



# It takes an island to raise a child

## An innovative, community-led design approach on the Southern Moreton Bay Islands

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands (SMBI) are a group of islands that sit about a 20-minute ferry ride off the coast of Redland Bay, Brisbane. The SMBI are home to a small community of approximately 750 families and about 10,000 residents. They enjoy a unique, secluded lifestyle that can't be found on the mainland.

The Islands' secluded lifestyle is also isolating – the only transport on or off the Islands is by ferry, barge or dingy. Separation from the mainland makes it challenging for the SMBI community to gain equitable access to all the health and social services available to their mainland counterparts.

The impact on SMBI children and families is particularly pronounced, with many children and families unable to access child health and social services. Residents report the journey to attend a single appointment on the mainland can take as much as a whole day. It is very costly and difficult for families to manage, with some having reported sleeping in their cars overnight because they couldn't get back home after appointments. Children and families residing on these islands are vulnerable, with child development issues and rates of domestic and family violence being some of the worst in south-east Queensland.<sup>1,2</sup>

Social and health funding tends to be focussed on the needs of the broader geographic catchment area of Redland Bay. Mainland models of care have failed to understand and cater to the unique cultural and geographical needs of the SMBI community. Funding support for the Islands is approached as an 'un-costed add-on', resulting in significant detrimental impact to the quality of health care and social services available to the community.

The community have reported they rarely feel consulted, do not feel heard and never feel part of the solution.

## Brisbane South PHN and SMBI Listeners Inc.

Brisbane South PHN has been working in partnership with SMBI Listeners Inc. and other key partners to develop the SMBI Community Impact Initiative. This initiative is designed to support a community driven, cross-sector, place-based approach to improve the health and wellbeing of children aged from birth to 8 years old.

SMBI Listeners Inc. are a group of people who are passionate about deep listening, ensuring the SMBI community have a voice, including how services are designed, delivered and experienced by children and families. They serve as a conduit between the community and health care and education system partners. Their responsibility is to support community services and stakeholders to understand SMBI's unique cultural and local context, and to work with system partners to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for the SMBI community. Their role is focussed on building trust and deeper working relationships between community and service partners due to long histories of failed service systems on SMBI and continued trends of disadvantage.

*"We are a group of people who represent the best of the SMBI community. We are creative, respectful and trustworthy. We are passionate about deep listening, helping others, and bringing a nuanced perspective to the table of decision makers."* – **Hilton Travis, President, SMBI Listeners Inc.**

 [SMBIListeners/](#)  [smbilisteners.org.au/](#)

## A new approach - setting the foundations

Brisbane South PHN and SMBI Listeners Inc. have been working with key community and system partners including Children's Health Queensland, Redland City Council and Education Queensland, to imagine a different way of working together, to collaborate with community, and re-orient their services to align and advance the goals of SMBI children and families. The four areas of focus are:

1. healthy, thriving children
2. healthy family relationships
3. a strong and connected community, and
4. wellbeing and recreational activities for school-aged children.

### Place-based innovation

*"What impresses me most about the SMBI initiative guided by the Brisbane South PHN is the maturity of the collective and approach to reflection and learning amongst the members. The SMBI Listeners Inc. are a crucial component to their success and it is what makes them unique as a place based collective. The commitment from all partners to work alongside community ensures they are genuinely responsive to the needs of the community. The Department of Education is a proud member of SMBI initiative and will continue to stay connected and committed to this initiative."* - **Darlene Arkininstall, Director Early Childhood, South East Region, Department of Education**

Brisbane South PHN have supported the SMBI Listeners Inc. by investing significant time and resources to build capability and create capacity to grow their presence on the Islands. Their intimate understanding of their own community and how best to engage and mobilise community has been instrumental in developing trust between system partners and the community. SMBI Listeners Inc. role has now expanded to convening a Community Governance group - consisting of community leaders, health providers, Education Queensland, Redland City Council and non-government sector leaders, to generate ideas to help improve health and social issues identified by the community. The successes of the approach can also be attributed largely to the mindsets of partners to think innovatively and support change in their own systems to do things differently.

*"The SMBI initiative is an exemplar of Government and community partnership at its best. As the Divisional Director of Child and Youth Community Health Services at Children's Health Queensland, I have witnessed the great opportunities that have been created through this initiative. This is a direct result of all partners thinking differently and longitudinally about delivering on real and lasting change for children and families in the Southern and Moreton Bay Islands."* - **Louise Van Every, Divisional Director, Children's Health Queensland**

### Transforming systems

SMBI Listeners Inc. play a lead role in connecting key partners to work together with the community while strengthening legitimacy and trust. For example, tele-health and digital equity are being developed in central community areas such as schools and other community spaces to alleviate basic access issues.

