



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People Toolkit

A toolkit to assist agencies and organisations working with Aboriginal children and young people to improve their wellbeing and future opportunities.

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the word 'Aboriginal' is intended to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Commissioner acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and notes that while there are similarities, each group of peoples is distinct and must be engaged in a manner consistent with the local culture, lore and custom.

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Message from the Commissioner

The situation

While many Aboriginal children and families are doing well, the disadvantage some Aboriginal children and young people experience on a daily basis should be unacceptable to us all.

Too many Western Australian Aboriginal children and young people do not have the opportunity to experience a happy and healthy childhood, to feel protected and nurtured, or have the opportunities and experiences they need to reach their full potential.

Over decades, substantial investment has been made to overcome this disadvantage but has failed to make a significant difference to the lives of generations of vulnerable children and young people.

A different approach is required.

What Aboriginal children and young people say

Over many years Aboriginal children and young people have told my office about the factors that support their wellbeing and, for those who have experienced disadvantage, what they need to turn their lives around and create a better future.

Many Aboriginal children and young people spoke about the importance of family and communities, their connection with Country and culture, and the innate strengths of many aspects of their lives and culture.

Some Aboriginal children and young people who had experienced disadvantage spoke of their desire for a safe and cohesive community, as well as their need for significant and specific help if they are ever to achieve a happy and productive life.

Almost without exception, given a small amount of time and attention, Aboriginal children and young people opened up and spoke about their lives and what they need. Their insight and earnest desire to change their lives was stark and incredibly valuable and their views need to be heard and acted upon.

Establishing an approach to enable service providers to capture and utilise Aboriginal children and young people's views is critical for the future of people and communities around the State.

The toolkit

The Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People Toolkit outlines a process for establishing a long-term, sustainable commitment to working with Aboriginal

children and young people within their community to establish effective initiatives that improve their current wellbeing and future opportunities.

The toolkit supports the development of Aboriginal-led solutions through engaging community Elders and senior leaders, in addition to children and young people, from the beginning to ensure programs are produced with the community and for the community.

This work will be challenging at times. It will take a complete and unyielding commitment through all levels of organisations and agencies to achieve change, but it is achievable, and it is incredibly important.

Improving the lives of Aboriginal children and young people must be seen as core business for all organisations and agencies engaging with Aboriginal people and communities.¹

We must act. Aboriginal children and young people comprise almost 40 per cent of all Aboriginal people in WA; these young people will be the community leaders of future generations.

Aboriginal children and young people all over the state must have opportunities to be heard and influence decision making, and by doing so provide opportunities to develop their leadership capacity to lead and sustain change into the future.

Colin Pettit

Commissioner for Children and Young People

¹ Western Australia Parliament Legislative Assembly Committees *Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Report 8*. November 2016 regarding government agencies.

Message from our Ambassadors

As Ambassadors for Children and Young People in Western Australia, particularly Aboriginal children and young people, we are proud to endorse this toolkit.

The toolkit was produced in response to the feedback shared by Aboriginal children and young people in the '*Listen To Us*' 2015 report², and seeks to assist organisations and agencies that are invested in improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

The toolkit focuses on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and communities as a key support for Aboriginal children and young people, and acknowledges the role that culture and community play in supporting children and young people to develop and express their views on matters that affect them. We support the development of culturally proficient, respectful and safe programs and services for our communities, which will positively contribute to the wellbeing of our children and young people.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal children and young people are one of our community's most precious assets and fully support Aboriginal-led, community based, sustainable initiatives that meaningfully engage with our children and young people and empower them to reach their leadership potential.

The toolkit is a live document that will continue to be enriched by publishing case studies and examples of best practice that outline the experiences of different programs operating throughout Western Australia. These case studies will continue to highlight the cultural diversity of Aboriginal people and communities and the resulting need for a place-based approach, in a pragmatic manner.

We look forward to the toolkit being used to support the implementation of new and informed practices that facilitate solutions developed and led by Aboriginal people and communities. These practices will improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people and provide them with the skills and tools needed to determine their own future, and continue building a strong and diverse Aboriginal culture for future generations.

Professor Colleen Hayward AM and Ms June Oscar AO

Ambassadors for Children and Young People

² Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2015, *Listen To Us: Using the views of WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to improve policy and service delivery*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth.

Using the toolkit

This toolkit sets a clear benchmark for practice in engaging and collaborating with Aboriginal children and young people. For some organisations and agencies this will be a useful step-by-step guide in developing your approach to engagement with Aboriginal communities and their children and young people. For others who are already working on the ground with Aboriginal communities, this will be a useful guide to reviewing and refreshing your practices to ensure that they are consistent with best practice throughout all stages of planning, implementation and review of projects and programs.

Section 1 - Understanding participation provides background information on what real participation looks like and why it is important.

Section 2 - Getting your organisation ready contains evidence-based information and research that can be used to gain the organisational or agency-wide commitment required to undertake meaningful engagement with Aboriginal children and young people.

Section 3 - Understanding Aboriginal cultural contexts outlines key concepts relating to Aboriginal history and culture. These are particularly important for organisations and agencies to be aware of and understand, prior to undertaking participation activities with Aboriginal children and young people and their communities.

Section 4 - The engagement process contains detailed and practical steps outlining the processes involved in undertaking meaningful consultation and engagement with Aboriginal children and young people for a specific project or target community.

The first four sections of the toolkit contain:

- background information that applies an Aboriginal lens to the participation of children and young people
- templates and resources to download
- links to resources and reference material
- examples of relevant practice.

Section 5 - Case studies contains elements of the toolkit in practice.

Section 1 - Understanding participation

This section outlines what is meant by true participation. Understanding participation is vital prior to advocating within your organisation or agency for this approach to be utilised and for the appropriate resources to be allocated.

A definition

Genuinely listening to children and young people, giving careful consideration to their views and involving them in decisions that affect their lives demonstrates our respect for them as valued members, and future leaders, of our communities.

Researchers often refer to **five levels** of participation, though their titles and descriptions may vary:

Level 1: Attend/be informed

Level 2: Be consulted

Level 3: Be involved (an opportunity to discuss and possibly influence)

Level 4: Be collaborated with (time to shape policies and decisions that affect them)

Level 5: Be empowered (share power and responsibility for decision making).

Unless organisations and agencies are committed to reaching at least Level 2, they should not undertake a participation process with Aboriginal children and young people.

This is the level required to meet the requirements of Article 12 of the [United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#):

the right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them.

the right for their views to be given due weight.

The aim for organisations and agencies should be to ultimately share power and responsibility for decision making with Aboriginal children, young people and communities, Level 5.

Integrating child rights into a participation model

The [Lundy Model of Participation](#) was developed to provide decision makers with a practical, chronological process of participation that meets the intent of Article 12 UNCRC.

The four steps are:

1. **Space** – Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
2. **Voice** – Children must be supported to express their view
3. **Audience** – The view must be listened to (by the right people)
4. **Influence** – The view must be acted on, as appropriate



Resources

- [Participation Policy – Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Participation Consent Policy – Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making, Health Canada](#)

Section 2 - Getting your organisation ready

This section contains evidence-based information and research that can be used to gain the organisational or agency-wide commitment required to undertake meaningful engagement with Aboriginal children and young people.

“We need to focus on the youth, they are our future...” 17 year-old Nyikina young person, Kimberley

There are four clear and significant benefits of making an organisational or agency-wide commitment to the participation of Aboriginal children and young people. Any business case seeking resources should clearly outline these benefits.

If your organisation or agency does not have its own business case template, we have developed a sample template to assist. We have also provided other resources you may find helpful.

Business case development tools

- [Business case template – Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Business case template and guide – business.gov.au](#)
- [How to write a business case - Workfront](#)
- [Business case template - Project Management Docs](#)

1. The demographic opportunity

“I think it's good for someone to make sure we kids aren't forgotten about.” 9 year-old boy, Mid West

There is an opportunity to break the cycle of disadvantage for Aboriginal children and young people with well-designed and effective programs, creating significant social and economic benefits for the community.

There are approximately 38,000 Aboriginal children and young people in WA. Aboriginal children and young people under the age of 18 years make up a significant part of the total Aboriginal population of WA (38%), compared to 22.5 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population.³

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population Projections, State/Territory (Series B), viewed 24 August 2017, <<http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?Queryid=44>>.

With Aboriginal children and young people making up such a significant part of the Aboriginal population in WA and many experiencing poor education, health and wellbeing outcomes, it is critical that we empower young people to take ownership and control of their development in a culturally appropriate manner.

Resources

- [2016 Census Community Profiles, Western Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Profile - Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\)](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - ABS](#)
- [Census: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population - ABS](#)
- [Census 2016: what's changed for Indigenous Australians? - The Conversation](#)
- [Census 2016: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population growing - NITV](#)

2. The benefits it provides to their wellbeing

"...[It's] uplifting because it's about taking down how kids sorted out problems and doing something with it. I'm glad to be a part of that and contribute to that 'cause it's good to be heard." 15 year-old girl, Perth

Having the opportunity to participate positively contributes to children and young people's wellbeing. Participation helps develop children and young people's level of responsibility and decision-making skill, improves their relationships and ability to communicate with professionals and peers, and increases their sense of control and self-esteem. Involving children and young people also supports them to actively contribute to their communities and enhances their social inclusion; ultimately supporting them to become more informed and experienced leaders.

Asking Aboriginal children and young people what they want and involving them in decision-making processes ensures the program or service provided for them is relevant to meeting their needs. This makes Aboriginal children and young people more likely to access the service and have a positive experience using the service, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes for their health and wellbeing.

Resources

- Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making - UNICEF
- Empowerment and participation of children tip sheet - Commissioner for Children and Young People Victoria
- Building a Culture of Participation, Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation handbook - National Children's Bureau UK
- Benefits of Engagement with Children and Young People - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

3. Their right to have a voice

"It's very nice that you are asking all the questions, that you are taking the time to hear what we want to say." 13 year-old girl, Perth

Under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), all children and young people have the right to express their views and to have their opinions taken into account in regard to decisions that affect them.⁴ Children and young people want to:

- feel valued, respected, listened to
- feel that their ideas are taken seriously
- be involved in making decisions and influencing matters that affect them.

They say that these things are important for their wellbeing. This is a consistent message from children and young people whenever they are consulted.⁵

⁴ United Nations General Assembly 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 12, United Nations, Treaty Series.

⁵ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2011, *Children and young people speak out about being acknowledged and involved in decisions policy brief*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, viewed 21 December 2017, <<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1306/policy-brief-wellbeing-research-being-acknowledged-and-involved-in-decisions-participation-may-2011.pdf>> .

4. The value of Aboriginal children and young people's knowledge, insight and expertise

"Listen to all these ideas you're getting to help make good changes for the future."
16 year-old boy, Mid West

When provided with appropriate opportunities, Aboriginal children and young people have proven themselves to have the capacity and desire to provide valuable and unique knowledge, insight and expertise on complex matters.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People has undertaken numerous consultation activities that have involved Aboriginal children and young people commenting on issues including:

- [out-of-home care](#)
- [youth justice](#)
- [alcohol-related harm](#)
- [their culture and factors that impact on their wellbeing, health and education.](#)

Valuable information about Aboriginal children and young people's wellbeing is available to organisations and agencies that are prepared to listen. This must be a core function of all organisations and agencies that develop, procure or provide programs and services to Aboriginal children and young people. This sharing of information, listening and two-way learning lies at the heart of co-design principles.

Section 3 - Understanding Aboriginal cultural contexts

This section outlines key concepts relating to Aboriginal history and culture. These are particularly important for organisations and agencies to be aware of, and understand, prior to undertaking participation activities with Aboriginal children and young people and their communities. While these concepts are introduced in general terms, Aboriginal communities are very diverse and the specific context of the community you intend to work with must be fully understood and considered prior to undertaking place-based work.

"I think it's very important to me because I don't want to lose my culture, I want to learn as much as I can." 17 year-old Noongar boy, Wheatbelt

1. Innate strengths of Aboriginal culture

"The things I would change would be the attitude towards my people by educating them better about my culture, language, traditions. This is because most people around here and [those] I go to school with assume rather than look at fact. They only look at the bad parts of our culture, such as crime rates, rather than good things, such as our traditions, cultures, athletes..." 14 year-old Yamatji young person, Perth

A strengths-based framework that recognises, builds and develops the existing skills and capacities of Aboriginal people will be more effective than viewing culture and knowledge from a deficit-based perspective.

Case study extract

Kids on Country – strengths-based approach

The Kids on Country program demonstrates the application of a strengths-based approach because it was founded upon Aboriginal children and young people's existing knowledge of and connection to country by utilising their local knowledge of the land and local animals.

"The Kids were interested in Malleefowl. They had seen them, knew where they crossed the road, and knew how to find their nests. Millennium Kids secured funding for a group of 30 young people from Coolgardie, based on their desire to learn more about the woodland, with a particular emphasis on traditional culture and protection of a threatened bird, the Malleefowl. The program also gave the Kids the opportunity to lead the program and found that with the recognition of their knowledge and skills and the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, they blossomed; keen to share their knowledge."

View the full Kids on Country case study in the *Case studies* section.

Some of the many strengths of Aboriginal culture that must be considered when working with Aboriginal children and young people include:

- **Community obligations:** Aboriginal children and families are more likely to have obligations and responsibility to and for their broader community including Elders, other family members (such as caring for younger siblings or relatives) and other community members. This strengthens the support systems and civic mindedness of Aboriginal children and young people but can also impact their time and autonomy and should be considered and discussed with children and young people when planning activities.
- **Reciprocity:** As part of the obligations Aboriginal young people may owe to their community, their community also owes obligations to them to ensure their health and wellbeing; this is part of the kinship system. The interest and responsibility of community members in your work with their children and young people should be taken into consideration when structuring your program, consulting with the community and determining who your stakeholders are, as well as during the feedback stage of the project.
- **Community-based decision making:** Decision making processes in Aboriginal communities are also more likely to be structured within the community, requiring individuals to consult with and gain consensus from other members of the community before being able to agree to a view or recommendations about community issues. This impacts the ability of an individual to speak for a community and selecting individuals to represent a community, without the consent, support and involvement of the community, should be avoided. Instead, consider building in time for community consultation and feedback into your process and including multiple individuals to assist in relaying the information to and from the community and to support the discussion of a reflective range of views. From the outset, the role of Elders and senior leaders in the community should also be respected through early engagement, prior to involving children and young people.

Additional information and resources

- [Families and cultural diversity in Australia - Australian Institute of Family Studies](#)
- [Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing – Child Family Community Australia](#)

"[Culture] tells me who I am and makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I belong somewhere." 13 year-old Yawuru girl, Perth

When working with Aboriginal children and young people, their wellbeing needs must be considered in the context of culture and cannot be considered in isolation.⁶

Research has shown strong cultural identity as a factor associated with resilience and demonstrated the importance of culture as a means through which Aboriginal people can overcome disadvantage. Strong cultural identity and connection is increasingly being linked to better outcomes in education, justice, health and wellbeing, and employment, as well as being a positive point of difference for economic activity.

Among young people, culture can be a vehicle for enhancing self-esteem, identity and belonging, which can help build their resilience, alongside other factors such as family support and good health.⁷ Where traditional cultural practices and structures have broken down, re-establishing these among the broader community can have a direct effect on children and young people's community connections and sense of wellbeing.

The [2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) states that Indigenous peoples want to:

- become agents of their own development
- determine and develop priorities and strategies for development.⁸

The UNDRIP asserts that self-determination, participation, cultural rights, land rights, ownership and free and prior informed consent, are key principles for improving the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

⁶ KidsMatter 2012, *Cultural diversity and children's wellbeing*, Department of Health and Ageing, Commonwealth of Australia, viewed 18 December 2017, <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/KMP_C1_CDCW_CulturalDiversityAndChildrensWellbeing.pdf>.

