



**Commissioner for Children and Young People**  
Western Australia

# **Breaking the cycle: Wyndham**

August 2020

## Background

*"Listen to young people; they are the solution, not the problem."*

Participant in Aboriginal youth wellbeing workshop

In August 2018, the Commissioner for Children and Young People hosted an Aboriginal forum as part of the Vulnerability Speaker Series. The forum was attended by 72 Aboriginal people who provided valuable insight into the issues, barriers and challenges impacting on the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in all indicators of disadvantage continues to highlight the need for more effective ways of working to address these issues.

In response, the Commissioner initiated a new project which recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to identify, develop and manage solutions to meet their needs. This involves working with selected communities to empower local young people to lead change.

The Commissioner commenced work with the Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation. A Change-Maker Program was developed to quantify the impact of significant, locally identified wellbeing issues for Aboriginal children and young people in the Wyndham area of the Kimberley.

This program addresses youth unemployment, stability and mental health issues, and appropriate youth-informed service provision. Learnings may guide future models for engaging with children and young people at a regional level.

This project was co-designed by the Commissioner and the Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation's board, employees and youth council and involved national not-for-profit company Ninti One Ltd. Ninti One creates opportunities for people in remote Australia through research and community development.

Decisions relating to the following have, at all times, remained with the community:

- recognition of need by the local community
- development of the program and model of design
- identification and selection of service provider
- selection of participants
- focus of engagement with Wyndham children and young people
- presentation and use of collected data
- approval to use the data and information.

The project gives a voice to Aboriginal children and young people, values participants by paying them for their participation, delivers real employment opportunities; requires support for participants from local mentors that are genuine and understanding in their approach to working with Aboriginal youth and is low cost (under \$20,000).

Participants developed their skills in research design, collecting data, analysing data and best practice in research design and delivery.

This project delivers several key recommendations from the Commissioner's Aboriginal forum held as part of his Vulnerability Speakers Series in late 2018:

- Transferring power and responsibility to Aboriginal people and communities to lead the solutions to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- Resourcing Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver services and build community capacity.
- Programs and services working in the Aboriginal community must be:
  - Aboriginal-led – the right of self-determination
  - Rights-based – rights of the child as well as Aboriginal rights
  - Client-centred – place child at the centre
  - Place-based – locally identified issues with local solutions
  - Evaluated and appropriately resourced.

## **Project overview**

Through partnering with Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC), empowered local Aboriginal young people have been trained, supported, and employed to talk to the children and young people in their community about their wellbeing.

*"Empower young people to get on with the job, and to become stronger and more resilient. However, stop asking them to volunteer their time for free: they are doing valuable work and should be supported and recognised for this."*

Aboriginal youth wellbeing workshop, Broome, 2019

### **Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation**

WYAC is a not-for-profit community-based organisation consisting of one representative from each of the local Indigenous family groups. WYAC's mission is to improve the wellbeing of local Aboriginal young people and their vision is that young people are healthy and feel empowered and capable in their chosen endeavours.

Since first opening in April 2018, WYAC has transitioned from a six-month pilot program with no confirmed ongoing funding to a medium-sized Indigenous corporation with multiple income streams.

WYAC developed a Wyndham Youth Wellbeing Survey in late-2018 and this survey has been undertaken twice as a way of tracking current status and improvements. WYAC developed, and is now delivering, a trauma and alcohol and other drugs-informed case management program for young people aged between eight and 18.

### **Link to 2019 Kimberley Aboriginal youth wellbeing workshops**

Workshops on Aboriginal youth wellbeing were held in Broome and Kununurra in 2019 to inform the WA government's response to the recommendations from the Learnings from the Message Stick report and WA Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young persons in the Kimberley region.

The workshop was co-hosted by the WA Government and Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial and co-facilitated by young Aboriginal leaders and Nous Group.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 200 people from a variety of locations and organisations across the Kimberley region attended the two workshops. Included were representatives of the WA and Australian Governments, Aboriginal community leaders and members as well as local service providers. The workshops included more than 25 young and emerging Aboriginal leaders to provide a youth voice.

## Youth recommendations: Key messages to government

<h3>WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?</h3> <p><i>The government's objectives should be:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>A governance structure to enable youth voice.</b></li><li>• <b>Employment, support and capacity-building for young people.</b> Build capability and stop relying on youth volunteers.</li><li>• <b>Let communities set their own priorities and choose what services they receive.</b></li><li>• <b>Support education beyond the classroom.</b> Connect young people to their Elders and Country, and build resilience and skills for mental wellbeing.</li></ul>	<h3>WHAT SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO?</h3> <p><i>Recommendations and proposed actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Move to strengths-based language</b> in all internal conversations and published material.</li><li>• <b>Listen to the Empowered Young Leaders Forum recommendations</b> alongside those in other reports.</li><li>• <b>Set up a funded structure and governance for youth voice</b>, with endorsement from Kimberley organisations.</li><li>• <b>Implement local area Local Aboriginal Youth Action Committees</b>, including training for young people.</li><li>• <b>Map and assess youth services</b> in to find overlaps and gaps.</li><li>• <b>Ensure a cultural outcomes framework</b> is in place. Draw on existing material and processes.</li></ul>
---	--

*Recommendations from Kimberley youth wellbeing workshops*

The Breaking the Cycle project addresses one of the key messages from these forums:

‘Young people’s voices and decision-making should be at the centre of government and community responses. The government must enable this through governance structures, investing in pathways and capacity-building for young people, and resourcing from their sustained involvement’.

