

# Cultural Security Framework for Youth Detention in Western Australia



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# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia (WA) and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future. We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and recognise their enduring connection to land, waters, Culture, and community.

## Special Thanks

The Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia (CASWA) and the Department of Justice – Young People Directorate sincerely thank all the young people and staff at Banksia Hill Detention Centre (Banksia Hill) and Unit 18 at Casuarina Prison for sharing their stories, thoughts and aspirations for youth detention in WA. We are grateful for your courage and trust.

We would also like to thank all community members and experts in youth justice who have shaped the Cultural Safety Report and Framework through your engagement in completing a survey and attending the Looking Back, Moving Forward event on 7 August 2025. To Dr Jocelyn Jones, Prof Juli Coffin, A/Prof Robyn Williams, A/Prof Hannah McGlade, and Mr Toby Millar, we thank you for your expert guidance in working towards a more culturally secure youth justice system for our young people.

## Artists Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the artist, Nikkita Passmore, and the many young people from Banksia Hill who contributed to the artwork on the cover and throughout this document.

This artwork tells the story of the young people at Banksia Hill; it resembles where they are from and how where they are from holds their identity. Drawings of totems, animals, artifacts, and storytelling passed from their Elders provide them with strength and keep them grounded. The colours represent all shades of land from the north, east, south and west. While the drawings are from young people from different parts of WA, the whole artwork illustrates how through a shared journey they become one.

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# Cultural Security in Youth Detention in WA

## Commissioner Brad Royce and Chairperson Chris Bin Kali

As the Commissioner for Corrective Services and the Chairperson of the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia, we stand united in our commitment to the cultural security of young people in youth detention in WA.

We share the belief that Culture is innate to Aboriginal people, and it provides the life force and strength for young people as they journey from childhood to adulthood. For young people entering youth detention, Culture provides a compass for identity, connection and healing enhancing resilience and development.

We recognise our role in upholding cultural security for young people in youth detention in WA.

We will work alongside each other to ensure the detention environment is a place of restoration and healing; that youth detention staff are culturally informed and equipped to provide trauma-informed support for young people; and, that young people are empowered to embrace cultural identities and practices as a source of strength in their journey.

We will strive to ensure the connection between young people and their families and communities is maintained, enabling the strength of kin and Culture to keep young people safe; and that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other government and community services are involved in coordinated activities to assure a supported transition for young people back into the community.

We know there is much work to be done and trust to be built, but we commit to doing this in partnership. Together we will hold ourselves and youth detention in WA to the highest standard, driven by our mutual commitment to cultural security.



Chairperson Chris Bin Kali and Commissioner Brad Royce

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## Developing the Cultural Security Framework

The Department of Justice – Young People Directorate’s (Young People Directorate) Model of Care for Youth Detention recognises the importance of ensuring Aboriginal young people in Western Australian (WA) youth detention remain connected to Culture and are supported in ways that respect and uphold their cultural identity, and foster empowerment.

To meet the culturally secure intent of the Model of Care for Aboriginal young people in detention, the Young People Directorate commissioned CASWA to develop a Cultural Security Framework (framework) for WA Youth Detention. Working in respectful partnership, CASWA and the Young People Directorate have shared in the co-design of the framework to ensure there is a mutual commitment to its implementation across the WA youth detention estate.

Drawing on the strength of Aboriginal Culture, the aim of the framework is to ensure cultural security is embedded and upheld for Aboriginal young people across all areas of youth detention, supporting more therapeutic and culturally informed experiences for young people in their journey from admission to freedom.

In approaching this work, CASWA applied the Noongar Six Seasons methodology to clearly map out the different phases of work. Starting with Makuru, the project commenced from the stage of fertility, where ideas were seeded, stories were shared, and trust with young people at Banksia Hill and Unit 18 began to form. Following this was the stage of Djilba, a period of deep listening with youth detention centre staff where narratives and themes about the state of youth detention and opportunities for renewal were formed and developed. And finally, the period of Kambarang, a season of birth, allowed narratives and themes to be formalised and trialed with community members, youth justice experts and senior government officials.

The framework has intentionally been shaped by the voices of people deeply involved with and impacted by the WA youth detention system. Young people spoke about the importance of staying connected to family, community and Country, having access to cultural programs, feeling empowered to plan for their futures, and feeling respected and understood.

Staff shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for making the youth detention environment more culturally safe and therapeutic. They highlighted the need for ongoing cultural learning and immersion, better support for Aboriginal staff, and stronger partnerships with community.

Community members told us that Culture must be at the heart of any changes in youth detention. They emphasised the need for Aboriginal-led programs, stronger throughcare for young people, and genuine collaboration between government and community to support young people.

These voices have guided and informed the development of this framework so it reflects what is most important to those living, working and caring within WA’s youth detention system, and the communities connected to it.

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# Statement of Commitment

## Cultural Security – Recognition, Respect, Empowerment

The Department of Justice – Young People Directorate in partnership with the CASWA is committed to a youth justice system that is culturally secure, safe and responsive for Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities across the state.

We will work towards embedding cultural security, recognition, respect and empowerment across all youth detention policy, operations, and engagement. We recognise and commit to upholding:

- **Cultural Recognition:** acknowledging and valuing the diverse histories, Cultures, languages and identities of Aboriginal peoples, ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives, leadership and lived experiences inform our approaches.
- **Cultural Respect:** developing environments and services that honour traditions, beliefs, spirituality and ways of knowing, engaging with Aboriginal communities in ways that are respectful, inclusive and guided by cultural protocols.
- **Cultural Empowerment:** creating opportunities for Aboriginal leadership, capacity-building and working with communities to shape and deliver services and programs that reflect their needs and aspirations.

Through this commitment we accept that the legacy of colonisation has ongoing, significant impacts on the lives of Aboriginal young people and their families, and that the existing system compounds these impacts due to their inherently disempowering structures.

We will take practical steps to:

- eliminate institutional racism in youth detention.
- work to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in detention; and
- improve wellbeing and life outcomes for young people through culturally informed and community-connected services.

Our approach will strengthen connections to family, community and Country, build the cultural capability of our workforce, and ensure alignment with national and state priorities for Aboriginal justice and cultural security.

This is a shared journey. It is about walking together with Aboriginal communities, grounded in respect and trust, and creating the conditions where young people can maintain pride in Culture.

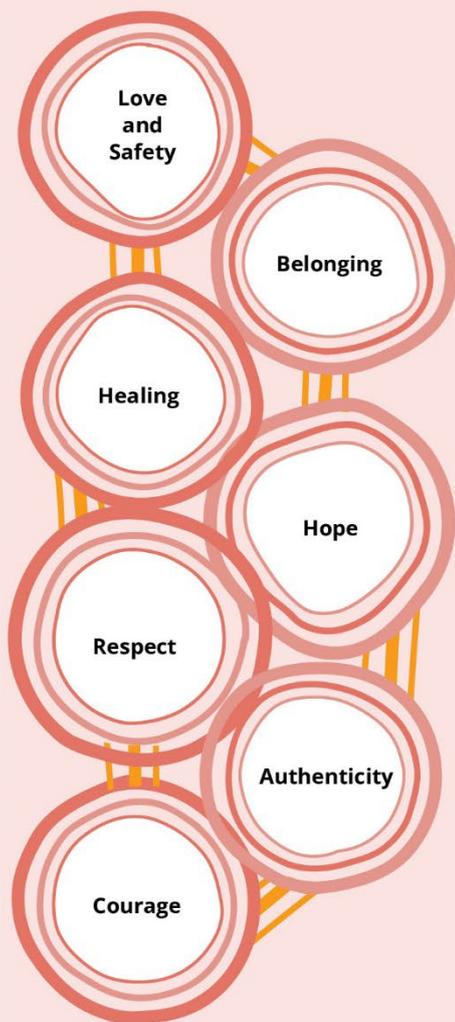
# Cultural Security Framework

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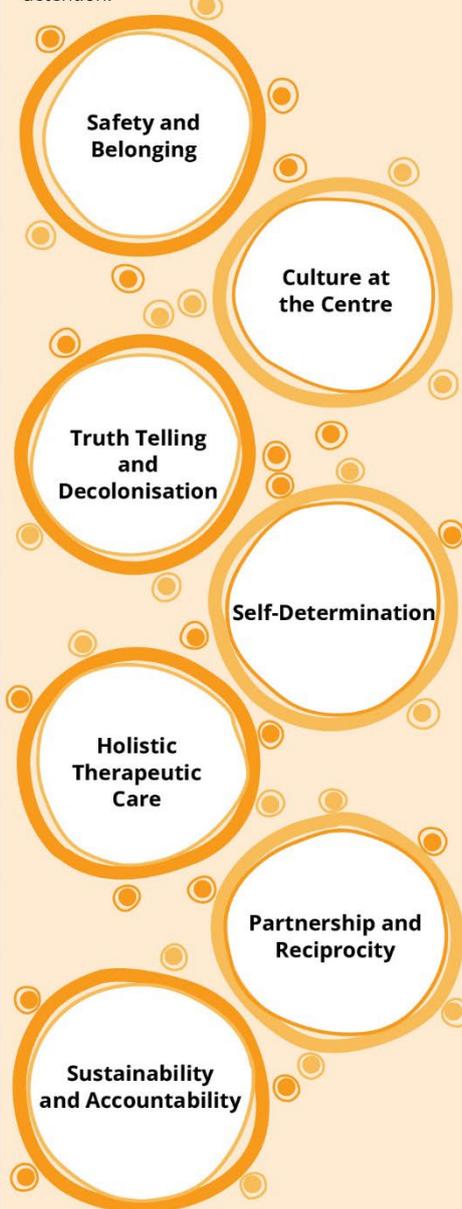
## Values

The Values underpinning the Cultural Security Framework define the behaviours, attitudes, and commitments that will bring the Framework to life. They aspire to shape how we walk alongside young people, families, communities, and each other as we commit to genuine cultural security within youth detention.



## Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles provide the foundation upon which the Cultural Security Framework is built. They represent the beliefs, values, and ways of working that must underpin every action, decision, and relationship within youth detention.



## Cultural Security Priorities

The Cultural Security Priorities translate principles and values into action and form the main component of the Cultural Safety Framework. They reflect the key themes from the consultations through which young people, staff, community members and experts identified there being the most opportunity for achieving cultural security in youth detention. These priorities provide the blueprint for reform and clearly detail required actions.



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# Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles provide the foundation upon which the framework is built. They represent the beliefs, values, and ways of working that must underpin every action, decision, and relationship within youth detention.

With everyone's buy-in and commitment, the principles ensure that Culture remains at the centre of all areas of youth detention - shaping how young people are supported, how staff engage, and how systems are designed, integrated and delivered.

Genuine adherence to the framework's Guiding Principles is essential for the transformational potential of the framework to be achieved.

## 1. Safety and Belonging

Young people must feel safe through the creation of environments and relationships which foster trust and protection. Throughout their journey, the identity and self-worth of young people must be maintained and strengthened.

## 2. Culture at the Centre

Culture, language, lore, and connection to Country are the foundation for spiritual wellbeing for Aboriginal people. Enabling young people to live their Culture through story, song, and dance, and share intergenerational knowledge with Elders will ensure Culture is protected and supports their journey.

## 3. Truth Telling and Decolonisation

Recognising and addressing the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma through truth-telling, confronting racism, and honouring Aboriginal-led systems is fundamental to support the young person's healing journey.

## 4. Self-Determination

Achieving cultural security requires a commitment to supporting Aboriginal self-determination and prioritising Aboriginal-led decision making and governance in all matters relating to young people in detention.

## 5. Holistic Therapeutic Care

Aboriginal wellbeing is understood as a holistic concept that connects spiritual, cultural, emotional, mental and physical aspects of a person and their community. Therapeutic, trauma informed care, grounded in healing and rehabilitation are essential for supporting young people in detention.

## 6. Partnership and Reciprocity

Cultural security within youth detention requires genuine, two-way relationships with young people, families, communities, Elders, and ACCOs. Genuine partnerships are everybody's responsibility to drive and uphold.

## 7. Sustainability and Accountability

Supporting a culturally secure youth detention system requires a long-term and transparent commitment to young people and community which is honest, accountable and responsive.

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# Values

The Values underpinning the framework define the behaviours, attitudes, and commitments that will bring the framework to life. They aspire to shape how we walk alongside young people, families, communities, and each other as we commit to genuine cultural security within youth detention.

They guide decision-making, strengthen accountability, and ensure that every interaction within youth detention reflects respect, authenticity, and cultural integrity. By living these values every day, we create an environment where young people feel seen, safe, and supported to heal.

## 1. Love and Safety

- Showing care and appreciation for every individual young person
- Creating safe spaces where people can dream and grow
- Nurturing connections with and between young people, families, staff, and Elders

## 2. Belonging

- Strengthening identity through relationships, and connection to kin and community

## 3. Healing

- Honouring Culture, Country, Elders, and each other
- Restoring balance for individuals, families, and communities

## 4. Hope

- Recognising achievements
- Fostering potential
- Believing in positive futures

## 5. Respect

- Recognising individuals
- Supporting identity
- Calling out stereotypes, biases and racism
- Giving back in equal measure to what is taken or received

## 6. Authenticity

- Acting with integrity, honesty, and cultural credibility
- Continuous learning, humility, self-reflection and personal accountability

## 7. Courage

- Speaking truth
- Challenging injustice
- Leading change

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# Cultural Security Priorities

The Cultural Security Priorities translate principles and values into action and form the main component of the framework. They reflect the key themes from the consultations through which young people, staff, community members and experts identified there being the most opportunity for achieving cultural security in youth detention. These priorities provide the blueprint for reform and clearly detail required actions.

## 1. Cultural Empowerment for Young People

Cultural empowerment for young Aboriginal people means creating an environment where they are supported and grounded in their cultural identity, family, kin, and community. These connections link them to both their traditional and modern sense of belonging. It draws on the cultural knowledge, traditions and strengths passed down by ancestors, Elders, and families, helping young people stand strong in who they are, proud of their language, stories and identity.

This cultural foundation is a guide for young people as they move through the Western Australian youth justice system, both in custody and in the community. It helps them understand their experiences and gives them strength to deal with the challenges they may face in youth detention. Cultural empowerment supports their voices to be heard, and for their cultural knowledge and lived experiences to shape their healing, learning, recovery and decisions.

A strong cultural base also helps build resilience as they grow and nurtures belonging, hope, growth and belief in a better future. It strengthens their relationships with staff and support services in youth detention, and their family and community, creating a network of safety around them. Being raised as an Aboriginal young person is a unique strength as Culture is a source of stability, identity, empowerment and resilience.

**Goal:** Strengthen identity, voice, and self-determination for Aboriginal young people in detention.

### Proposed Actions:

- Conduct cultural mapping at admission to record each young person's Country, language, kinship, and connections.
- Ensure personal cultural identities guide case management, programs, and education goals.
- Embed daily cultural activities such as yarning circles, storytelling, art, dance, and music led by Elders and Aboriginal Youth Support Officers (AYSOs).
- Establish a Young People's Cultural Advisory Group to ensure Aboriginal youth voices shape programs and decision-making.
- Facilitate youth-led cultural projects that promote pride and leadership (e.g., artwork, community radio, or cultural events).
- Partner with ACCOs to deliver cultural mentoring and support ongoing connection to Country and community.
- Celebrate cultural milestones and achievements through community events and ceremonies.

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## 2. Positive Pathways from Admission to Freedom

The young people involved in the development of this framework described their time in detention as a journey from admission to freedom. This journey takes many different directions and is influenced by connection to Culture, family, community, language and Country. Freedom is not the last step of the journey; instead it is an ongoing period of growth and development which starts by leaving detention with a clear throughcare plan to support transition back into community.

**Goal:** Ensure every young person's journey, from admission to freedom, is trauma-informed, culturally grounded, healing-centred, cohesive and seamless.

### Proposed Actions:

- Redesign admission processes to be trauma-informed, welcoming, and supported by Aboriginal staff and Elders who can provide cultural grounding and immediate emotional support.
- Ensure all communication is respectful and fosters trusting, non-threatening relationships.
- Embed a cultural orientation within the first 24 hours of entry, ensuring therapeutic care is provided consistently for the duration of the young person's stay. This may include acknowledging Country, building an understanding of the young person's family, community and Country connections, using a cultural lens to describe the facility and its routines, and introducing the young person to Aboriginal staff.
- Develop individual case plans that prioritise Culture, identity, and connection to family and Country from the outset, ensuring all relevant units can ensure consistent implementation of the plan with the young person.
- Support young people to actively participate in case plan decision making.
- Embed therapeutic care processes and environments by establishing daily routines that support relationship building and education outcomes, e.g. sharing meals, creating home-like routines, and exercising before school.
- Begin throughcare planning at admission with the support of Aboriginal mentors and the engagement of ACCOs to ensure culturally appropriate support continues seamlessly post-release.
- Expand throughcare care support timeframes to be determined on a case-by case basis.
- Integrate restorative justice approaches guided by Elders to support accountability and reconciliation before reintegration.

## 3. Supporting Connection to Families, Communities and Country

Connection to families, communities and Country is intrinsic to Aboriginal identity. Cultural Security is predicated on the need for young people to maintain these connections, while supporting healing for their families and communities also.

**Goal:** Maintain and strengthen cultural, emotional, and spiritual connection to kin, community, and Country to support healing and growth.

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### **Proposed Actions:**

- Ensure an acknowledgement of Traditional Owners is made visible to everyone entering youth detention facilities.
- Establish culturally safe family visitation areas with privacy, comfort, and reduced security barriers.
- Consider practical options to support regional families to visit young people in detention.
- Simplify visitation and contact processes, reducing scrutiny and ensuring trauma-informed, family-led engagement.
- Expand virtual connection options for young people off-Country to stay in contact with family and cultural mentors.
- Partner with ACCOs and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) to map family and community connections for young people and integrate these into case plans.
- Enable regular visits by community Elders and mentors from a young person's region, particularly when they are far from home.
- Embed hands-on, community informed learning (e.g. gardening, bush tucker cooking, cultural maintenance) as part of education and wellbeing programs, encompassing traditional practices for young people off-Country.

## **4. Aboriginal Leadership and Governance**

Cultural security does not exist without Aboriginal engagement and decision making. Particularly in youth detention, where the level of access to young people is heavily restricted, there is an essential need for Aboriginal leadership and cultural governance to support and guide the healing journey.

**Goal:** Embed Aboriginal authority, decision-making, and accountability at every level of youth detention.

### **Proposed Actions:**

- Establish an Elder-led Cultural Governance Group to work directly with Young People Directorate senior executives, oversee cultural integrity, advise on policy, and evaluate outcomes.
- Develop a statewide Elder Directory to support engagement of Elders from across the regions and ensure respected Elders are involved in providing cultural support to young people off-Country.
- Consider the establishment of Aboriginal Practice Leader positions across units and services to guide culturally informed practice.
- Create formal Aboriginal representation within key decision-making and review processes (e.g. the At-Risk Management System (ARMS), case conferences, program design).
- Support regular Aboriginal workforce gatherings for cultural supervision, planning, and community-building.
- Establish principles for Aboriginal data integrity and ensure young people, their families and communities have a voice in how data is collected, interpreted, and shared.
- Ensure Cultural Security performance reporting to the community, demonstrating accountability and transparency.

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## 5. Culturally Responsive Systems, Services and Spaces

Transformation across the service system and environment is required to support the achievement of cultural security in youth detention. Traditionally rigid, Western-centric methods for implementing legislative protocols and delivering services must undergo significant reforms to support culturally secure ways of working.

**Goal:** Design and deliver systems and environments that uphold cultural identity, dignity, and healing and foster restorative therapeutic outcomes for young people.

### Proposed Actions:

- Embed Cultural Security principles into all policies, procedures, and evaluation frameworks and monitor compliance.
- Develop standardised cultural safety protocols across Banksia Hill and Unit 18 to ensure consistency.
- Explore options to align Justice, Health, Education, and Child Protection agency action to enable shared, culturally informed case planning.
- Enhance the Total Offender Management Solution (TOMS) to record Country, language, and family information for improved cultural planning.
- Establish integrated care models involving ACCOs to provide holistic, on-Country support.
- Redesign the physical environment considering visual, sensory and practical design elements, including uniforms, using art, language, gardens, and healing spaces to reflect Aboriginal Culture, and promote calm, belonging, and safety.
- Redesign the Intensive Support Unit (ISU) as a short-term therapeutic space with consistent, culturally trained staff.
- Preserve and formally recognise the Hill as a cultural and healing site within detention.
- Use non-invasive technology for monitoring safety.
- Create therapeutic, sensory, and culturally reflective spaces for yarning, education, and quiet reflection.

## 6. Culturally Capable Workforce

With the engagement of over 250 staff in consultations to develop the framework, there is clear support for new ways of working to support better outcomes for Aboriginal young people in youth detention. Supporting the cultural capability of the youth detention workforce, and investing in them as agents of change, is an essential step forward to cultural security.

**Goal:** Build and sustain a workforce that is capable of and committed to cultural humility, relational practice, and healing-centred care.

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## Proposed Actions:

- Make cultural capability and trauma-informed training mandatory for all staff, refreshed annually and delivered by Aboriginal trainers.
- Introduce cultural supervision, peer reflection, and wellbeing support as standard practice.
- Prioritise values-based recruitment focused on empathy, integrity, and respect for Aboriginal Culture.
- Establish clear career pathways for Aboriginal staff, including leadership development opportunities, quarantined 50D positions, traineeships, and mentoring.
- Increase Aboriginal staffing in key areas, including AYSOs, education, health, and wellbeing, ensuring coverage across all shifts.
- Create safe, culturally affirming workspaces and peer networks for Aboriginal staff.
- In alignment with Child Safe regulatory measures, ensure employment processes don't unnecessarily prevent people with lived experience from joining the workforce.
- Recognise and highlight the efforts of staff who demonstrate cultural safety, consistency, and relational excellence.
- Facilitate Elder and community mentorship within workforce development to strengthen cultural learning.

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## What Success Will Look Like

Cultural Security across Youth Detention in WA will be transformative for the young people exiting the system with a renewed sense of hope and purpose, for their families and communities standing ready to support them in their next steps, and for staff who invest so much time and effort into supporting better outcomes for the young people in their care.

A culturally secure system will be one where Aboriginal young people are safe, valued, and connected to their identity, where Culture is embedded in everyday practice, and where healing is the focus of care.

Indicators of success include:

- Culture is central to all decisions, practices, and environments, from admission to throughcare, reflecting a system that recognises and enables Culture as a protective factor and source of strength.
- Cultural security integrated into the young person's journey from admission to freedom and throughcare.
- Young people feel safe, respected, and empowered, with increased trust in staff, stronger cultural identity, and improved wellbeing and behavioural outcomes.
- Families and communities are active partners in the care and rehabilitation of their young people, with ongoing connection to Country and cultural continuity maintained throughout detention and reintegration.
- Elders and Aboriginal leadership guide governance and practice, ensuring decisions are made with cultural authority and accountability to community.
- A statewide pool of Elders is established to provide cultural support to young people in detention.
- Comprehensive Aboriginal workforce across custodial and community areas (inc. with external stakeholders).
- Strong and consistent Aboriginal workforce inclusive of identified positions across levels and teams.
- SEWB integrated into service programming and delivery (psychology services/cultural healing practices).
- Statewide network of funded ACCOs to support young people exiting youth detention.
- Recidivism rates decline, and transitions from detention to community are safe, stable, and supported by strong relationships and opportunity.

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## Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

The framework is intended to be a live document that will be implemented throughout 2026 to test and refine its impact for developing cultural security in Banksia Hill and Unit 18.

Continuing themes from the Noongar Six Seasons, the framework will pass through phases of: Birak – the season of the young – where it will be tested and trialed; Bunuru – the season of adolescence – where it will be refined; and, Djeran – the season of adulthood – where it will be fully developed.

The framework will be implemented through clear action plans, with regular monitoring and evaluation to measure progress and adapt to emerging needs.

Monitoring and evaluation will be guided by Aboriginal cultural governance, ensuring accountability for young people, families, and communities.

Success will be monitored through both quantitative indicators and qualitative, culturally grounded measures that reflect healing, connection, and empowerment. Monitoring success will not only be about numbers or targets, but about how young people, families, and staff experience change - how safety, Culture, and belonging are lived each day within youth detention.

Evaluation must be ongoing and focused on creating a system that continues to learn and evolve.

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## Cultural Security Framework Voices of Hope

*“My Nan still thinks I’m a good kid, even in here”*

*“We need more Elders here to keep us in line”*

*“We need more Aboriginal people working here so we feel safe”*

*“You can see their ancestors with them when the young people dance”*

*“This isn’t your destination, this is part of your journey”*

*“Intergenerational healing means interrupting cycles”*

*“Genuine listening = genuine advocacy”*

*“Walking with young people”*

*“Healed people heal people, hurt people hurt people”*

*“Story, song, dance, heart”*

*“Therapeutic responses = community safety; Tough on crime fails everyone”*

*“Mend Aboriginal wounds with Aboriginal medicine”*

*“Build strong minds through cultural pathways”*

*“Speak the same emotional language – I see you, I am you”*

*“Love comes from safety”*

*“Empower youth as agents of change, not passive “clients””*

*“Design for dignity, not detention”*