisfying and kind of good for that inner wellbeing so that you can continue to hold onto doing some of the outer stuff.

WELC Interview Participant 8

Participant 10 identified the way that working with uncertainty was a key strength of the Program design:

the discomfort in like 'what are we doing, what is the outcome?' and I think that learning of making space for different groups of people to come together and a really holding space for us to be able to learn together... it could have been Wellbeing Economy, it could've been anything I think. And the strength building and the resilience building that happens within that alone is so incredible. I think that kind of feeds into what we're trying to kind of create. So I think yeah, I just think that was proof of concept for me maybe around that a little bit more. WELC Interview Participant 10

In particular, the above participant reflected around the strengths of having a more open process over a strict predetermined agenda, although they acknowledged it is accompanied by a tension or 'discomfort'.

Participant 14 shared how their learning was attached to how the Learning Circle facilitated a supportive and immersive learning space amongst a large group with different characteristics and approaches:

Probably now that I think about it the biggest learning I think is in terms of facilitation of a group of that size, and how it was done by the team to just be such a safe space and so encompassing of all the different personalities, different ways of working, different ways of thinking... And how it was done in such a nice way, like you know thinking about the smell and the sights and all the senses and ...a lot of care was put into it. WELC Interview Participant 14

For Participant 7, their most significant learning was attached to the value of slowing down, and the inner work required to make that change.

So, what would be most significant for you in terms of those? I think it's probably the value of pausing, in that the pod, paused me, the program paused me and I need to work out how to do that I know and I think I need to do that by myself like I've been trying to do it with [community organisation], I don't think we can do that together, you just gotta do it yourself. WELC Interview Participant 7

As the above quotes suggest, for the above participants, the design and facilitation aspects were particularly effective in nurturing inner and collective ways of working around complex issues.

5.3 Participants experienced major 'a-ha' moments from different frameworks and models presented in the Learning Circle

A number of most significant learnings were attached to different frameworks and models introduced in the Program as identified by the following five interview participants.

For instance, Participant 11 noted Cornerstone Indicators (introduced by REGEN Melbourne) as an important tool for driving change.

I think Cornerstone Indicators. I think they are really important...I think they all drive the narrative and the conversation around a Wellbeing Economy. They are the kind of things, ...if constructed properly shift it from being a theoretical construct to actually in our community, these are the indicators that just do matter. And over time, we hope they would do this and we want to track them. WELC Interview Participant 11

Another participant noted the Diverse Economies Iceberg as a key device to foreground relationships that sustain volunteer efforts, driving them to pay attention to the unfunded energy...WELC Interview Participant 15

For Participant 4, the workshop on Place-Based Capital was particularly revelatory:

[It] was a bit of an 'aha' moment for me, when we had to map, in the Capital workshop all of the things that had value for us in our projects. All the types of capital. And all of mine are in land... and that was a massive eye opener for me, because I didn't actually think like that, I didn't think about it in those terms... I was looking at, the connecting with the people...around nothing to do with land.

Interviewer- Some people struggled with the capital terminology?

It broke it open for me... I would have struggled with capital if we hadn't had that workshop. The word capital did not resonate ...but now that I've seen all the different sorts I appreciate that. WELC Interview Participant 4

A different participant in this theme described their 'a-ha' moment as 'unlearning' their assumptions about economies and looking to other ways thinking and doing locally and internationally:

So for me I think my 'a-ha moment' has been over the last three months just unlearning some of the assumptions I have about economies... I think my aha moments would be very much, intellectually I understand the difference in capital through the Wellbeing Economy lens but I think for me it's more been enriching that language and bringing it to life.

And seeing the real life examples that are already there in our community to some extent but also seeing studies where this might be implemented or embedded like in

Wales for example where there is different decision making that's happening which is spreading across lots of different domains.

Yeah so I think for me yeah there's been an evolution in how I have seen the economy. And I feel like I have a more balanced view now possibly. WELC
Participant 6

A final participant in this theme identified the Inner Development Goal Framework was pivotal in helping realise a more meaningful career path:

Beforehand there was just working as usual, but there's been a desire to do something different. There's been a desire to push with my skills into something that has more meaning for me and also has more contribution to the community. What happened? I found a way to be able to do that. So particularly with Inner Development goals, the key area for me because it aligns with what I do but it takes it out into the community and into organisations and it takes the change maker work out into in adding to the community in a way that I can see working well and I can contribute to. WELC
Interview Participant 2

For the above participant, the Inner Development Goals therefore provided a pathway for them to channel their professional skills into desired community action.