---

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal youth wellbeing report, Nous Group 2019

# Timeline

## April–June 2020

- Ongoing partnership between WYAC and the Commissioner for Children and Young People to develop a program that is culturally secure, locally appropriate as well as being directed and endorsed by the Wyndham Aboriginal community.
- Collaboration between WYAC, the Commissioner's staff and Ninti One to develop the learning materials and design an implementation process that was both culturally appropriate and in line with COVID-19 pandemic health requirements.

## July 2020

- Completion of an intensive three day community research training program by Wyndham youth and supported locally by staff from WYAC and the Commissioner's office.

## August–December 2020

Undertake youth consultations to develop a Wyndham Youth Strategic Plan.

This plan will help map the priorities for youth in Wyndham and assess current and proposed youth programs/projects against those priorities.

## 2021

Continue regular monthly training within WYAC and seek employment opportunities to conduct community consultations for Australian Census, research organisations and agencies. This will ensure local information is protected and used for the right reasons to make positive change for the Wyndham Aboriginal community as well as giving a strong voice to children and young people.

# Process

## Step 1 Engagement (Self-determination)

Identify a local organisation that has a strong commitment to:

- genuine engagement with the Aboriginal community including the willingness to speak with Elders and to follow their lead at all times;
- providing children and young people with a voice; and
- being flexible, supportive and culturally appropriate.

## Step 2 (Valuing others)

- As a partnership, design a program that delivers against the vision of the Elders and Aboriginal community.
- Use a transparent process for selecting participants including encouraging and supporting potential applicants.
- Identify funding to pay young people for their participation.

### **Step 3 Training program (Up-skilling for employment)**

The young people were engaged in four to five days of training:

- Two days of online Aboriginal community research training developed and delivered as five modules by culturally sensitive researchers supported locally by a qualified teacher (Commissioner's office) and local content expert (WYAC). The modules provided an insight into designing and conducting research and analysing data in a culturally appropriate way.
- One day of designing and implementing their own consultation processes around their question.
- Data analysis and report writing (5–10 hours).

### **Step 4 Opportunities (Voice of children and young people)**

Look for real opportunities to young people to utilise their newly acquired skillset. Ensure they are supported as they learn through doing.

## **Outcomes**

The Wyndham Change-Makers program provides an ongoing valuable opportunity for young people to develop their confidence and leadership capacity in research design, data collection and analysis, providing a strong voice to Wyndham children and young people.

The Commissioner received the following feedback from participants:

*"Our training has helped to:*

- *understand what youth in town want, and not to make assumptions*
- *have a voice and the other young people of Wyndham as well*
- *advocate about how Wyndham agencies can best meet the needs of youth in the town*
- *identify what choices youth have and what actions need to be taken to meet their needs*
- *act as positive role models for other youth in Wyndham and our younger siblings."*

## **Participant profile**

Nine local community members took part in this training, all aged under 20. Some participants are at high school, two are employed as Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) and two as youth officers.

The Commissioner will now seek future opportunities to partner with other organisations wanting to give a genuine voice and employment opportunities to Aboriginal children and young people.



Mr Colin Pettit  
Commissioner for Children and Young People WA  
1 Alvan Street  
Subiaco WA 6008  
[Colin.Pettit@ccyp.wa.gov.au](mailto:Colin.Pettit@ccyp.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Pettit

The Wyndham Aboriginal Corporation would like to express their thanks for the opportunity to co-design, co-fund and collaboratively implement the Wyndham Change-Maker program, in particular the comprehensive and well supported training program that was provided to local Aboriginal youth.

Having completed the program, this now widens the employment opportunities for these young people as Aboriginal Community researchers as well as giving all children and young people in Wyndham the chance to have a voice. As evidenced by recent approaches to WYAC by NOUS and the Australian Government to discuss potential employment of these young people.

This project is a strong example of the success that can be achieved through utilising the principles of strength based community development, especially the elements of:

- Transferring **power and responsibility** to Aboriginal people and communities to lead the solutions to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- **Resourcing Aboriginal community controlled organisations** to deliver services and build community capacity.
- Programs and services working in the Aboriginal community must be:
- **Aboriginal-led** – the right of self-determination
- **Rights-based** – rights of the child as well as Aboriginal rights
- **Client centred** – place child at the centre
- **Place-based** – locally identified issues with local solutions
- **Evaluated** and appropriately **resourced**.

Feedback from the young people who participated in the program is as follows:

**“Our training has helped us to:**

- **understand what youth in town want, and not to make assumptions**
- **have a voice and the other young people of Wyndham as well**
- **advocate about how Wyndham agencies can best meet the needs of youth in the town**
- **identify what choices youth have and what actions need to be taken to meet their needs**
- **act as positive role models for other youth in Wyndham and our younger siblings”**

Once again, thank you and we look forward to continuing to work together.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Tyson', is written over a horizontal line.

Katie Tyson

General Manager

Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC)