

Ngurra Buru (Night Space) Project

Impact Evaluation

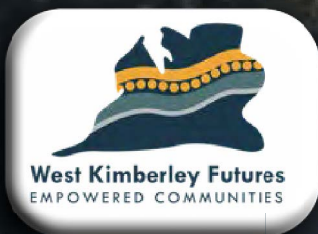
July 2026



Collaboration among Ngurra Buru, Western Australian Police Youth Policing Team, Community Liaison Officers and the Shire of Broome.

Photo: Broome Recreation & Aquatic Centre (BRAC) during Saturday night basketball session

This report was written by Dr Abby-Rose Cox and Dr Ee Pin Chang for the impact evaluation of the Ngurra Buru (Night Space) pilot. Thank you to the many people who provided valuable input, including members of the design committee, staff and young people who access Ngurra Buru (Night Space).







Acknowledgement

This work was completed on Yawuru and Djugun land, within the broader Kimberley region with its many diverse Aboriginal cultures and Countries. We give respect to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the ongoing connection of Aboriginal people with their lands and waters.

This report was written by Dr Abby-Rose Cox and Dr Ee Pin Chang for the impact evaluation of the Ngurra Buru (Night Space) pilot. Thank you to the many people who provided valuable input, including members of the design committee, staff and young people who access Ngurra Buru (Night Space).

This report was prepared by:

Dr Abby-Rose Cox¹ and Dr Ee Pin Chang^{2,3}

Affiliations:

1. Kimberley Aboriginal Health and Research Alliance
2. Kwop Boorn Djenara, University of Western Australia
3. University of Melbourne

Suggested citation:

Cox, A.R. & Chang, E.P. 2026. Impact Evaluation of Ngurra Buru (Night Space) Project. Western Australian Department of Justice.



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	4
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project	5
Self-determination and empowerment	5
Social and emotional wellbeing framework	6
Trauma-informed model of care	7
Characteristics of at-risk young people	8
Cultural safety	9
Justification	10
Financial	10
Non-financial	10
Closing the Gap	11
Ngurra Buru	11
Method	13
Ethics	13
Settings	13
Data analysis	14
Findings	15
Survey with young people	15
Services or support received	15
Cultural safety	16
Features of cultural safety	16
Safety of centre and transport	16
Safety network-family	17
Safety network-services and supports	17
Stakeholder and staff interviews	18
Aboriginal people have the solutions to what works for Aboriginal people	18
Genuine co-design and collaboration	18
Cultural safety	19

Capacity building of individuals and the sector	20
Vision, passion and commitment.....	20
Inter-sectoral collaboration and referral pathways.....	21
Trauma-informed care.....	22
Impact	22
Interactions and services.....	22
Reduced crime rates.....	24
Holiday slam dunk and laser tag.....	26
Recognition by peer services	28
Closing the Gap.....	28
Strengths of Ngurra Buru	28
Areas for improvement.....	29
Recommendations.....	29
Support Aboriginal leadership and governance.....	29
Inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration	29
Increase capacity of Ngurra Buru.....	30
Capacity building of staff and young people	30
Funding	31
Justice reinvestment.....	31
Limitations	32
Conclusion	32
References	34

Glossary of Terms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ATSISPEP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project
CPFS	Child Protection and Family Support
CtG	Closing the Gap
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
HYPE	Helping Young People Engage
KAHRA	Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance
KJJS	Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy
KRCIC	Kullarri Regional Communities Indigenous Corporation
NB	Ngurra Buru (Night space)
PCYC	Police & Community Youth Centres
SEWB	Social and emotional wellbeing
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WA	Western Australia
EC-WEST	West Kimberley Futures-Empowered Communities Ltd



Executive Summary

This impact evaluation of the Ngurra Buru (Night Space) project is to determine the impact, feasibility and sustainability of the pilot and its potential to positively benefit street-present young people in Broome and the community. Ngurra Buru was conceptualised by the Broome community, informed by extensive community consultations; co-design was led by West Kimberley Futures-Empowered Communities Ltd (EC-West) alongside multiple stakeholders. It has been implemented through Kullarri Regional Communities Indigenous Corporation (KRCIC), as part of the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy[1] (KJJS).

The decade old findings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project[2] (ATSISPEP) provided a set of principles for what works for Aboriginal people. These principles include Indigenous leadership and governance, self-determination and the importance of culture, which were clearly demonstrated in the design, development and operation of Ngurra Buru.

Numerous initiatives have demonstrated the effectiveness of Aboriginal-led and place-based efforts designed to improve outcomes for at-risk young people. These include the justice reinvestment initiative, the Maranguka project in Bourke, New South Wales, and the youth diversionary initiative, Gebie Gang on Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory. The success factors of these initiatives exemplify the principles articulated in the ATSISPEP.

The ATSISPEP also recommends a) a trauma-informed model of care that adopts a strengths-based and holistic concept of health and wellbeing, and b) improving the social determinants of health, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, and address young people's involvement in the justice system. Initiatives such as Ngurra Buru which provide a safe space and food have the power to change the life trajectory of young people.

[1] <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-justice/kimberley-juvenile-justice-strategy>

[2] [https://www.uwa.edu.au/about/-/media/project/uwa/uwa/about/docs/atsispep/atsispep-report-final-web-\(1\).pdf](https://www.uwa.edu.au/about/-/media/project/uwa/uwa/about/docs/atsispep/atsispep-report-final-web-(1).pdf)





This impact evaluation included valuable input from the young people who engage with Ngurra Buru, staff and stakeholders. Over 50% of young people surveyed received at least four of the services provided. Every young person felt welcomed and accepted and attributed it to the staff and amenities. Ngurra Buru employs 77% Aboriginal staff from the local community which enhances cultural safety for young people. The stakeholder and staff interviews revealed themes of genuine co-design and collaboration, cultural safety, capacity building of individuals and the sector, vision, passion and commitment, and intersectoral collaboration and referral pathways.

The impact of Ngurra Buru included a) nomination for an achievement award, b) significant increases in the number of interactions with young people, c) the number of next day follow-up, d) the number of meals served, and e) also supporting 17 young people to reengage with the education system.

Importantly, there has been an 8% (n=224) decrease in crime rates for the financial year 2024/25 in the suburbs of Broome, Cable Beach and Djugun combined. This is directly attributed to the decline in burglaries by 34% across these three suburbs, with the suburb of Broome recording the largest decline of 42% (n=193) from the previous financial year.

A justice reinvestment approach through diversionary programs and efforts to address street-present Aboriginal young people in Broome will support community safety while potentially changing the life trajectory of a young person. A holistic and whole-of-government systems approach to addressing the social determinants of health, such as initiatives similar to Ngurra Buru, will contribute to a) improving the outcomes of Aboriginal people, and b) fulfilling Western Australia State Government's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CtG).





Within Western Australia (WA), the term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of WA. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander may be referred to in the national context and Indigenous may be referred to in the international context. No disrespect is intended to our Torres Strait Islander colleagues and community.

*We cannot always build the future for our youth, but
we can build our youth for the future*

– Franklin D. Roosevelt



Introduction

This impact evaluation of the Ngurra Buru project has been prepared in collaboration with the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance (KAHRA) team and an external evaluator from the University of Melbourne to understand Broome's newly implemented pilot, operationalised by Kullarri Regional Communities Indigenous Corporation (KRCIC). The objective of the evaluation was to determine the impact, feasibility and sustainability of the pilot and its potential to positively benefit street-present young people in Broome and the wider community.

Broome is situated within the Kimberley region of WA, with a population of over 35,000, of which 41% are Aboriginal people (ABS, 2021). WA has the highest Aboriginal imprisonment rate of 4,623 per 100,000 adult Aboriginal population for the March quarter, 2025 (ABS, 2025). The Kimberley region recorded the second highest suicide rate of 32.9 per 100,000 people with 59 suicide deaths in the period 2019-2023 (AIHW, 2025; McPhee et al., 2022).

Ngurra Buru was conceptualised by the Broome community, informed by extensive community consultations, and co-designed with Empowered Young Leaders, Broome Regional Youth and Families Council, Department of Justice, WA Police Force, Department of Communities, Department of Local Government Sport and Cultural Industries, Mental Health Commission, and the Shire of Broome. It is a culturally safe and trauma-informed space at night for street-present young people aged 10 to 17 years and commenced operations in May 2024 under the WA Government's Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy (KAHRA, 2024).

An evaluation of Ngurra Buru requires an understanding of some of the policies and projects impacting Aboriginal young people across the nation to provide the context of how this pilot fits into these national strategies. At the national level, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031[3] aims to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through culturally safe care and community-led initiatives with a focus on health equity and human rights; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP; Dudgeon et al., 2016) also articulated a set of principles for what works for Aboriginal people. At a state level, it includes projects underpinned by principles of self-determination and empowerment such as the Kimberley Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program[4] (Carlin et al., 2020), the Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program (Dudgeon et al., 2024), and the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (Gee et al., 2014), which embed trauma-informed care and cultural safety.

[3] <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-plan-2021-2031?language=en>

[4] <https://kams.org.au/training-employment/kimberley-empowerment-healing-and-leadership-program/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project

It has been almost 10 years since the findings of the ATSIPEP (Dudgeon et al., 2016) reported a set of principles for what works for Aboriginal people. These include Indigenous leadership and governance, self-determination and the importance of culture. The ATSIPEP has since provided a national blueprint for policies and funding efforts to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.

While the ATSIPEP recommendations relate to Aboriginal suicide prevention initiatives, the principles are just as relevant for initiatives designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people including the (impact evaluation of) Ngurra Buru.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is central to effective suicide prevention."

- Dudgeon et al., 2016 (ATSIPEP Final Report)

Self-determination and empowerment

Numerous initiatives have demonstrated the effectiveness of Aboriginal-led and place-based efforts designed to improve outcomes for at-risk young people. These include the justice reinvestment initiative, the Maranguka project in Bourke, New South Wales (KPMG, 2018) and the community-led youth diversionary justice initiative, the Gebie Gang on remote Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory (media release, 2022[5]). Data demonstrating over 30% retention rate for year 12 students and a decrease in the number of juvenile charges in Bourke, and police data reporting a 95% decline in youth crime on Groote Eylandt are just two great examples of these initiatives.

The success factors of these initiatives exemplify the principles clearly articulated in the ATSIPEP: the initiative was strengths-based, preventative and overseen by Traditional Owners. It included diversionary programs and supporting young people disengaged from education or employment. Once with an imprisonment rate up to 8 times higher than the Northern Territory, the turnaround in Groote Eylandt can be attributed to the landmark 2018 Agreement (Northern Territory Government, 2018[6]) which returned control over housing, education, economic development, health, local government and law and justice back to Community.

This whole of government and systems approach to address youth crime aligns with the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department's commitment of \$69 million over four years to justice reinvestment. Justice reinvestment diverts funds away from costly yet ineffective strategies such as building prisons and imposing harsher punishments and punitive responses. Such responses penalise the marginalised, especially Aboriginal young people living in remote areas such as Broome. This is the basis for the impact evaluation of the Ngurra Buru project. The Ngurra Buru project aligns with the justice reinvestment concept given it was community-led, with local Aboriginal people making up the majority of the Design Committee.

[5] Community-led youth justice initiatives deliver 95 per cent decline in crime and offending, media release November 21, 2022, <https://smarterjustice.org.au/community-led-youth-justice/>

[6] Groote Archipelago Local Decision-Making Agreement, Northern Territory Government, 2018, <https://ldm.nt.gov.au/regions/east-arnhem>

Social and emotional wellbeing framework

Improving health outcomes of Aboriginal people requires an understanding of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) framework, a strengths-based and holistic concept of health and wellbeing widely accepted by Aboriginal people. The SEWB framework recognises the historical, political, cultural and social determinants of health of Aboriginal people and is rooted in connections to culture, family, community and Country (Gee et al., 2014), within the context of ongoing impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

This concept of health differs from the more medicalised, Western and deficits-based model of health. The SEWB framework underpins the development and implementation of Ngurra Buru. For example, connection to family was the fundamental principle of the service, and staff were equipped to assist young people with connection to mind, body and emotions through trauma-informed training. Cultural connections through Aboriginal artworks throughout the centre manned by mainly Aboriginal staff demonstrates that the SEWB framework has been instrumental in developing the pilot project through an Aboriginal lens.

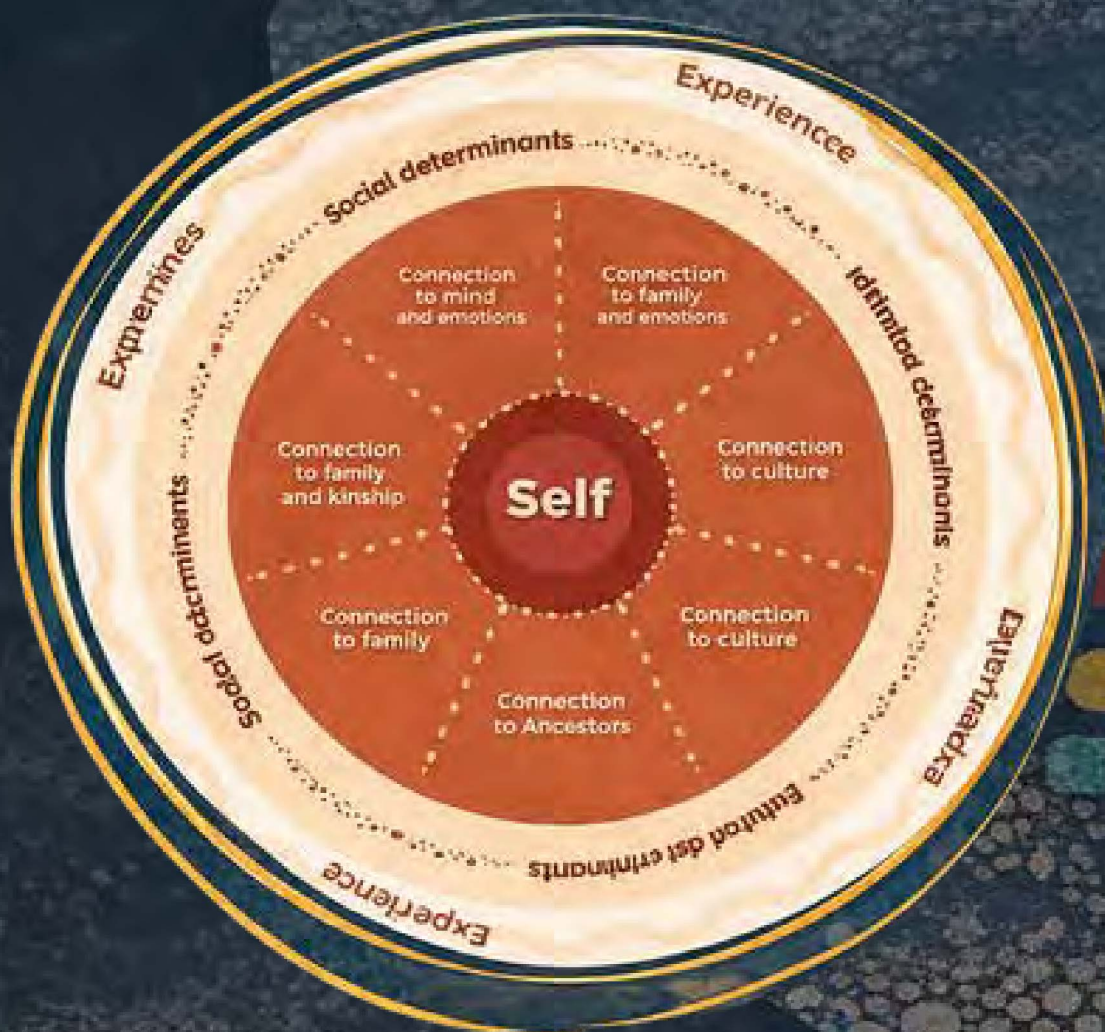


Figure 1. Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model (adapted from Gee et al, 2014)

Trauma-informed model of care

Trauma-informed care is a strengths-based model of care that acknowledges the continuing impacts of trauma (Dudgeon et al., 2016). A trauma-informed model of care that adopts a holistic approach to supporting a person, with the understanding of the SEWB framework as the concept of health and wellbeing is one of the ATSISEEP recommendations. It also recognises that the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the pervasiveness of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal people (Atkinson et al., 2010) perpetuates inequities across health, education, employment, incarceration and suicide. The Ngurra Buru staff were encouraged to undertake trauma-informed training whilst being employed at KRCIC. A total of 10 staff have completed trauma-informed training: six staff completed it at North Regional Technical and Further Education (TAFE), three staff had completed it in their other employment and one staff member had completed a psychology degree which provided trauma-informed training.



Image: Young people at the Ngurra Buru Centre

Characteristics of at-risk young people

Aboriginal people account for under 4% of the population in WA, yet account for over 40% of the adult prison population (ABS, 2024). It is not surprising then that approximately 19% of Aboriginal children up to age 17 years have experienced maternal imprisonment, which is 27 times that of non-Aboriginal children (Dowell et al., 2017). This has tremendous repercussions on children as mothers are often the primary caregiver. In Aboriginal communities, the caregiving responsibilities of women often extend beyond the family, to kinship and communities. Importantly, children of incarcerated parents experience poor health outcomes from birth, including premature births and low birth weight, and vulnerability for poor development across numerous domains including social, emotional, physical, cognitive and communication (Bell et al., 2018), which have lifelong impacts. Adopting a trauma-informed approach will better position organisations and programs to provide effective and optimal support to create a safe and caring environment for young people; this will reduce their street presence especially at night and potential consequent interactions with police.

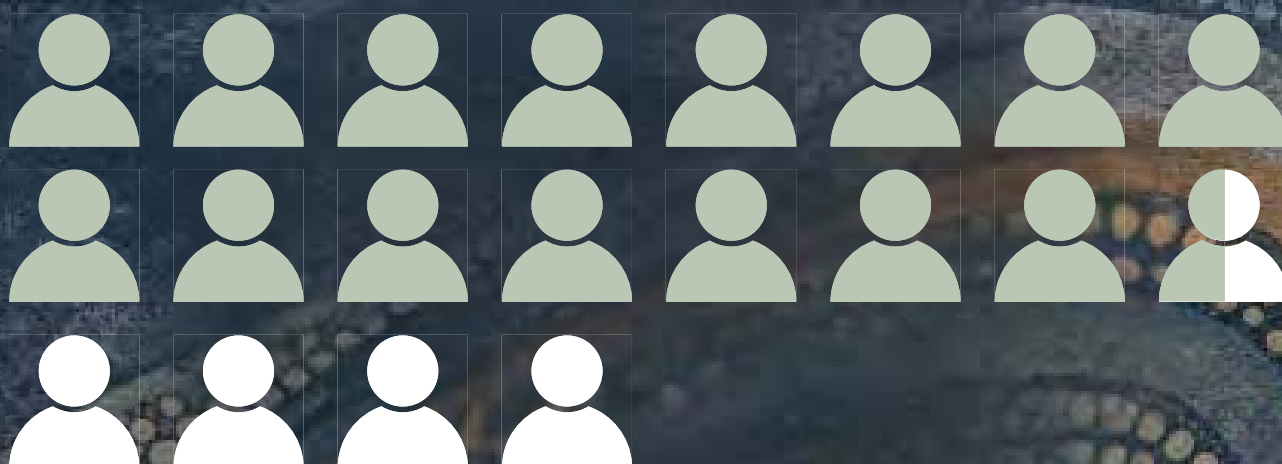
Evidence suggests that young people involved in the justice system often represent people who have been marginalised due to social determinants (Anoshiravani, 2020). This is reflected in the evaluation findings which revealed that some street-present young people looking for a feed may unintentionally become involved in risky behaviours and contact with the justice system. Initiatives such as Ngurra Buru, which provides a safe space and a feed for young people, has the power to change the life trajectory of a young person.