Both community and system partners are spanning beyond their own boundaries, share decision-making and capitalise on strengths in supporting change.

*"As a Clinical Nurse Consultant working in the Child Health Service, I cannot emphasise enough how valuable the SMBI initiative is. I feel like I am a part of a genuine partnership working toward a shared common goal to support SMBI children to thrive. It feels great! Thank you, SMBI initiative."* - **Tracey Button, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Children's Health Qld**

*"I am proud to be involved in a community driven initiative and remain optimistic and energised with every step of progress made."* - **Jayne Barnett, Principal, Russell Island State School**

### Learning circles and culture

*"We are inspired by the commitment shown by SMBI Listeners Inc. and the learning culture intentionally promoted and protected by community leaders and service providers. We look forward to continuing to contribute to enhancing the SMBI ecosystem - to deliver better outcomes for SMBI children and families."* - **Belinda Drew, Chief Executive Officer, Community Services Industry Alliance**

The initiative's collaborative approach has allowed for experimental solution design and the development of safe shared learning environments. This approach has opened pathways for community identified problems to be explored, ideas to be generated and potential solutions to be tested in real time where data is collected to indicate whether the changes were successful or need to be revised to achieve better health outcomes. As a result, a collaborative, innovative culture is growing between the community and system partners.



## Our progress

Then	Now
Longstanding playgroups engaging only part of the community.  Many families not obtaining support with their children's growth and development needs or being unable to talk with other parents about challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New options for parents and children addressing their needs and linked to school readiness. e.g. 2 Kindylineq programs, 3 Playgroups, new Russell Island Community and State school driven Mums and Bubs playgroup.</li><li>• Early Years Network to better support readiness for school and kindergarten uptake.</li></ul>
Families unaware that services, activities and events were available around the Islands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SMBI Listeners Inc. created a monthly newsletter which is sent to approximately 300 recipients and shared on social media.</li></ul>
Siloed Health Services difficult for families to navigate and find the right support at the right time.  Little SMBI child health and literacy with no remedial action plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community-driven child health and maternity spaces created with community input.</li><li>• Child health and development government services now collaborating with local state schools to support children preparing for Prep.</li><li>• Free local SMBI Child Health phone number for families to link directly to Child Health for any concerns.</li><li>• SMBI Birthday Club – age and stage child development information provided as part of a birthday card to all children and their families prior to school.</li></ul>

## Strengthening, advancing and protecting a new way of working

### Strengthening...

Brisbane South PHN has recently transitioned the coordination of the Community Governance Group to SMBI Listeners Inc. The Community Governance Group will continue to support and enable ideas to be generated and tested to help improve community identified issues, while Brisbane South PHN will continue to play a supporting role in the future.

SMBI Listeners Inc. is growing its reputation on the Islands as a neutral community-led entity. Their Facebook and social media engagement is extensive, reaching over 900 of the SMBI population (and growing). The intention is for SMBI Listeners Inc. to drive continued collaboration and innovation with partners over the next few years, and in partnership with community, transform health and wellbeing outcomes for SMBI children and their families.

*“I have lived on Macleay Island for 9 years and am raising my daughter here. Before the SMBI Community Impact Initiative started, there was a sense of helplessness and confusion as the issues many children and families face here are complex and can seem very overwhelming. While there were and still are individuals and groups working to support SMBI Children and Families, no one was bringing these people together around their common purposes. This is where I feel the strength of the SMBI Community Impact Initiative lies, through our ways of working and collaborative approaches.” Amy Fernando, Manager, SMBI Listeners Inc.*

### Advancing...

To build on this work, a partnership with the Yunus Centre, Griffith University is developing to support continuous learning locally and understand how the approach could provide learning for other contexts, informing future health care models in highly vulnerable communities.

The Yunus Centre, Griffith University, a leading body on design and innovation approaches nationally and internationally, has also invited the SMBI Listeners Inc. and partners to be part of its civic innovation research and development program. The research will help drive innovation in systems and health reform and support community-led action, increasing the likelihood of sustainable change.

*“The Yunus Centre is focussed on applied research, design, demonstration and development work – much of which has a place focus. We are pleased to play a partner role in the SMBI Community Impact initiative, where learning is woven into practice and experimentation.” – Professor Ingrid Burkett, Co-Director, The Yunus Centre, Griffith University*

### Protecting...

Strategic partners involved in this initiative include Community Services Industry Alliance, Redland City Council, Children's Health Queensland, Education Queensland and the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, as well as pro-bono support from philanthropic partners such as the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and The Dusseldorp Forum.

It is envisaged that part of Griffith University's role would be to lead this group of partners in progressing the SMBI Community Impact Initiative, and bring other perspectives to the initiative to help protect and grow it, and influence government policy and systems on how to best work with community to generate better health and social outcomes.



*“Council is delighted with the introduction of the Brisbane South PHN SMBI Community Impact Initiative. The Initiative has delivered a common community vision and enhanced sector collaboration within the early-years and child and family sectors. The establishment of SMBI Listeners Inc. has further embedded a community driven approach to tackling complex social challenges on SMBI. Council will continue to support this initiative with the view to establishing a sustainable commitment into the long-term benefit of the SMBI community.”*

**- Kelly Taylor, Strengthening Communities Manager, Redland City Council**

## Support us

*“The SMBI initiative has made an impressive start to responding to the needs of local children and families in one of Queensland’s most overlooked communities. Their work engaging local people in agreeing community aspirations, priorities and strategies has been outstanding and has created a very solid base from which to develop long term strategies for change. SMBI is ready to take the next steps on their journey.”*

**- Matthew Cox, Director, Cox & Collaborators**

Brisbane South PHN has been leading the SMBI Community Impact Initiative since 2018 and will assume a sponsorship role within the Strategic Partners Group. The SMBI Community Impact Initiative is at a stage where there is need for diversification of leadership. Brisbane South PHN will continue to support the provision of practical support and removal of barriers for families with children with complex health and developmental needs.

*“Brisbane South PHN are proud to support positive, sustainable shifts in the health and wellbeing of our communities. The SMBI community Impact Initiative is an excellent example of PHN driving social innovation – by drawing on the power of partnerships to support the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for SMBI children and families. We are committed to continuing to play a key foundational partner role as the initiative continues to grow and mature.”* – **Lucille Chalmers, Deputy CEO, Brisbane South PHN**

**To date, progress has only been made possible by numerous partners contributing and working together. We’ve been building our collective capability and strengthening the trust we have in each other – so the conditions for change are growing strong.**

**Looking forward, the initiative is seeking like-minded complementary partners who share a passion for driving positive change in vulnerable communities. We need diversified financial support, thought leadership and network support to continue to deliver a community-led approach to improve better health outcomes for children and families residing on the South Moreton Bay Islands.**

*“Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation is supportive of SMBI Listeners’ Inc. thoughtful approach to collaborative, grassroots, place-based organising. In navigating complex, siloed health and family service systems SMBI Listeners Inc. is committed to keeping the community’s voice at the centre of decisions about their needs, priorities and potential solutions.”* – **Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation**

1 For Macleay Island and surrounds, the Australian Early Development Census data that is a national indicator of child development vulnerability has reported over 41% of children being developmentally vulnerable in 1 or more domain since 2012. This is in comparison to the Redland mainland area which reports 22.7% of children.

2 On Russell Island, rates of breaches of DFVO have doubled from 137 per 100,000 people in Feb 2016 to 297 per 100,000 people in July 2021.

## This work is made possible through the collaboration and commitment of the following partners:

- Bay Islands Children’s Inclusion Association Inc.
- Bay Island Community Services Inc.
- BIMSARA – Bay Islands Multi Sport & Recreation Assn Inc.
- Benevolent Society
- Brisbane South PHN
- Centre Against Sexual Violence
- Centre for Women and Co.
- Children’s Health Queensland
- Community Services Industry Alliance
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- Families Australia
- First Five Forever
- HeadStart
- Macleay Island State School
- Metro South Health (Queensland Government)
- NBN – National Broadband Network
- Playgroup Queensland
- Queensland Government Department of Education
- Redland City Council
- Redlands Integrated Early Years Place
- Russell Island State School
- Safe Harbour Church
- Save the Children
- Sealink
- SMBI Listeners Inc.
- The Midnite Baker
- The Salvation Army
- Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation
- Wellways Australia
- Yunus Centre, Griffith University

**To speak with us about the initiative or learn more about opportunities to collaborate, please contact: Hilton: [President@SMBIListeners.org.au](mailto:President@SMBIListeners.org.au) or Craig: [ccunningham@bsphn.org.au](mailto:ccunningham@bsphn.org.au)**