As the above insights suggest, Learning Circle content generated a number of significant learnings ranging from the use of frameworks and indicators, to 'unlearnings' about the economy more generally.

6. Project Team Reflections

6.1 Project Team Midpoint reflections

Written reflections from project team members at the pilot midpoint shared the following observations and experiences:

- Strengths:
 - Richness of learning and connections
 - Interesting and enjoyable project
 - Connections
 - Pods working well (for most groups)
 - Content and speakers
 - Flexible funder and timeline

- Challenges:
 - Emergent work with a large cohort and team
 - People feeling lost with communications and calendar invites
 - Uncertainty over case study development
 - Various team absences over school holiday period could lead to loss of momentum and clarity over this period

- Heavy focus on non-financial exchange (due to cohort composition and small proportion of groups focusing on financial or community wealth building) and need for making a clear distinction between financial wellbeing in the now and what is needed for a new economy/care economy in the future
- Personal wellbeing challenges across the team
- Opportunities
 - Layers of Learning
 - Being more targeted with sectors or impact domains for next cohort (democracy, cultural, social, ecological justice).

6.2 Project Team Interviews

At the end of the Learning Circle, the project team convened to share their experiences and learnings on the pilot process overall.

6.2.1 Key learnings centred around the following themes:

Content

- Surprise on the cohort's hesitancy in engaging with the economy as a concept and accompanying language such as capital
- Success in combining inner and outer work components

Diversity and Inclusion

- What do relationship-centred approaches mean for broader diversity and inclusion considerations?
- How to engage others who may not be aligned?

Learning as a methodology to bring people together

- Valuing of time together/working together – 'university – but with purpose'
- Relationships and trust vs content
- Creating relationships and openness for place-based systems change

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

- Capturing the value of having monitoring, evaluation and learning embedded in the project

Missing or Future Opportunities

- An overnight cohort building component
- More time on deconstructing the economy and building economics systems literacy around how to redesign our economy together
- More time/capacity for individual case studies
- Cohort demand for more time together (although variable across participants)

Recruitment

- Strength of working from a relational map
- Trust placed by participants in the team

Relational resourcing for place-based work

- Substantial care work involved in place-based efforts
- Cohort recruitment and support
- Impacts on individual team members
- Asynchronous components required a whole different set of skills and capacities

6.2.2 Project Team Interview - Most Significant Learnings

The following is a summary of what learnings were deliberated by the project team as most significant based on the above discussion points.

6.2.2.1 Place-based work requires relational resourcing

The first most significant learning noted by the team overall, was the significant resource demands that place-based relational work puts on the team's capacity. As the below team member reflected, the care labour involved in doing the project in their own community caught them off-guard:

The first [learning] is the extra additional mental and emotional and relational labour that goes into doing this work in the place where you live, because it's like you're always juggling reputational risk. You know so much more about people and their circumstances than we would normally be privy to, and that meant that we were having conversations with people about very complex things that were happening in people's lives all the time. And that's basically been since the start of the year. And I had no preparation for that. And I was like, totally floored by it. It's impact and just like how low my capacity actually [was]...Like I feel very able to do that kind of really nurturing work in the relationships that I already have in my life, but I have no capacity to do that work in my job. WELC Project Team Participant 3

A key factor contributing to the relational resourcing demands (but also a strength), of the Learning Circle, was the care and effort involved in cohort selection and development, including identifying where there was 'trust and alignment' in the community (WELC Project Team Participant 2). As the team member went on to elaborate, the relational work required for community change projects like the Learning Circle needs dedicated resourcing:

[If] you had a less designed cohort, like how much would people still experience that same impact from the cohort building, whereas if you didn't put all that effort in around building a cohort and building those connections to start with. So I think there's open questions for me about how much of that upfront and the relational work is worth it to get the outcomes that you want. For this work, which is that building change in the community over the long term, my sense is that it's very much

required, but also that it's a job. You know, you'd need someone whose full-time job is local partnerships. And they just need to have that flexibility to have a four hour chat with someone if that person needs to have a four hour chat, because all of a sudden they've come into your kind of sphere of care in a way. WELC Project Team Participant 3

Another team member also noted the challenges the relational Learning Circle format presented at a personal level:

Some parts of the work are much harder than other parts of the work, and just also how difficult it can be to show up in group, front facing group environments and collaborative team environments. They felt like new learnings for me. WELC Project Team Participant 2

Similarly, their colleague also experienced personal challenges around balancing this intensity:

Even just like having one team day on a Tuesday was as much contact with people that I could have outside of the programmed activities that they were within this piece of work because it was just ...very dense. So I think that, you know, and I think there's all sorts of things that I'm also understanding about myself and how I've designed my life to actually have quite little face to face contact as part of my working life and that I need some very real boundaries around that. So I've been stretched in ways that I didn't know. Yeah, so. So I've grown a lot in myself awareness through that. WELC Project Team Participant 3

A key learning for the group was therefore around the importance of adequate resourcing for place-based relational work.

one of the reasons why we need sustained long-term funding is because if we want to do this relational work with people who we don't already know, then it's long, we've got to start to build those relationships and work WELC Project Team Participant 1

Accompanying the demands of relational and face-to-face engagement, were the diverse resourcing needs underpinning the asynchronous component of the pilot. As the below team member highlighted:

[A surprise] was around just how much skill and emotional labour, power literacy and like technical skill, and then just executive functioning skills is involved in asynchronous organising and collaborating. Co-budget really showed me there is a lot of social and cultural nuances and emotional labour going into making decisions around how to engage with this thing. And yeah, it's really interesting. WELC Project Team Participant 2

As the team member went on to reflect, engaging with the cohort required experimentation with different approaches depending on the activity and level of urgency:

we kind of did little experiments along the way, like ...a Loom video as a briefing, we did a collaborative Miro board. We did try to do some coordination stuff through the WhatsApp and that kind of stuff and when we were in positions where we really needed to know, we'd like pick up the phone, call the person directly, SMS the person directly. WELC Project Team Participant 2

The efficacy of taking individual approaches could be one factor in contributing to the successful retention rate of the pilot (100%), but also brings substantial relational, resourcing and skill considerations.

6.2.2.2 Navigating the Tension Between Relationship-Centred Practice and Diversity and Inclusion in Place-Based Work

The second most significant learning concerned the dilemma around navigating relationship-centred approaches with diversity and inclusion. While a strength of the Learning Circle was its relational approach, i.e. working on building trust and alignment amongst existing relationships in the community; the project team also noted concerns on the implications of this approach for broader diversity and inclusion considerations. As the below team members reflected:

I think there's something about relationship-centred approaches that is inherently in conflict with diversity and inclusion. WELC Project Team Participant 2

I've been thinking about that a lot lately. And density of power and all sorts of ethical conundrums. WELC Project Team Participant 3

There is an acknowledged tension therefore in relationship-centred approaches that requires further unpacking for the team:

if we know that's how change happens and that's how buy-in happens...we need to develop the nuance around our stance and practises of diversity and inclusion and working with power, in a way that reflects our knowing and belief of the efficacy of relationship-centred approaches. WELC Project Team Participant 2

At a practical level, for future iterations, the importance of recognising the complex composition of community was raised around needing to clarify 'who it is for' (WELC Project Team Participant 2), and whether when 'building the field', if participants on the margins of the group culture are engaged in more 'targeted' and 'bridging' ways (WELC Project Team Participant 3). The cultural context of Castlemaine itself was also noted, with another team member highlighting:

diversity and inclusion... is also acknowledging old Castlemaine and new Castlemaine. And what does the psychology of those two groups mean for understanding power and systems change? WELC Project Team Participant 4

6.2.2.3 The value of learning as a methodology to bring people together and enable place-based change

The final most significant learning noted by team members was the valuing of time together shown by participants:

You know, lots of very busy people, some partly burnt out etcetera...but how much they cherish the time together, it seemed like people really appreciated that opportunity. And that time together. Despite all of those other pressures on their lives. So I think that's the value thing to learn in itself, that this kind of time together is really valued. WELC Project Team Participant 1

As another team member reflected, the Learning Circle acted as a container for developing relationships and working together, rather than the necessarily the content in its own right:

people really enjoyed getting together and it didn't really matter what was on the table in some respect, as long as it contained this sort of, you know, purpose and service and community, a bundle of things that everyone is contributing to. WELC Project Team Participant 4

A different team member described the Learning Circle as:

an expansive experience where you're all coming ideally with some unknown together, where you where you have things to share directly between each other rather than sort of focusing on one thing. WELC Project Team Participant 3

They later elaborated in terms of the significance of this learning 'in place-based systems change' and the role of:

Learning as a methodology to bring people together and create relationships and openness and to have the rare opportunity in any setting to go on a journey with people. WELC Project Team Participant 3

As identified by the project team, taking a learning-centred approach can act as an important enabler for place-based change through acting as a container for sharing experiences and ideas. In the following section, we explore further how this was perceived from the perspective of Learning Circle participants.

7. Learning mindsets and principles (ways of working together) for place-based innovation

This final section draws on insights from the Learning Circle interviews with cohort participants. Transcripts were analysed for themes around learning mindsets and principles for place based-innovation (e.g. curiosity, openness to feedback, willingness to experiment, reflective practices). The key themes are detailed as follows:

7.1 Challenging previously held assumptions and fostering 'relearning'

The Learning Circle generated a number of key learnings for participants on previously held assumptions on topics like 'diversity' and 'the economy'. For instance Participant 11 reflected on how they became more 'self-aware' of their understanding of diversity through a conversation in the Learning Circle:

I became a bit more self-aware too...because I was having a conversation with someone about one of the problems with [community group], is that we actually need more diversity. And when I say that, we actually need more younger people. And we need more non-old-white males involved. But the person I was talking to said yes – you should have more LGBTIQ people...disabled people...their concept of diversity was out here and it was like my concept was ‘we are vanilla right now, we need to be a bit more diverse than what we are’. WELC Interview Participant 11

The participant also acknowledged the challenge in how to put this into practice, suggesting a capacity building gap for community groups.

Participant 6 reflected on how ‘unlearning’ assumptions of the economy was a standout learning for them:

‘Unlearning’ I think is one of the learnings I took away. Reflecting on some of my assumptions around money, Wellbeing Economy, growth and wealth and what kind of value, what I value, what my community values, that there's different types of values as well. Yeah that's another thing I took away. That's another key thing I took that, that within our group, we are all different people. We might have overlapping values and assumptions, but we've all got very different hats on. I think for me that was a key. WELC Interview Participant 6

As the participant highlighted, the Learning Circle provided the opportunity to reflect on economic concepts as well as explore the diverse values attached to them by different members of the community.

Participant 10 noted that while the concept of ‘capital’ was challenging for them, they were able to break through the discomfort through the Learning Circle:

Actually one thing that I've really been like thinking of it about is like capital, you know as that like, I guess, in that sort of piece in where it is something that I'm like ‘Ugh it feels yucky’ and for all the reasons that we previously discussed in our workshops around that. But really just kind of thinking, it helped me. Sort of gave me some new frames of reference to speak about the stuff in a way that it feels like I can approach people that really don't understand this work, but you can speak in terms that they do understand. WELC Interview Participant 10

Yet for Participant 8, their assumptions around capital appeared to be reinforced:

Just when we when we really got into talking about what that economy stuff really means and the different types of capital I did feel quite lost, but then not I'm not feeling like super motivated to engage with that knowledge model, cause I'm not quite sure how it applies to my personal situation, but I did pick up that I had this little like ‘ugh I don't think that's for me for me’ and that's not very helpful when you are trying to learn something new. WELC Interview Participant 8

While the participant's assumption around capital was largely due to the lack of connection they felt it had to their personal situation; they reflection it as a 'challenge' for learning.

Another participant saw learning as a process that is continuous and needs to be held in the community. For instance, the Learning Circle highlighted for Participant 9 the importance of continually challenging thinking in community action through a process of relearning, particularly amongst different groups and generations:

So I guess what I saw in the learning circle sessions I was at was this relearning by the community as new people get engaged,...and activist groups need to be relearning, but there is no way currently where past experiences can be passed on to the next generations of community activists. So it made me wonder about perhaps we need some structure for relearning (drawing on local people's knowledge and experience) and in a way this project was that. WELC Interview Participant 9

The Learning Circle therefore shows potential for being a critical part of the infrastructure for place-based innovation through its role in challenging thinking and assumptions and (temporarily) holding and exchanging knowledge and experiences for continual learning.