Young people at risk of contact with the justice system often have undiagnosed and often untreated mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions. A study conducted at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, WA's only juvenile detention centre, found that almost 90% of detainees had a neurodevelopmental impairment and 36% were diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD; Bower et al., 2018). FASD is characterised by neurodevelopmental impairment including impairment in executive function, language, and learning; these impairments increase the likelihood of an inability to comprehend the consequences of risky behaviours (Mutch et al., 2020; Sessa et al., 2022). This may be exacerbated by language diversity and impaired language comprehension (Kippin et al., 2018) often misconstrued as disobedience and defiance. An understanding of some of these conditions through mechanisms such as Ngurra Buru ensures that young people are provided with appropriate support and referral pathways to culturally safe services.

Cultural safety

Cultural safety must be perceived by the recipient of the services or care. To ascertain if culturally safe care is being provided requires engaging with the young people, who are recipients of this care. Family members, Aboriginal peers and/or respected members of their communities may also comment on the cultural safety of services provided. An indication of whether services are culturally safe can often be whether the young people continue to engage with the services/care provided. While the mental state of a person may influence their engagement with services provided, continued refusal to engage with services may indicate that young people do not feel that the services provided are culturally safe or that it can benefit them.

One of Ngurra Buru's strengths is its commitment to prioritising Aboriginal staff. With 77% Aboriginal staff who are from the local community, the needs assessments that Ngurra Buru staff conduct are culturally appropriate and informed by local knowledge. It is noted that many/some of the staff grew up in Broome. However, a more comprehensive and holistic needs assessment requires increased staffing and therefore, increased funding to ensure the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff. This is particularly important for night shifts when the needs of street-present young people may be most acute.



Aboriginal Staff = 77%

Financial

It costs \$3,124 per day to maintain a young person in custody in WA. This amounts to \$1.1 million per year per young person in custody, or \$66 million per year for Aboriginal young persons in custody based on the daily average of 58 Aboriginal young persons in custody. This contrasts with approximately \$157 per day or \$57,000 per year to monitor a young person in the community (OICS, 2025). These costs are likely an underestimate as they do not account for total man hour costs within the justice system including police (KPMG, 2018), court and custodial services, nor the costs of hospitalisations from potential adverse incidents which street-present young people may encounter, without a safe place to go.

Even a 10% reduction in the detention rate of Aboriginal young people in WA would translate to cost savings of almost \$6.6 million annually (10% of 58 Aboriginal young people in custody at \$1.1 million per year). These savings are expected to grow exponentially over time given the ripple effects of even one life that has been transformed. This effect is more profound especially given the collectivist culture of Aboriginal peoples who maintain close connections to families and communities, and the momentum this may have intergenerationally. Furthermore, these projected cost savings are likely an underestimate as they do not account for the opportunity costs and savings from individuals who are supported by services such as Ngurra Buru to avoid interaction with the justice system, and the potential for incarceration.

Non-financial

The economic and social benefits from the revised trajectory of a transformed life would be astronomical, given the stark contrast between the economic benefits of the productivity of a transformed life, compared to the costs of maintaining a young person in custody. It will be too complex to quantify the other non-tangible benefits of a transformed life and an empowered person, such as improved SEWB, a positive role model for peers, the ability to contribute to family (e.g., looking after younger siblings), improved family relationships, and the reciprocal and bi-directional effects of these benefits.

Ngurra Buru was developed with the appreciation that keeping street-present young people safe and preventing contact with the justice system can have social benefits that extend far beyond the quantifiable financial benefits. Young people in contact with the justice system are often on the pathway to adult incarceration, contributing to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

Closing the Gap

Addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the criminal justice system is a target of the Australian Government's commitment to Closing the Gap (CtG): Target 11 is to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people age 10 to 17 years in detention by at least 30% by 2031 (Australian Government, 2020). Ngurra Buru represents a response to CtG Target 11 and indirectly addresses other CtG targets including Target 5 (students achieve their full learning potential), Target 6 (students reach their full potential through further education pathways), Target 7 (youth are engaged in employment or education), Target 13 (families and households are safe) and Target 14 (people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing), and in the longer term, Target 10 (adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system).

Ngurra Buru

The Ngurra Buru pilot which has been implemented through KRCIC was developed as part of the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy-Collaborative Design Project. For years, the Kimberley community, along with service providers and the WA Police Force, have recognised the need for a safe space for street-present young people in Broome. Often, these young people don't feel safe going home and need somewhere else to turn to, besides the police station. In response to this pressing issue, the Western Australian Government committed funding in the 2021-2022 State Budget to co-design a safe space facility as part of the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy.



Image: Promotional items including fidget spinner with Ngurra Buru logo providing a sensory object, shoelace with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to promote connection to culture, fridge magnet with phone number distributed to families for ease of contacting Ngurra Buru, and drink bottle for use in school and sporting event

Extensive stakeholder engagements, including a forum in Broome in January 2022, highlighted the need for services to better support at-risk and street-present young people, especially at night. Night patrol service providers and the WA Police Force have observed the challenges faced by young people, including exposure to overcrowding, substance use, and violence. Without a safe space, these young people are vulnerable to risky situations, potential victimisation and the potential to be involved in anti-social or criminal behaviours.

Extensive community engagement, including the West Kimberley System Design Project led by EC-West (over 430 participants across 8 locations in the Kimberley), validated the need for culturally secure safe spaces across the West Kimberley, including an urgent need in Broome. Insights from this community engagement revealed various challenges, including the need for flexible support for families experiencing violence and the importance of cultural understanding in service delivery. Youth offending data further emphasised the necessity for community-led solutions, with Broome recording a significant number of offences. Analysis of justice and police data from 2017 to 2021 highlighted the prevalence of offending young people in Broome, reinforcing the need for safe spaces and community support for at-risk young people.

Vision



To establish a sustainable Ngurra Buru for Kimberley young people to feel safe and be connected to responsible adults and appropriate services decreasing young people's negative involvement with statutory authorities and improve their overall wellbeing.

Mission



To improve social determinants of health for Aboriginal young people by ensuring they are safe at night.

Ethics

This evaluation has been approved by the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum Research Subcommittee and Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (HREC1337) in June 2024. The initial list of eight investigators listed on the application were all local Aboriginal people. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the evaluation and their right to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Efforts were made to create a safe and respectful environment for all participants, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed.

Settings

Ngurra Buru operates in Broome, a unique town with a rich history and a culturally strong presence, located in the Kimberley in the Northwest region of Western Australia. Broome is home to diverse language groups from its surrounding communities. Broome has a high rate of street present young people, which has led to the development and implementation of Ngurra Buru (KAHRA, 2024). This impact evaluation occurred across a number of different sites and included valuable input from a diverse range of stakeholders with the most important being the young people who engage with Ngurra Buru, staff and stakeholders. KAHRA led the team in conducting the evaluation including oversight of investigators, stakeholder engagements, data collection and analysis. This impact evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the impacts of a service supporting young people present on the streets at night in Broome.

The evaluation aimed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the service's impact on young people and the broader community. Informal yarning sessions were conducted with three separate cohorts: young people accessing the space, staff, and stakeholders. These yarns provided a platform for individuals to share their experiences, insights, and perspectives in a safe and culturally appropriate way, as they were conducted by local Aboriginal researchers. This helped create an environment of trust and openness between evaluators and participants. The yarning approach was particularly effective in engaging staff and stakeholders, however deemed challenging when engaging with young people. One of the Aboriginal researchers led the team to re-design the evaluation with young people by presenting yarning prompts on an iPad, where young people could select their responses.

This table presents the questions and prompts used for the survey with young people and interviews with staff and stakeholders.

Table 1. Questions and prompts for survey with young people and interviews with staff and stakeholders

Cohort	Questions
Young People	• What services or support did you receive from Ngurra Buru? • As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young person, do you feel that Ngurra Buru is welcoming and accepting? If yes, • How/why is the Centre culturally appropriate? • How safe did you feel at Ngurra Buru Centre and/or in the Outreach vehicle? • Which family members did you choose at Ngurra Buru as part of your safety network? • Which services or other supports are part of your safety network?
Ngurra Buru Staff	• What were your experiences like during Ngurra Buru recruitment process? • What have your experiences been like working at Ngurra Buru? • Do you believe Ngurra Buru has been created as a culturally strong and safe place for young people in Broome? How/how not? • Do you think you had appropriate training? • What have been some of the highlights being a part of this pilot project? • What have been some of the challenges? • What impact has Ngurra Buru had on young people?
Ngurra Buru Stakeholders	• Tell me a bit about your experiences of being part of Ngurra Buru project? • Do you think interagency communication, documentation, and processes have strengthened since the establishment of Ngurra Buru? • Do you think Ngurra Buru had strong governance structures in place? How/how not? • What impact has Ngurra Buru had on your service/agency? • What has been the perception/feedback from young people and community members regarding Ngurra Buru?

Data collection

The evaluation focused on young people engaged with Ngurra Buru during its operation. Participants were selected based on their involvement in program activities, ensuring that the data collected reflected the experiences of those directly impacted by the initiative. As a result, 6 yarns were held with Ngurra Buru Staff, 5 yarns with Ngurra Buru stakeholders (including representatives from Empowered Communities, Department of Justice, TAFE and Broome Youth and Families Hub) and 20 iPad surveys from the young people accessing the space.

Data analysis

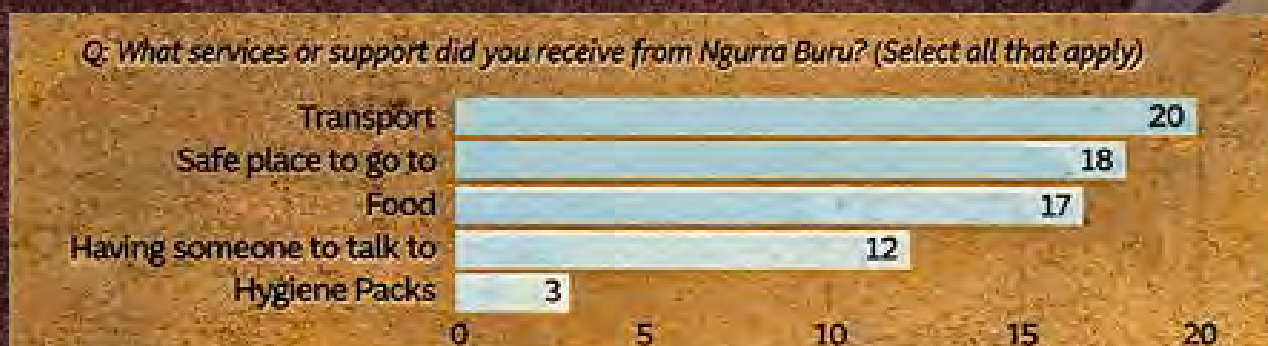
The final pieces of data were analysed separately by a Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance manager and an external consultant from the University of Melbourne.

Findings

Survey with young people

Services or support received

The survey with young people revealed that over 50% of the 20 who participated in the survey received at least four of the five services provided: transport, safe space, food and having someone to talk to. All the young people surveyed felt that Ngurra Buru is welcoming and accepting, with over 75% indicating that the staff, basketball court, bean bags, artwork and entertainment—and over 50% indicating that the books and food also—made Ngurra Buru culturally safe for them.



Over half of young people surveyed reported that Ngurra Buru provided them with someone to talk to, in addition to the basic needs of food, safety and transport. While we were unsuccessful in engaging young people in evaluation interviews, these responses corroborated with the staff yarning sessions which revealed that

*"young people were really happy to have a yarn with them...
they wanted to talk about their life and their situation..."*

- (P3)

Cultural safety

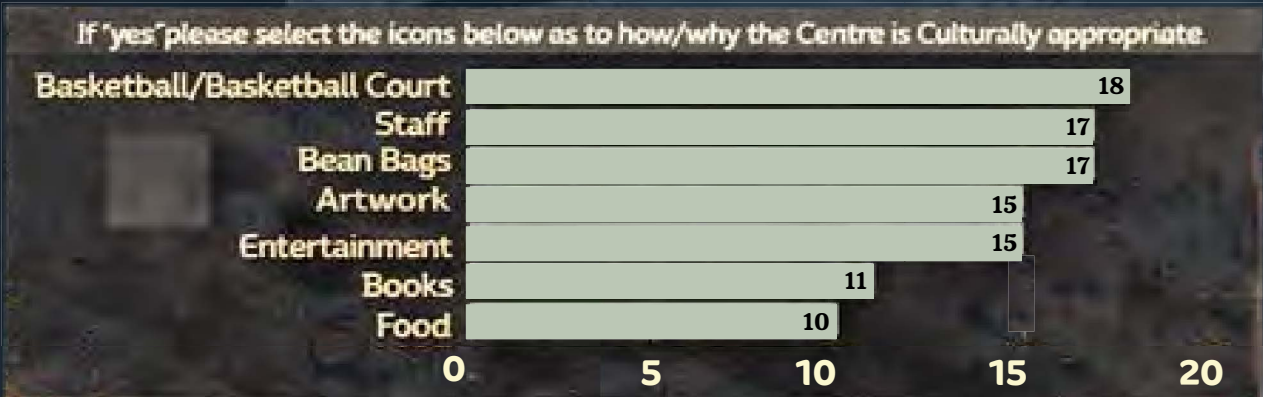
Question: As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young person, do you feel that Ngurra Buru is welcoming and accepting?

All young people responded ‘YES’ to this question. This may be attributed to the high proportion of Aboriginal staff (77%) who are also from the local community which promotes trust and familiarity with the young people. The cultural awareness training for non-Aboriginal staff would also have contributed to the cultural safety of Ngurra Buru.

Features of cultural safety

As a follow up to ‘YES’ responses to the above question, young people were asked the next question.

Question: How/why is the Centre culturally appropriate?

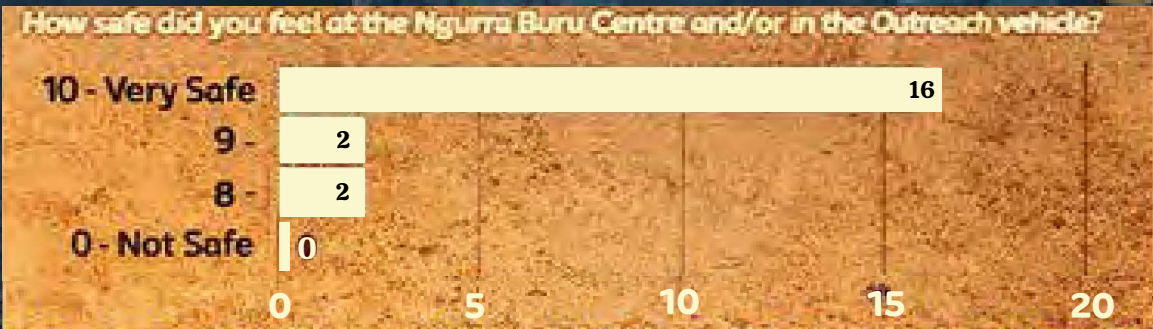


The responses from the young people confirmed that the staff make Ngurra Buru a culturally appropriate place, in addition to the accessibility of the basketball court, bean bags, artworks and entertainment. These items have been thoughtfully prepared and are based on community consultations, which reinforces the importance of co-design.

Safety of centre and transport

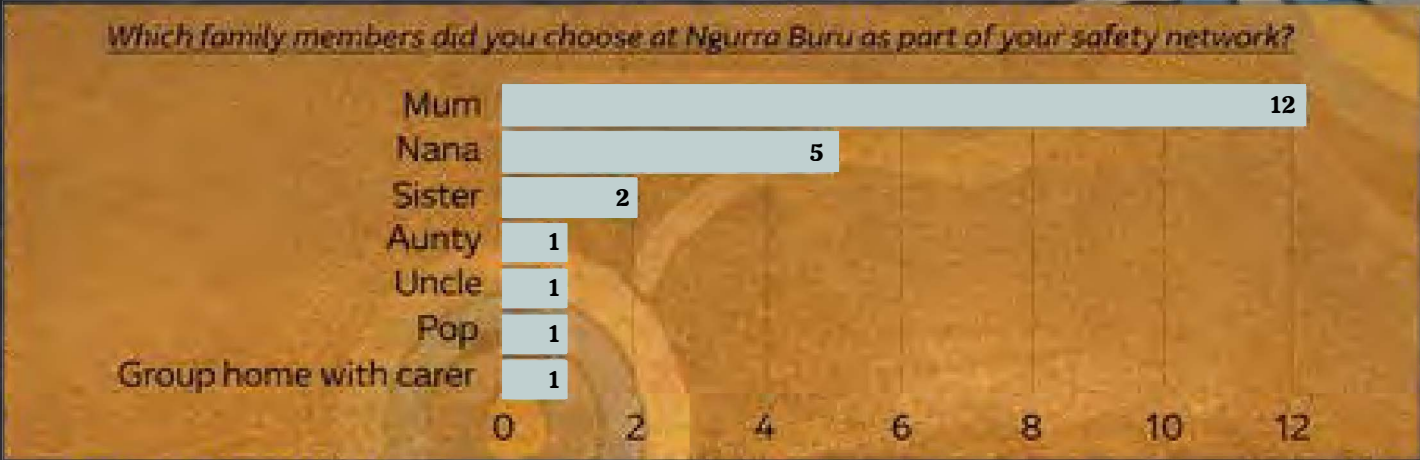
Question: How safe did you feel at the Ngurra Buru Centre and/or in the Outreach vehicle?

On a scale of 0 (not safe) to 10 (very safe), the mean response of all 20 young people was 9.7 (standard deviation=0.66) with a minimum rating of 8, attesting to the perceived safety of Ngurra Buru and the outreach vehicle.



Safety network - family

Question: Which family members did you choose at Ngurra Buru as part of your safety network?



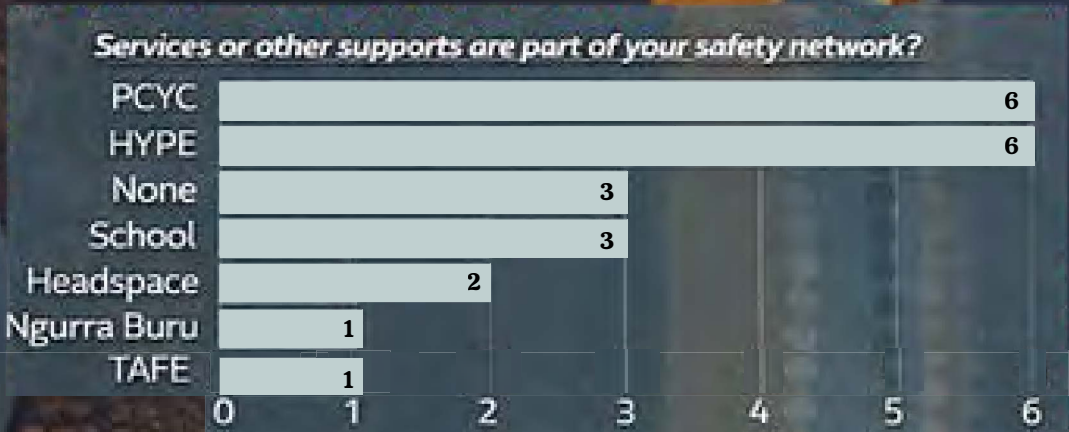
Note: The total number of responses exceed 20 as one young person provided four family members

Findings revealed a heavy reliance on mothers, who are typically the primary caregiver, as the safety network. While this is expected and suggests that young people have a safety network in their family, it would be ideal for young people to also have a strong father figure as a male role model. This is just as important for the development and wellbeing of children, especially boys. Only one young person identified multiple members as their safety network, specifically, the father, mother, uncle and sisters.

Safety network - services and supports

Question: Which services or other supports are part of your safety network?

The Police & Community Youth Centres (PCYC) and Helping Young People Engage (HYPE) were identified as services and supports that are part of the young people’s safety network, which suggests strong collaboration with existing services and effective referral pathways to support the young people who accessed Ngurra Buru.



Stakeholder and staff interviews

From the 11 stakeholders and staff interviews, five themes emerged:



Genuine
co-design and
collaboration



Cultural
safety



Capacity building
of individuals
and the sector



Vision,
passion and
commitment



Intersectoral
collaboration/
referral pathways

Aboriginal people have the solutions to what works for Aboriginal people

As the ATISPEP clearly articulated almost 10 years ago, Aboriginal people have ‘the solutions that work’, based on ‘what the evidence and our people tell us’. This is clearly demonstrated in how the Ngurra Buru design came about,

"... conversations sort of triggered everything of well, you know, in town we know there's certain people's houses we could go to.. sit down and yarn... but if we need to, we can go there and sleep, whereas you know, there might be some kids in town who don't have that sort safe place"
-P5.

No expensive consultants to tell us what works, just grassroots Aboriginal people who have the solutions, passion and commitment to make a difference for the young people, the future of their communities.

Genuine co-design and collaboration

Stakeholders felt that there was a balance of power and equal representation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people at the table and making decisions.

"I was the project lead for justice, working closely with EC West... It was great, most of the time we were pretty evenly represented (government and non-government)... everything was essentially consensus decision making"
- P2

"The process is an example of genuine co-design, not like a consultation piece when you already have a predetermined kind of program in mind. But I think it's quite new to government and for justice to put the communities' needs at the forefront, and to genuinely partner with an Aboriginal community organisation like we did with EC West. To co-design and deliver a project for the community has been a positive process to be a part of"

– P2

The chairperson of the design committee aspired to ensure that

'everyone's getting involved and everyone's opinions are valued'

which helped the project progress (P2).

The co-design process has been genuine and never tokenistic... becoming the 'exemplar' practice and has been asked by others how it has been done.

"I consider it to be very successful. I think the department does as well. Different areas in the department have contacted us (to ask) 'how did you do this?'"

– P2

A whole of government approach to addressing juvenile justice issues through enhanced collaboration between government agencies and ACCOs will ensure a holistic approach and facilitate two-way learning, build cultural responsiveness and capacity of government agencies and structural competence especially in the sectors supporting young Aboriginal people.

However, initially one of the stakeholders felt that at times, there were too few Aboriginal people at the table and their voices were being shut down:

"Low numbers could be intimidating for Aboriginal reps... challenging to speak up at times... felt silenced or overpowered by the government reps having more people on the committee"

– P6

Cultural safety

The visible representation of Aboriginal staff, and cultural responsiveness of non-Aboriginal staff provided a safe space for young people.

"I think the best part about it is everyone's Aboriginal"

– P1

"kids also given respect because they know who they are"

– P1

Ngurra Buru has been able to meet the immediate needs of young people, by providing a safe space staffed by local Aboriginal people, providing a feed, and also providing transport to the Centre as well as back home when it was safe to be home. The perception of cultural safety of Ngurra Buru by stakeholders and staff is consistent with the survey with young people as presented above.

However, a true indication of a culturally safe space may be when the young people are able and willing to speak up and speak for themselves, to provide better insights into their challenges, struggles and needs so that funding can be channelled to meet the targeted and specific needs to achieve better outcomes for the young people and the community.

Capacity building of individuals and the sector

Establishing a local service to provide for the needs of local communities also creates opportunities for local employment, building the capacity of individuals:

"it's given them opportunities to employ more Aboriginal people"
– P1

"Doing this project has given (us)... a lot (of) experience... something I could take away..."
– P1

There is also capacity building of the sector as KRCIC had the opportunity to implement and operationalise Ngurra Buru, something they have never done before:

"KRCIC has never done anything like this"
– P1

Vision, passion and commitment

Staff reported that it was tiring working long hours and overnight but that it was rewarding when they earned the trust and respect of the young people who come into Ngurra Buru; because of this trust and respect, young people are willing to have a yarn with staff.

The interviews also revealed that stakeholders have a vision for sustainability of the program as well as being a road map for other services in WA.

"more than just a justice project... It's very much a community project and seeing if we can set a bit of a road map for an example for how this could potentially be done around the state"
– P2

Inter-sectoral collaboration and referral pathways

Stakeholder interviews revealed that government agencies on the design committee were committed to the success of the Ngurra Buru pilot program. Notably, government agencies also understood the importance of listening, honouring self-determination, and demonstrated humility and respect for local Aboriginal wisdom and knowledge.

"biggest highlight for me is that... government had willingness to actually work with local people and hear our voices... allow us to be a part of the process"

– P6

Ngurra Buru has also enhanced cultural responsiveness of the police when faced with street-present young people. Furthermore, the police now have someone to call at that time of night, which is effective to de-escalate the situation and build trust between the police and the young person and community:

"Especially involving the police now they're more open... they're more likely to call Ngurra Buru"

– P5

Ngurra Buru not only provided a service during the night when all other culturally appropriate services were unavailable, it also demonstrated multi-agency coordination and collaboration, and preventing the 'over-servicing' of an individual so that family and caregivers are not over-burdened with repetitive information gathering:

"So we sort of made sure that... everyone... shared some kind of information with each other when they were interacting with the kids that were coming to the night space"

– P5

Although one of the remits of Ngurra Buru is to refer young people to specific services that can support their needs, staff felt that the other services may not always deliver what they should and are funded to provide. This results in the Ngurra Buru staff feeling helpless and unable to be accountable to parents.

One of the participants revealed that there is a lack of awareness of the services that Ngurra Buru is providing with some people thinking that it is a hostel. To increase visibility, create awareness and highlight the impact of Ngurra Buru, community events that cater to young people such as outdoor movie screenings or community BBQs could be organised. The success of the Saturday night basketball sessions (see below 'holiday slam dunk') also justifies its continuation and potentially making it available all year around.

Trauma-informed care

Our evaluation also revealed that Ngurra Buru has adopted a trauma-informed model of care that promotes healing and recovery by dealing with trauma and its effects (Atkinson, 2013). We illustrate how Ngurra Buru has applied the following five characteristics of a trauma-informed model of care:

- 1 Creates a culturally safe physical and emotional environment through a visible representation of Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal artwork, space and time for yarning
- 2 Ensures culturally responsive staff and adopts practices that acknowledge and demonstrate respect for Aboriginal people and culture through cultural awareness training for non Aboriginal staff
- 3 Supports survivors of trauma on the path of healing through providing a safe space and someone to yarn with
- 4 Integrates and coordinates care to meet needs holistically through adopting a whole of government, intersectoral approach, and involving families and communities.
- 5 Support safe relationship building as a means of promoting healing and recovery through the representation of Aboriginal staff and ensuring staff consistency as through time to building trust and genuine relationship to support continuity of care.

Impact

Interactions and services

A clear indication of the impact of Ngurra Buru is demonstrated through its nomination for the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) achievement award in the category 'Best Practice in Collaboration between Government and Other Organisations' in Perth during the last quarter of 2024, just 6 months after Ngurra Buru commenced operations.

Ngurra Buru commenced operations from May 2024 and has significantly increased its capacity and services provided to young people. The following table is based on the quarterly progress reports submitted by KRCIC to the KJJS on their progress, deliverables and impact of Ngurra Buru for each quarter in 2024 and 2025. The number of interactions represent a tangible measure of engagement with street-present young people.

Table 2. Deliverables of Ngurra Buru, by age group and gender

	Q1 2025	Q4 2024	Q3 2024	Q2 2024	Increase*	Increase**
Total number of interactions	1,208	979	765	491	146%	58%
< 10 years	94	49	27	34	176%	248%
10 to 12 years	344	351	319	175	97%	8%
13 to 14 years	407	337	264	163	150%	54%
15 to 17 years	363	242	155	119	205%	134%
Individual interactions	172	150	133	112	54%	29%
Male	85	88	79	71	20%	8%
Female	87	62	54	41	112%	61%
Next day follow up	672	530	504	297	126%	33%
Meals served	907	730	546	406	123%	66%
Total referrals	25	19	29	19	32%	-14%
Saturday basketball	120	29	NA	NA		

Note: *increase from April-June 2024 to January-March 2024; **increase from July-September 2024 to January-March 2025 as Ngurra Buru commenced operations in May 2024

The most significant increase from the quarter ending September 2024 to the quarter ending March 2025 is in the total number of interactions with young people aged below 10 years and 15 to 17 years, which increased three-fold and doubled in under 12 months, respectively; the increase in 13 to 14 years is also significant. The increase in the under 10 age group was largely attributed to the recent placement of young people aged below 10 years into the care of the CEO of the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS). These young people were frequently absconding from the placement and Ngurra Buru staff was able to de-escalate the situation by liaising with CPFS workers and carers, and to return the young persons to their placement after a short period at Ngurra Buru where staff provided positive behaviour support to these young people.

While the number of interactions with young males was significantly higher than young females when Ngurra Buru commenced, there was a steady increase in the number of interactions with young females such that the gender disparity was eliminated by March 2025. During this same period, the number of next day follow-up (672) and the number of meals served (907) also increased significantly. The number of referrals ranged from 19 to 29 for each quarter during this period.

On 1 August 2024, The Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP as Commonwealth Attorney General (AG) and other State and Commonwealth Government representatives including The Hon. John Quigley, previous State Attorney General, Senator for WA Sue Lines and the Member for Kimberley Divina D-Anna visited Ngurra Buru and participated in the night services. In an ABC radio interview, the AG said:

"The service starts at 10:30pm and we're out there till about midnight, and it goes on after. I went home to get some sleep. I was very impressed to see the degree of connection that the team have got with kids who are on the street in Broome. It's a program that, again, is designed to make sure they're getting meals, make sure that they're going home when they should be, making sure that their parents know where they are, and their carers know where they are. I was really impressed by the level of connection that the people on the team have already been able to form, even though the program has been going only since April."

Reduced crime rates

While the consistent increase in the number of interactions with street-present young people demonstrates the impact that Ngurra Buru has in the lives of young people and their families, a clear indication of the impact of Ngurra Buru is a decrease in crime rates; this is also one of the key objectives of the development of Ngurra Buru.

The figures below present the number of offences against property (burglary, stealing motor vehicle, stealing, property damage, arson) and the person for the three suburbs of Broome, Cable Beach and Djugun by financial year. Since 2020, crime rates have been increasing especially in the suburb of Broome. However, there has since been a decline in the number of offences against property and the person for the financial year ending June 2025; this reversal in the crime rate trend coincides with the operation of Ngurra Buru.

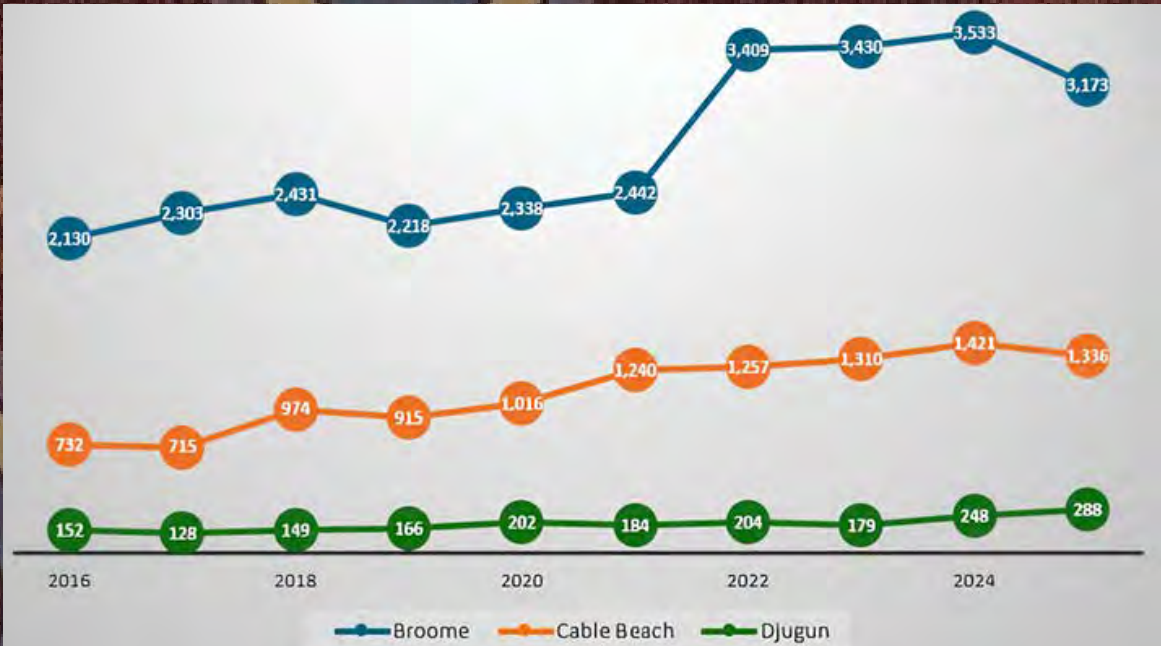


Figure 2. Number of offences against property and the person by suburb and financial year

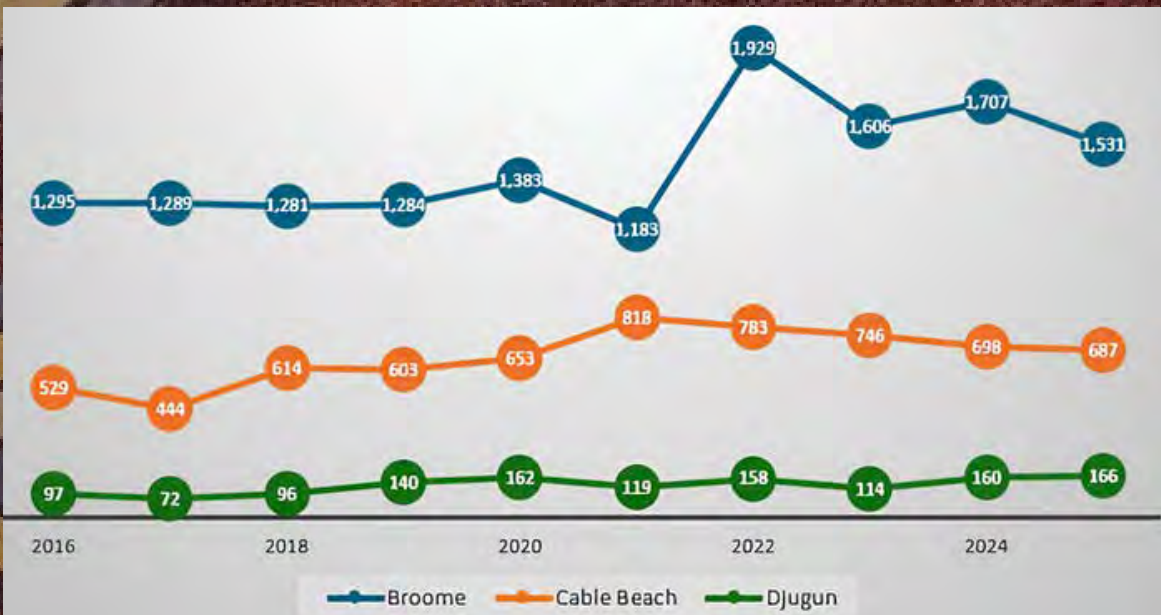


Figure 3. Number of offences against property by suburb and financial year

The following table is based on the latest available data from the WA Police up to June 2025.

Number of offences by offence category and type - Broome, Cable Beach and Djugun				
	FY24/25	FY23/24	Incr/(Decr)	(%)
Selected offences against the person	2,413	2,637	(224)	8%
Selected offences against property	2,384	2,565	(181)	7%
- Burglary	493	747	(254)	34%
	4,797	5,202	(405)	8%
Broome				
Selected offences against the person	1,642	1,826	(184)	10%
Selected offences against property	1,531	1,707	(176)	10%
- Burglary	265	458	(193)	42%
Total Broome	3,173	3,533	(360)	10%
Cable Beach				
Selected offences against the person	649	723	(74)	10%
Selected offences against property	687	698	(11)	2%
- Burglary	201	243	(42)	17%
Total Cable Beach	1,336	1,421	(85)	6%
Djugun				
Selected offences against the person	122	88	34	39%
Selected offences against property	166	160	6	4%
- Burglary	27	46	(19)	41%
Total Djugun	288	248	40	16%

Despite only 13 months of operation of Ngurra Buru since May 2024, there has been an 8% (n=224) decrease in crime rates (selected offences against the person and property) in the suburbs of Broome, Cable Beach and Djugun combined, based on financial year 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. This decline is mainly attributed to the largest decline in burglaries by 34% across these three suburbs, with the suburb of Broome recording the largest decline of 193 burglaries, which represent a decrease of 42% from the previous financial year. While Ngurra Buru's primary focus is to provide a safe place to support street-present Aboriginal young people, the program has also contributed to overall community safety and reduced crime. This has been demonstrated on numerous occasions where Ngurra Buru staff have witnessed criminal activities (e.g., break-in and vehicle theft) and alerted the police who were then able to apprehend the offenders.

With the relationships established with street-present young people and their families, based on familiarity and trust, we are optimistic that the youth crime rates in Broome and Cable Beach will continue to trend downwards, as a result of the continuity of care of Ngurra Buru staff and the support of services that young people have been referred to. Furthermore, there may be a time lag for other indirect impacts of Ngurra Buru, including the potential positive peer influence from young people whose lives have been positively impacted through their interactions with Ngurra Buru.

Holiday slam dunk and laser tag



Photos: Saturday night basketball sessions at Broome Recreation & Aquatic Centre (collaboration between Ngurra Buru, Western Australian Police Youth Policing Team, Community Liaison Officers and the Shire of Broome)

The Christmas holidays saw between 30 and 40 Broome's young people participate in weekly Saturday night basketball sessions, with up to 240 young people across the six basketball sessions. Two laser tag sessions were also held during the holidays with up to 50 young people participating. These initiatives are powerful collaborations between Ngurra Buru, Western Australian Youth Policing Team, Community Liaison Officers, and the Shire of Broome. These sessions were a safe and welcoming space for connection between the young people and the Youth Policing Team, allowing trust to be built through a culturally safe and engaging activity. The kids showed up with enthusiasm and respect as they knew the adults were there to support them. Local police praised the initiative's impact, with a representative from the Youth Policing Team commenting:

"The young people see us in a different light, and we get to see their strengths and talents outside the usual settings"

Return to school



Photos: Clockwise from top left: Young people accessing hygiene packs, dressed in school uniform on first day back at school, attendance at laser tag event during school holidays (collaboration between Ngurra Buru, Western Australian Police Youth Policing Team and the Shire of Broome), and being supported with school supplies (shoes, bags) through Police & Community Youth Centres (PCYC) to return to school

To date, Ngurra Buru has assisted 17 young people reengage with the education system. This was made possible through collaboration across agencies to complete enrolment paperwork, help with school items through PCYC and finding alternative education pathways through TAFE. The Ngurra Buru staff then worked with the school to develop a timetable that supported the young people's return to school.

The return of young people to the academic path enhanced learning opportunities and improved access to additional support systems. Importantly, reengaging with the school has facilitated young people to build and maintain new friendships, fostering social development and building healthy connections. A structured routine of school attendance restores stability and normalcy in some young peoples' lives.

This represents 17 young people who were previously at risk of contact with the justice system, but who now have transformed lives and trajectories towards potentially contributing members of our society. Without Ngurra Buru, 17 young people may have continued to roam the streets and been unintentionally involved in minor crimes for food, potentially resulting in very different life trajectories:

"... wander the streets, not always committing crime, but might get roped into being involved or associated with the kids that are out for that particular reason"

– P5

The Department of Justice and all stakeholders adopted a multi-agency collaborative approach from the inception of Ngurra Buru. More commendable is the genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities/staff/stakeholders who felt that their voices have been heard and that there is equal representation from Aboriginal people.

Recognition by peer services

The strengths and impact of Ngurra Buru has already been recognised by peer services including Fitzroy Valley Night Space and Pilbara Night Space teams who reached out to learn from Ngurra Buru staff during the April to June 2024 quarter.

Closing the Gap

While designed to improve outcomes of Aboriginal young people, their families and the communities of Broome, Ngurra Buru has also contributed to government initiatives, more specifically, addressing CtG targets. These include reengaging 17 young people with the education system (Targets 5 and 7), finding alternative education pathways through TAFE (Target 6), providing employment opportunities for Aboriginal people (Target 8), adults and young people are not over-represented in the criminal justice system (Targets 10 and 11), young people are safe (Target 13), and people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing (Target 14).

Strengths of Ngurra Buru

This impact evaluation has revealed that the success of Ngurra Buru can be attributed to the extensive community consultation which informed the design of Ngurra Buru. This co-design process was led by an ACCO, involved genuine and robust stakeholder engagement and collaboration from inception, ensured diverse expertise and perspectives of the various stakeholders, maintained an appropriate balance of power and shared decision making, which complemented existing programs and services by filling the identified gaps while establishing and maintaining strong relationships with existing programs and services to facilitate effective referrals.

Strong collaboration, communication and information-sharing with existing programs and services also ensured that young people and families are not over-burdened with excessive and repetitive information gathering. Importantly, Ngurra Buru is Aboriginal led with over 70% Aboriginal staff to ensure cultural safety for young people and families.

Furthermore, the evaluation of Ngurra Buru has been conducted in a culturally appropriate manner with a substantial proportion of the chief investigators being Aboriginal peoples, interviews and yarning sessions conducted by Aboriginal researchers, and the analysis and report writing led by Aboriginal researchers.

In addition, the following were also instrumental in the success of Ngurra Buru and the impact it has had on young people, their families and communities:

- *The services provided are culturally safe and trauma-informed*
- *There is commitment and inter-sectoral collaboration across multiple government and non-government agencies, including the Department of Justice, WA Police, KRCIC, and the Shire of Broome*
- *There is capacity building of staff, including cultural awareness training for non-Aboriginal staff and upskilling of Aboriginal staff through TAFE*
- *There is strong passion and commitment from staff and stakeholders to enhance the health, wellbeing, and safety of young people, as well as the wider community*

Areas for improvement

Despite these positive impacts and tangible improvements, such as engagement with school and reduction in crime rates, a continuous improvement approach will ensure that Ngurra Buru continues to strive to improve outcomes for Aboriginal young people in Broome.

Increased staffing would add benefit especially overnight when the needs are greatest. This would allow for more comprehensive and holistic needs assessments to be completed:

"good if we get more staffing... we're outnumbered by kids with the amount of staffing that we have... we only have six staff on at night and we're getting like 30 kids some nights through the door... get more detail when assessing them... good with more eyes..."

– P9

Ensuring sufficient staff will allow staff more time to build rapport and trust with the young person while making them feel safe and supported, which will facilitate a more comprehensive and holistic needs assessment.

Recommendations

Support Aboriginal leadership and governance

ATSISPEP reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the solutions to challenges that communities, families and individuals face. Any effort to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people needs to engage and honour Aboriginal peoples' rights and desire for self-determination. There is also overwhelming evidence that Aboriginal-led initiatives based on the wisdom and knowledge of Aboriginal Elders and leaders have better outcomes, such as the Bourke project in New South Wales (KPMG, 2018), the Groote Eylandt Gebie Gang (media release, 2022) and the Yiriman project (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre, 2020).

Inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration

In addition to ensuring Aboriginal governance and principles of co-design underpin any reform of systems, solutions to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system require strategic system and law reforms (PWC, 2017). This would require a holistic approach that encompasses self-determination, system and law reform, cultural and structural competencies of service providers, and access to services and initiatives that are Aboriginal-led.

Increase capacity of Ngurra Buru

The survey with 20 young people identified their needs which suggest that Ngurra Buru should ideally operate 7 nights per week. Indeed, it was noted during the process evaluation that young people and families tried contacting Ngurra Buru on nights outside of the operation days from Thursday to Sunday, prompting calls for Ngurra Buru to operate over 7 nights.

In addition, there is a need to increase staffing to allow for better needs assessment. We can learn from the 'clinical yarning' (Lin et al., 2016) used to overcome barriers to the delivery of health care for Aboriginal people. It prioritises Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, is 'patient-centred', and combines 'Aboriginal cultural communication preferences' with westernised and medicalised models of health (Lin et al., 2016).

Culturally appropriate and adequate risk assessment, in conjunction with a respected Elder/community/family member, would better inform the development of a holistic and culturally appropriate care plan tailored for the person and appropriate referrals to ensure that needs are adequately met. This will prevent an escalation to crisis/distress, which would then require more resources to address and a longer time to reverse psychological harms.

To address the ongoing complexities of staff retention in the region and in human services such as Ngurra Buru, we propose better remuneration to attract and retain staff for the night shifts, where the needs may be most acute, as young people tend to be more active and energetic late at night and past midnight.

Capacity building of staff and young people

Providing relevant training to build the capacity of staff has multiple benefits: it enhances the support they can provide to young people and may enhance the recruitment and retention, especially of Aboriginal staff. This is important as an increase in the number of Aboriginal staff enhances the cultural safety of Ngurra Buru; Aboriginal staff also serve as positive role models for Aboriginal young people. Overall, this contributes to a culturally safe space for Aboriginal staff as well as for the young people who access Ngurra Buru. There is nothing more empowering than vicarious learning from a positive role model. Building on the rapport that young people have already established with staff would reap exponential benefits.

Furthermore, the scope of Ngurra Buru could be expanded to include mentoring of young people and potentially include peer mentoring. This is based on the very successful model of the Groote Eylandt program which had evolved from initially supporting youth at risk of contact with the justice system, to a mentoring program. Ngurra Buru staff could identify potential young people who access Ngurra Buru to provide peer mentoring to other young people who access this service. Ideally, peer mentors would be young people who have displayed qualities including compassion, empathy, leadership and communication capabilities, and demonstrated a potential and/or expressed a desire to be peer mentors. Alternatively, Ngurra Buru could recruit Aboriginal young people in the community to be peer mentors. This is not only empowering for the peer mentors, but it also helps to lighten the burden on Ngurra Buru staff who can then devote more time to conducting more comprehensive needs assessments and focus on the more vulnerable and/or at-risk young people. Many Aboriginal young people share caregiving responsibilities within their families and communities and have the skills and experience to mentor other young people. This also provides a platform for them to further develop their mentoring skills. Should funding permit, peer mentors could be remunerated for their time which can be both empowering and transformational.

Funding

Now that the momentum, trust and rapport have been established with the community, ACCOs, Aboriginal Elders/staff and government agencies such as the WA Youth Policing Team, ongoing funding is critical. Fragmented and short-term funding builds expectations within communities only to disappoint when funding is discontinued, this will not only undo all the good work and rapport built between staff and young people but also has detrimental impacts on future government initiatives; it is more costly financially and emotionally, to rebuild trust that has been broken. Continued funding will help to achieve longer term goals to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people, which will contribute to addressing some of the Closing the Gap targets, with additional benefits from the ripple effects of one life being transformed.

While the following recommendation may be beyond the immediate scope of this impact evaluation of Ngurra Buru, it reflects the systemic nature of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system. Australia has the highest rates of Indigenous incarceration (Anthony & Wilson, 2024) in the developed world.

Justice reinvestment

We join the ‘Change the record’^[7] in calling for the diversion of funds away from building more prisons, towards Aboriginal-led and evidence-based solutions that address the social determinants of offending, including poverty and trauma. The evidence is compelling: Finland and Norway adopted a justice reinvestment approach in early intervention and reported youth imprisonment rates of 1 per 100,000 people, while Australia reported youth imprisonment rate of 20 per 100,000 people, in 2022 (UNICEF, 2025). For Western Australia, this rate is 300 for Aboriginal young people aged 10 to 17 years in 2022 (AIHW, 2023). Nearer home, the success of the Bourke project in New South Wales (KPMG, 2018) and the Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory (media release, 2022) provides evidence for an Aboriginal-led justice reinvestment approach to address youth crimes, while keeping the community safe. The continued funding of Ngurra Buru to ensure that all the critical elements and success factors—including Aboriginal leadership, cultural safety, capacity building, inter-sectoral collaboration—are adequately funded will provide a blueprint for a juvenile justice strategy that may inform other communities and/or states and territories.

^[7] <https://www.changetherecord.org.au/>

Limitations

While the mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive view of the program's impact, certain limitations were acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may have introduced biases, and the evaluation was constrained by time and resource limitations, which may have affected the depth of data collection. Furthermore, KAHRA was unable to adequately engage with the young people who accessed Ngurra Buru to get their experiences, reflections and aspirations. This would have provided valuable information on the impact of Ngurra Buru, as well as inform future directions, scope and type of services which would better meet their needs and improve outcomes. Future efforts to increase engagement with young people in evaluation could consider other less intrusive and confronting methods, such as soliciting anonymous input through a suggestion box.

Conclusion

The success and impact of Ngurra Buru can be attributed to the approach towards the development and subsequently, the principles underlying the operation of this service. Genuine co-design and inter-sectoral collaborations were embedded in conceptualising and developing Ngurra Buru; the principles for what works for Aboriginal people as reported in the ATSISEPP (Dudgeon et al., 2016)–Indigenous leadership and governance, self-determination and the importance of culture–guided the operations.

Funding Ngurra Buru will complement the work that the WA Government sets out in the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021-2029^[8] with the goal that Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation. Continued funding of Ngurra Buru will ensure that WA remains at the forefront of this reform, setting a path for other states to follow. Systemic reform is needed to uphold the desire of Aboriginal people for self-determination and leadership, bringing Australia a step towards Closing the Gap.

Funding and evaluation of Ngurra Buru will provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of change of Aboriginal-led initiative designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal young people. This understanding will inform the design and implementation of future, large-scale programs/services across other at-risk settings (individuals presenting to Emergency Departments for self-harm and/or alcohol or drug issues, victims and/or perpetrators of domestic violence/abuse, and individuals struggling with mental health issues, disability). This service will forge these exciting new pathways and will ensure that the criminal justice system moves from a reactive, to a preventative, diversionary and proactive approach through enhancing wellbeing and reducing contact of Aboriginal young people with the justice system.

[8] <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/aboriginal-empowerment-strategy-western-australia-2021-2029>

To adequately and effectively address the inequities of Aboriginal people in the Shire of Broome requires an understanding of the complexities and interdependence of the causal factors including the historical, political and social determinants of health as depicted in the SEWB model. A justice reinvestment approach through diversionary programs and efforts to address street-present Aboriginal young people in the Shire of Broome will keep the community safe while potentially changing the trajectory of a young person. The continued funding of a holistic and whole-of-government systems approach to address the social determinants of health such as Ngurra Buru, will contribute to improving the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and fulfilling the Western Australian Government's commitment towards Closing the Gap.



References

- Anoshiravani, A., 2020. Addressing the unmet health needs of justice system-involved youth. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(2), e83.
- Anthony, T. & Wilson, K. First Nations imprisonment is already at a record high. Unless government policy changes, it will only get worse. *The Conversation*.
<https://theconversation.com/first-nations-imprisonment-is-already-at-a-record-high-unless-government-policy-changes-it-will-only-get-worse-226612> (accessed 30 August 2025).
- Atkinson, J., 2013. Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children. *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Resource sheet no. 21. Australian Government.
- Atkinson, J., Nelson, J., & Atkinson, C., 2010. Trauma, transgenerational transfer and effects on community wellbeing. *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, 135-144.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021. *Census, Australia, 2021*.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/51001>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics., 2024. *Corrective Services, Australia, June quarter 2024*.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release#key-statistics>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025. *Corrective Services, Australia, March quarter 2025*
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/corrective-services-australia/latest-release#persons-in-custody>
- Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, *Justice Reinvestment*.
<https://www.ag.gov.au/legal-system/justice-reinvestment>. (accessed 30 August 2025).
- Australian Government, 2020, *Closing the Gap Report 2020*,
<https://www.ag.gov.au/legal-system/justice-reinvestment>. (accessed 30 August 2025).
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023. *Youth detention population in Australia 2023*. Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2023/contents/first-nations-young-people#What-are-the-differences>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025. *Suicide and intentional self-harm hospitalisations by regions and local areas. Suicide and self-harm monitoring/Geography*. Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/geography/regions-and-local-areas>
- Bell, M. F., Bayliss, D. M., Glauert, R., & Ohan, J. L., 2018. Using linked data to investigate developmental vulnerabilities in children of convicted parents. *Developmental Psychology*, 54(7), 1219

- Bower, C., Watkins, R. E., Mutch, R. C., Marriott, R., Freeman, J., Kippin, N. R., ... & Giglia, R., 2018. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and youth justice: a prevalence study among young people sentenced to detention in Western Australia. *BMJ Open*, 8(2), e019605.
- Carlin, E., Seear, K., Spry, E., & Ferrari, K., 2020. Kimberley Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program Evaluation: Final report to Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services. Rural Clinical School of Western Australia, University of Western Australia.
- Change the record. <https://www.changetherecord.org.au/> (accessed 19 July 2025).
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020. National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Canberra, Australia. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement> (accessed 27 June 2024).
- Dowell, C. M., Preen, D. B., & Segal, L., 2017. Quantifying maternal incarceration: a whole-population linked data study of Western Australian children born 1985–2011. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 41(2), 151-157.
- Dudgeon, P., Chang, E. P., Chan, J., Mascall, C., King, G., Collova, J. R., & Ryder, A., 2024. Evaluation of the Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program with Aboriginal women in the Boronia Pre-Release Centre for Women: a mixed methods study. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 221(1), 55-60.
- Dudgeon, P., Derry, K. L., Mascall, C., & Ryder, A., 2022. Understanding Aboriginal models of selfhood: The National Empowerment Project's cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing program in Western Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 4078.
- Dudgeon, P., Milroy, J., Calma, T., Luxford, Y., Ring, I., Walker, R., ... Holland, C., 2016. Solutions that work: What the evidence and our people tell us. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention evaluation project report. University of Western Australia.
- Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A., & Kelly, K., 2014. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing. Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice, 2, 55-68.
- Heffernan, E., Andersen, K., McEntyre, E., & Kinner, S., 2014. Mental disorder and cognitive disability in the criminal justice system. Chapter 10, in Dudgeon, P., Milroy, H., & Walker, R. (eds.), Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice. Commonwealth Australia, Canberra, 165-178.
- Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance, 2024. Process evaluation of the Ngurra Buru (Night Space).
- Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre, 2020. The Yiriman Project: Key Commonwealth & State Policy Alignments. <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2020-10/Kimberley%20Aboriginal%20Law%20and%20Cultural%20Centre%20Attachment%202.pdf>
- Kippin, N. R., Leitão, S., Watkins, R., Finlay-Jones, A., Condon, C., Marriott, R., ... Bower, C., 2018. Language diversity, language disorder, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder among youth sentenced to detention in Western Australia. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 61, 40-49.

- KPMG., 2018. Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project-impact assessment.
- Lin, I., Green, C., & Bessarab, D., 2016. 'Yarn with me': applying clinical yarnning to improve clinician–patient communication in Aboriginal health care. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 22(5), 377-382.
- McPhee, R., Carlin, E., Seear, K., Carrington-Jones, P., Sheil, B., Lawrence, D., & Dudgeon, P., 2022. Unacceptably high: An audit of Kimberley self-harm data 2014–2018. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 30(1), 70-73.
- Mutch, R., Badry, D., Williams, R., & Tulich, T., 2020. Children, adolescents, and FASD in the criminal justice system. In *Decolonising justice for aboriginal youth with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders* (pp. 18-42). Routledge.
- Northern Territory Government, Local Decision Making, Regions, East Arnhem. <https://ldm.nt.gov.au/regions/east-arnhem>. (accessed 30 August 2025).
- Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, 2025. Review of youth custody: Follow-up to 2023 Inspection (Part Two). Government of Western Australia. <https://www.oics.wa.gov.au/reports/review-of-youth-custody-follow-up-to-2023-inspection-part-two/key-findings/> (accessed 19 July 2025).
- PWC Indigenous Consulting, 2017. Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts. <https://www.pwc.com.au/indigenous-consulting/assets/indigenous-incarceration-may17.pdf>. (accessed 19 July 2025)
- Smarter justice for safer communities (November 21, 2022). Community-led youth justice initiatives deliver 95 per cent decline in crime and offending. <https://smarterjustice.org.au/community-led-youth-justice/>
- Sessa, F., Salerno, M., Esposito, M., Di Nunno, N., Li Rosi, G., Roccuzzo, S., & Pomara, C., 2022. Understanding the relationship between fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and criminal justice: A systematic review. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 84). MDPI.
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007. [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | OHCHR](#) (accessed 5 September 2025).
- UNICEF, 2025. Justice for children. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/justice-for-children/> (accessed 24 July 2025).
- UN General Assembly, 2007. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/29