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## CALVARY COMMUNITY HUB: CONCEPT DESIGNS IN RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF A THRIVING COMMUNITY HUB

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### Abstract

The Calvary Community comprises Calvary Lutheran Primary School, Calvary Lutheran Church, Calvary Kindergarten, Noarlunga Children's Centre, an Opportunity Shop, Men's Shed, and Emergency Housing in Morphett Vale, South Australia. This paper outlines how 'Family Zone', a model that aims to bring together a range of support programs to break a generational cycle of marginalisation, will be adopted to create a thriving Calvary Community Hub. This parenting program developed by Lutheran Community Care focuses on family wellbeing by providing access to needs-based professional and volunteer assistance. Building trust and rapport is the key to long term relationship change and improved lifelong outcomes. The existing co-location can be enhanced by developing a common vision and purpose. Overcoming operational barriers and sharing resources is a challenge. A collaborative and cooperative approach can deliver on the aspirations articulated in this paper. Architectural concept designs developed in response to the needs of a thriving Calvary Community Hub are provided.

*Keywords:* family wellbeing, improved lifelong outcomes

## **Calvary Community Hub:**

### **Concept Designs in Response to the Needs of a Thriving Community Hub**

In 2019 Calvary Lutheran Primary School embarked on a journey of assisting families to build their social and emotional capacity and become interdependent. Some of the families associated with the Calvary community linger in a cycle of abuse, poverty and hopelessness and find it challenging to bring about change in their own lives. Calvary Family Zone is an opportunity to improve connections with school and community by providing a stepping-stone for families. This is a place and service that can bridge the gap between school and government agencies such as the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The goal of this program is for families to stay connected with the Calvary community even after their children have graduated. The provision of settings that facilitate connection with others in a safe and non-judgemental environment has the potential to significantly reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences resulting from childhood trauma. The objective of Calvary Family Zone within a school setting is to increase the likelihood of children being able to regularly and actively engage in their learning and to build their capacity for improved lifelong outcomes. This paper identifies the aims, describes the strategic intent, illustrates the design concept and lists the key challenges associated with developing the Calvary Community Hub.

### **Background and Key Aims**

Reducing the impact of childhood stress is a key aim of the Calvary Family Zone. There is evidence that childhood stress can change neural systems and that this lasts a lifetime (Burke Harris, 2018). Timely interventions can help retrain the brain and body, foster resilience and help children, families and adults live healthier and happier lives. Children are especially sensitive to trauma because their brains and bodies are developing. A large and growing body of research indicates that toxic stress during childhood can harm the most basic levels of the nervous, endocrine and immune systems and that such exposure can even alter the physical structure of DNA (Mercy & Houly, 2019). Some children and families attending Calvary Lutheran Primary School have been exposed to physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect, growing up in a household where a parent is mentally ill and/or substance dependent. If we work to address the impact of adverse childhood experiences in both adults and children, then we have an opportunity to support change in the short and long term. Our focus is to support adults to build capacity, to identify their own trauma, to support them to manage their lives and by implication, reduce the negative influences on their children.

Children do not focus and engage with learning if they are distracted by social and emotional concerns. Conventional academic curricula are focused almost entirely on the world around us and pay little attention to the inner world. We see the results of that every day in boredom, disengagement,

stress, bullying, anxiety, depression and dropping out. These are human issues, and they call for human responses (Robinson, 2015). Parents and teachers have the greatest influence on a child. The power of positive teacher-student relationships is critical for learning to occur. It is not so much the structure of the family but rather the beliefs and expectations of the adults in the home that contribute most to achievement (Hattie, 2009). A significant impact on student well-being and the ability to attend to learning would increase if we could positively influence social and emotional issues.

We can support change by offering a place within the school setting and community where families feel closely connected. We envisage facilitating access to supporting agencies and professionals who can provide financial counselling, speech therapy, behaviour counselling, parenting groups, fitness classes, playgroup, food preparation sessions and early intervention programs for parents and children such as the 'Circle of Security' course. Associated help includes supporting children learning from home, homework club, breakfast club and providing healthy lunches.

### **Strategic Intent**

According to the Calvary Lutheran Primary School (CPLS) Strategic Intent (2020), CPLS aims to prepare all students to be able to 'reach for success' in relationships, engagement and achievement, with Christ-centred holistic learning. The school's strategy is organised as four pillars; learning, wellbeing, high quality teaching and an eco-system of partnerships. Calvary Family Zone connects an eco-system of partnerships by forming supportive networks and collaborations. Partnerships with allied health and external professionals are expected to support our goal to build a strong and thriving Community Hub. The pillars are aligned with, and support, the achievement of our school 'REACH' philosophy of connecting and serving others within a safe, inclusive and supportive community. They are also synergistic with the vocational practices outlined in the 'Growing Deep Leadership and Formation Framework' (Lutheran Education Australia, 2016) which comprise excellence in learning, ongoing improvement and innovation strengthening Lutheran identity, community building and leading effective organisation and management.

Schools are funded to deliver education and an education system is all about learning. Effective learning occurs within a network, security, context, connection and sense of belonging. What happens outside school is manifest in a student's social and emotional behaviour and this hinders learning. Transition for parents and caregivers is as important as transition for students and needs to be part of the school culture.

### **The Vision**

The vision for the Calvary Community Hub is to create a community of support networks where families and individuals are able to develop their skills in a range of areas. Capacity and skills development can help reduce the likelihood of making poor choices that result in family members being placed in the care of the government agencies they are trying to avoid. Creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing

relationships and environments for all children and families can prevent adverse childhood experiences and help all children reach their full health and life potential (Mercy & Houly 2019). By providing support and opportunities for growth through rich community connection, we also hope to create a culture of 'pay it forward' where families go on to contribute to Calvary Family Zone through volunteering and supporting others. Growing capacity in our young people and families and strengthening life skills, resilience and discernment can assist in developing communities of hope.

The school has created a new job description called the 'Calvary Family Zone Connector'. The role of the connector is to find and leverage existing local programs, resources and services. Calvary Lutheran Church provides a venue for a breakfast club, professional sharing and debriefing, food hampers through the Community Care Pantry, Thursday Community Lunches and the provision of take home meals when requested. Lutheran Community Care provides counselling services, parent education and workshops and the opportunity to provide placements for students studying counselling. The City of Onkaparinga offers a range of services and initiatives as part of Community Development and Healthier Cities. The local Community Garden across the road from the campus and Foodbank SA, OzHarvest and The Food Embassy all connect community through food.

One of the recent success stories is the Foodbank Fresh Food Fridays Program. Twenty food hampers are delivered to school each week. These are discretely distributed 'on the way home' to students of families who will not have food equity for the weekend. Sharing and caring in a tangible and practical manner develops and deepens trust and connections with people and community.

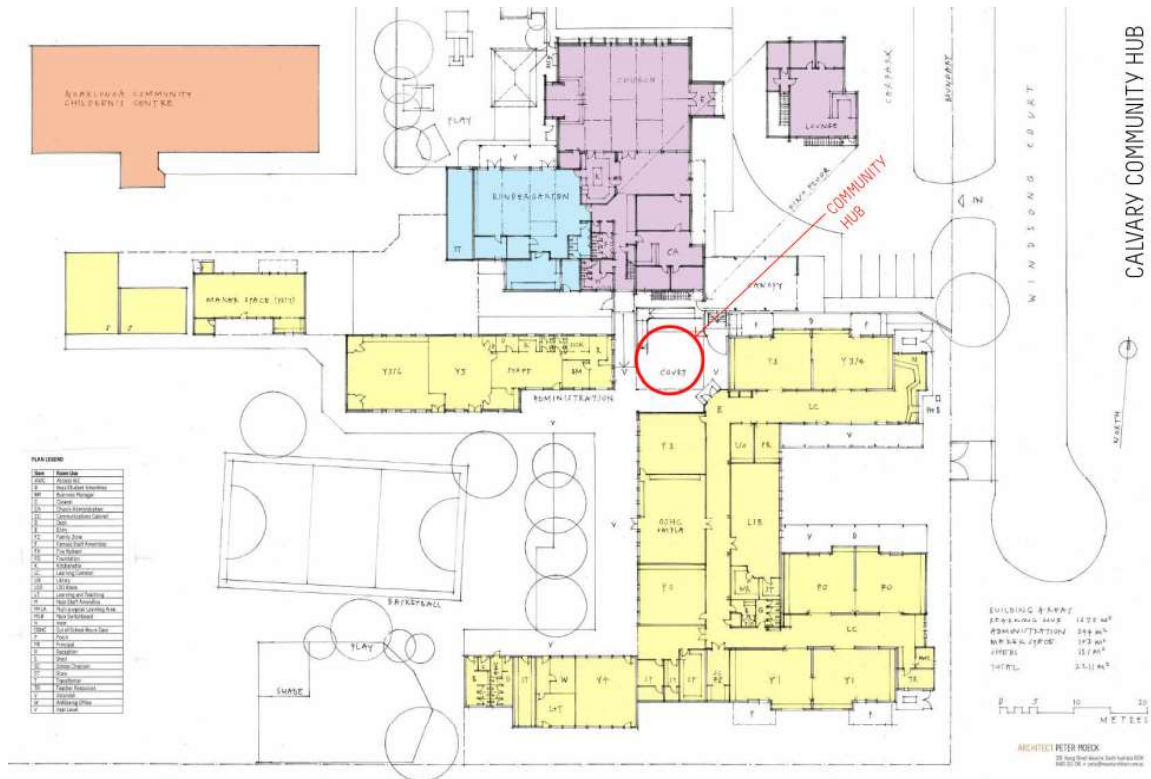
### **The Design Concept**

The concept is to locate Calvary Family Zone at the heart of the campus rather than within an isolated re-purposed room. This is a move towards a welcoming single front door model of multi-service delivery in a school setting and central to the philosophy that underpins this initiative. The appended architectural drawings illustrate the proposal to infill an existing courtyard and link buildings that accommodate administrative and learning hub functions. The footprint of new and altered floor area is modest (see Fig. 1 to 6). The intent is to provide a welcoming, informal and safe place. The central space is configured as a circle to warmly embrace the users of the space within a restful backdrop of lush garden and green wall. Areas can be open or segregated to suit a range of user groups and programs using curtains and glazed sliding doors for visual and acoustic privacy. Secure and monitored entry to the school is maintained with electronic locking and visual supervision from the school's administration team. New automated sliding doors are used at two secured entries.

The design intent is to provide a comfortable environment that uplifts the human spirit. This will be achieved with informal loose furnishings, raised ceilings, generous daylight provision and a place to access decent coffee and tea. The radiating timber strips on the ceilings connect with the perimeter

**Figure 1**

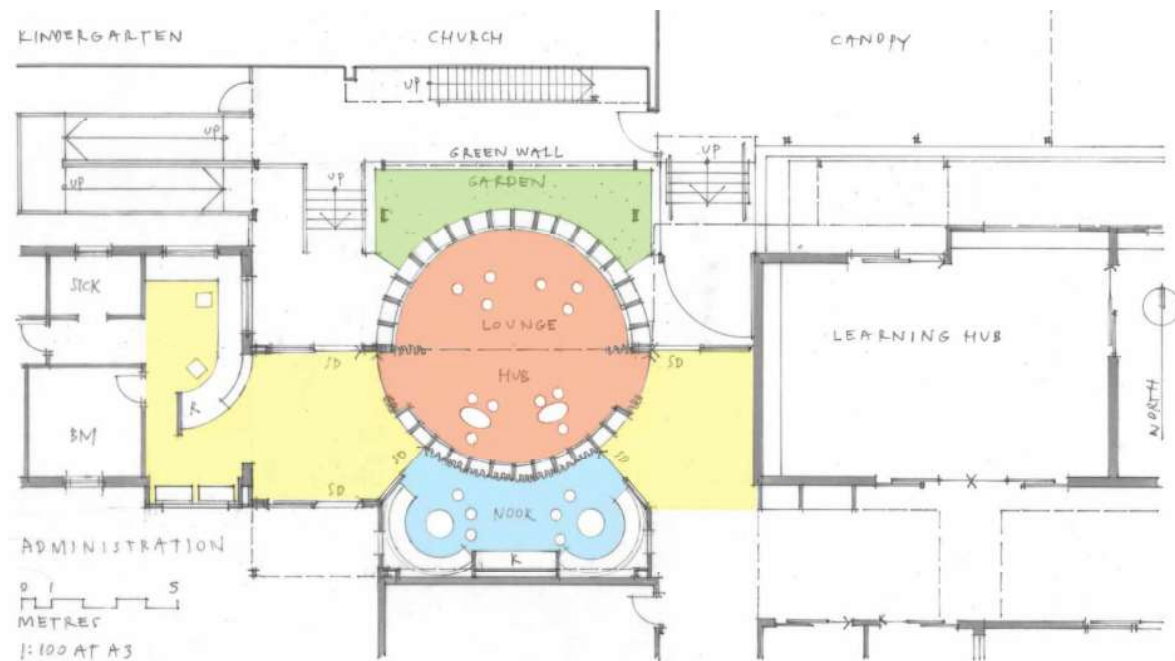
*Calvary Community Hub: Site Plan*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect

**Figure 2**

*Calvary Community Hub: Proposed Concept Design*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect

**Figure 3**

*Calvary Community Hub: Garden Forecourt*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect

**Figure 4**

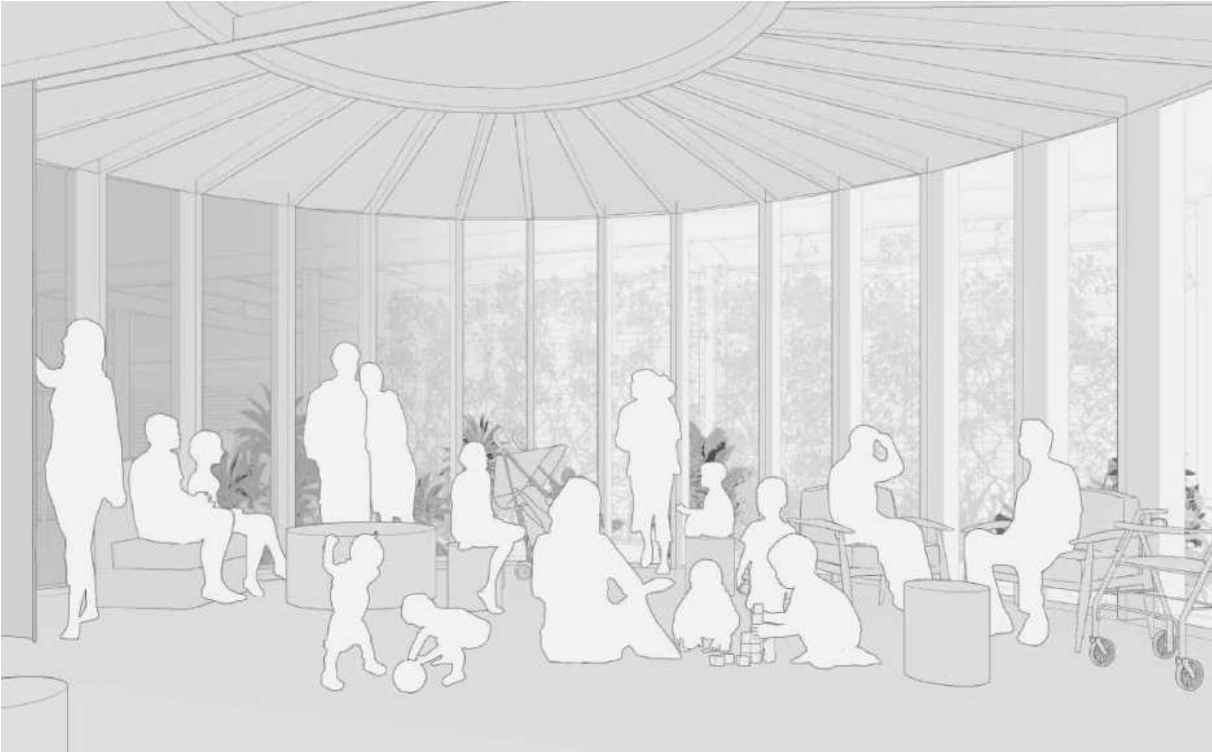
*Calvary Community Hub: West Entry View to Hub and Nook*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect

**Figure 5**

*Calvary Community Hub: Lounge View to Garden*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect

**Figure 6**

*Calvary Community Hub: Entry View to Hub and Lounge*



Source: Peter Moeck Architect



structural fins that define the circle reflecting a sunshine theme that represents hope for the future. This informal environment is visually and physically connected to the administration functions and set within a north facing garden setting. The Community Hub is strategically placed and accessible at the heart of the campus and the role of the Calvary Family Zone Connector will be placed front and centre.

### **The Challenges**

There are two challenges facing the development of the Family Zone at Calvary. The first challenge is that the co-located organisations are currently working autonomously with limited connectivity to each other. It is important to address this challenge because there are many opportunities to share and collaborate for community benefit. Evidence lends support to locating place-based initiatives in places already connected with the local community such as schools (Brettig, 2020). The co-located model can thrive and flourish in an arrangement where there are positive attitudes regarding community mission and the aspirations to uplift and bring stability to families in crisis and in need. This will also share the load and can reduce the financial and volunteer strain on the church as an autonomous service provider.

The second challenge is to develop co-ownership of the vision and approach. Whilst families have historically demonstrated reluctance to attend support evenings such as parenting sessions and information evenings, strategies that are being considered to develop co-ownership include the sharing of stories that demonstrate successful connection, cooperation and collaboration because 'word of mouth' referrals are a sustainable marketing strategy.

The next step is to secure funding from the SA Independent Schools Block Grant Authority to make the design concepts a reality. We are aiming to build in 2023.

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