7.2 Seeing the value of inner work for outer change

Another key finding around learning mindsets and principles for place-based innovation centred on the value of doing the inner as well as outer work (linked to a specific workshop theme on Inner Development Goals). As Participant 13 reflected:

I'll just go back to the inner work, that felt like a really kind of pivotal moment for the group as well really, if we are gonna actually make any change and influence any kind of change then we have to do the work ourselves on our responses and our inner environment. WELC Interview Participant 13

Other participants also reflected on learnings around relational ways of being:

I learned a bit more about myself, there is always things to learn about yourself and working with others. WELC Interview Participant 9

There's also learnings around my own ways of being in a group in that way. And that interplay of what people's needs are and how does that land together in a bigger group and how to make space for that, but also to hold my own a bit, to make that choice around how important it is to hold that right now. WELC Interview Participant 3

Bringing people with passion for change and passion for creating, so it's not the usual story and it's not the usual dichotomy. It's actually about bringing together energy and skills and heart and everything together actually, just do it. For me that's where all the relational stuff comes in. I've been an ideologue, but what I've realised that it's all about the relationship, is all about trust and respect and belonging. WELC Interview Participant 1

Two participants in particular, reflected on the role that the Castlemaine Institute Project Team played in modelling inner development skills such as self-awareness and empathy and putting them into practice:

It might be more of a soft skill, but I really learned from the Castlemaine Institute, how they kind of valued their own wellbeing and health and care for each other. So I think they really modelled tuning into their own needs and listening to themselves but supporting each other and trying to think about what is sustainable for themselves personally and as a group. I think it got me to think more about my own needs and capacities as well, definitely something I took away... WELC Interview Participant 6

I really appreciated the sense of team... Seeing how Castlemaine institute team modelled that, of 'spread yourself thick'. Instead of having one person and expecting them to be across the people, the facilitation and holding for each person of - 'cause it was very emotional in lot of ways - and then catering and watching the time and tech and all the things....

I remember clearly when we were in Wild and [team member] had whatever they had going on that day, and they kind of curled up in the corner. And it was very like yeah 'I'm here but I'm also I need to be right here', being the cat in the corner. And that helped me to feel on another day that we had..I had a shabby week I think and was just not 100% at all. And you know if I think if I hadn't seen [team member] role modelling that, 'be here as you can and we won't poke, and we won't force you...' then I felt confident to be in that room and if I needed to say 'actually I just need to curl up just for a second' then it would have been like...you know it is what you need... 'cause I really wanted to be there that day... I just felt that I didn't have ability to really engage. WELC Interview Participant 3

In contrast, another participant reflected, that the inner work activities were initially uncomfortable for them and some other peers:

The inner work stuff is a bit alien to me. I never do group meditation or any of that stuff but it was actually quite lovely. Last night I couldn't sleep and I found myself doing that little exercise on my hand... Initially at the start I was wondering 'What had I gotten myself into'?! but by the end... those of us who were a little more uncomfortable about all of that stuff were much more on board and that was lovely... WELC Interview Participant 12

By the end of the Learning Circle, the participant noted how they were more open to this approach.

7.3 Openness to collaboration and new ways of working across groups and organisations

Similar to the entry and exit surveys, insights from the interviews with Learning Circle participants signalled more openness for collaboration and new ways of working in the community to support place-based innovation.

For instance, through the Place-Based Capital workshop, the below participant saw the potential to work with a new institution who they initially didn't think they were aligned

with and in turn, work together to unlock a valuable asset for their group and wider community:

Lots of it was around maybe seeing difference in value in itself and diversity in groups within our community as a value and an asset I guess. That idea that very different assets or groups could still work together with common goals which are more around environment and people, so I think that's yeah that for me is quite anchoring as well. WELC Interview Participant 6

Another participant recognised that through the Learning Circle, that there has been a long history of community collaboration for change (particularly reflecting on the ten year anniversary of the 'Local Lives Global Matters' event) and how there was potential for larger impact, if community members united around key issues, such as supporting the local high school:

I probably came away from it thinking... 'we don't actually need to think of new ideas...necessarily, we've probably got all the things we need...it's just how do we make them work better or more effectively'? That's not a bad way to start, because if you come into the room and go 'oh God, we've got to think something up' that's a whole lot harder again. I actually came through it thinking, and this is not unusual, we are at risk of spreading our focus too thin and too wide, we are trying to do too many things, and what can we achieve if we really narrow the focus down and pick the two or three things that matter the most. And all put our collective efforts towards those. WELC Interview Participant 11

Learning Circle cohort members also played valuable roles in mentoring others on their own experiences around collaboration and ways of working, particularly those whose community groups were more established. As one participant of a burgeoning community group noted, these learnings from more experienced groups were particularly insightful for the opportunity to learn and practice 'decentralised' ways of working:

I think that decentralised way of working that we're trying to embody and continue to form, this means sharing the load of the tasks. I'm someone who likes to do things myself, to be independent and get it done but it's not always effective and it's not always sustainable either, so being able to trust in people that you're with takes time... I think the decentralised bit I wanted to learn about but I didn't really know how to enact it... I do believe it comes down to relationships and that was consolidated through the learning circle and gave us a space to kind of practise that as well. WELC Interview Participant 6

The Learning Circle also helped to foster collaboration between organisations and community groups.

For a participant joining from a community funding organisation, the Learning Circle was valuable in building shared understanding and making change together:

The main thing was learning about what other groups in the Shire are up to I think. And not just, like we get grant applications from some of those groups or we don't...but understanding [what others do]... and how we can collectively we can create change, I think really helps. WELC Interview Participant 12

The participant went on to elaborate how the Learning Circle provided an important opportunity to work across scale in order to unlock resources and create bigger impact:

We are starting to realise that a lot of the major significant changes that need to happen are at a bigger scale, so getting to know the groups working on that, on a bigger scale – a Shire-wide scale, has really opened my eyes to how a little bit of funding could have proper systemic change. As opposed to you know running one little event in a little town, which is really important at the same time...but I guess understanding things like 'Really Local' who are working on democracy which is such an amazing thing...at like a bigger scale. Like understanding those groups that are trying to make systemic change...has been huge for me and I think, them being aware of us...together we can grow impact and Castlemaine Institute as well... I think that just being aware of those different levels and the course has helped me connect with people that think Shire-wide and think about serious change... WELC Interview Participant 12

From a Council perspective, the Learning Circle made visible Wellbeing Economy initiatives that were already in place:

it was more grassroots to me, really kind of seeing in action I guess, which was a really good thing. It's been translating a lot of the theory that I've been kind of spouting on about working on for the last few years, and seeing it in action. WELC Interview Participant 13

Through the revealing of new actors or 'hidden gems' in the local Wellbeing Economy, the participant hoped to be a 'conduit...for the community into council'. A major benefit of the Learning Circle for this participant was therefore about:

cementing relationships, and an opportunity to talk through those kind of opportunities that embracing a Wellbeing Economy brings. WELC Interview Participant 13

Another Council participant shared that the Learning Circle provided a positive space to connect with community members and draw upon shared knowledge, skills and curiosity:

I learned more about our community and how lucky we are to have this at our disposal. And it's certainly a source of hope for me - which all of us need working in this space. When it can be really challenging to just draw on things like this and have that shared interest. So yeah, I guess that was that was a key learning in terms of learning more about the community. WELC Interview Participant 13

The participant went on to elaborate that Learning Circle initiatives like the co-budget, 'provided really good examples to draw upon when we are looking at what we can do as Council and how we can support community through different avenues'.

A different participant also noted how the Learning Circle also help to mobile internal council collaboration for advancing Wellbeing Economy objectives:

it's helped me think about how are there ways internally I can advocate for it and knowing that it is aligned with the council plan, start to utilise it already, when we have opportunities come up with things. WELC Interview Participant 4

As the above insights demonstrate, the Learning Circle further enhanced or facilitated new openness for collaboration across groups and organisations, as well as new ways of working such as coalescing on key issues facing the community rather than duplicating efforts.