⁷ Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2015, *Discussion Paper: Culture and the design and delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal young people*, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Perth, Western Australia, p.1.

⁸ United Nations 2008, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Articles 3, 43, 44, viewed 17 May 2017, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>>.

Resources

- Whose voice counts?: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection decision-making - Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
- Recognising the Strength of Culture, Aboriginal Cultural Response for the Child and Family Health Service Discussion Paper - Government of South Australia
- The Importance of Identity, Culture and History for Indigenous Youth Wellness - L. Wexler, University of Massachusetts Amherst

In the context of the participation of children and young people, this includes respecting the autonomy of Elders and senior leaders in the community through early engagement and recognition of the need to gain their consent, by way of a fully-informed invitation to work in the community, prior to engaging with the community.

2. Cultural safety is key

"My culture is who I am, it is a part of everything I do. It connects me to my family and makes me unique..." 17 year-old Jabirr Jabirr girl, Kimberley

Cultural security is behavioural based; it is about the obligations of those working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to work within policies and practices that ensure programs and services adequately meet cultural needs⁹ by recognising, appreciating and responding to the impact of cultural diversity on the effective use and provision of services.¹⁰

Developing the cultural security of your organisation or agency, together with the practice of a strength-based approach to culture, drives a better understanding of the community with which you are trying to engage and respects, values and properly acknowledges culture(s) and the community leaders who carry and impart this knowledge.¹¹

⁹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2011, *Social Justice Report 2011, Chapter 4: Cultural safety and security: Tools to address lateral violence*, Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 17 May 2017, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/social-justice-report-3>>.

¹⁰ Palmerston 2003, *Aboriginal cultural security – A background paper*, Department of Health, Government of Western Australia, viewed 18 December 2017, <<https://www.palmerston.org.au/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=112992>>

¹¹ Hunt J, Closing the Gap Clearing House 2013, *Engaging with Indigenous Australia— exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities Issues paper no. 5*, viewed 18 December 2017, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgc-ip5.pdf>>

It is essential that organisations and agencies understand the cultural context in which they are working, and ensure their programs and services are built upon elements that strengthen cultural identity, connection and leadership capacity among the Aboriginal children and young people accessing them.

The steps towards providing cultural security include:

Cultural awareness: sensitivity to the similarities and differences that exist between two different cultures and the use of this sensitivity in effective communication with members of another cultural group.¹²

Cultural competency: becoming aware of the cultural differences that exist, appreciating and having an understanding of those differences and accepting them. It also means being prepared to guard against accepting your own behaviours, beliefs and actions as the norm.¹³

Cultural safety: shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. It is about creating an environment that is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.¹⁴

Reflective practice

It is important for non-Aboriginal workers to use reflective practice when engaging with Aboriginal children and young people and their communities. This means reflecting on your own perceptions and biases.

Vicary et al. explains:

“Judging Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices from a western worldview can be a barrier that prevents Aboriginal people from engaging with non-Aboriginal people. The worker must be both aware and comfortable with cross-cultural differences and ensure that these differences are valued and not negated or judged. Aboriginal people, and particularly children, can quickly detect when non-Aboriginal people are unable to disengage their western framework or are being insincere. This can result in superficial engagement or avoidance all together.”¹⁵

¹² Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) 2017, Government of New South Wales, viewed 21 December 2017, <<http://www.heti.nsw.gov.au/International-medical-graduate/Cultural-Awareness/>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2011, *Social Justice Report 2011, Chapter 4: Cultural safety and security: Tools to address lateral violence*, viewed 17

May 2017, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/social-justice-report-3>>.

¹⁵ Vicary D, Tennant J, Garvie T and Adupa C 2008, *Can You Hear Me? The Active Engagement of Aboriginal Children in the Development of Social Policy by Non-Aboriginals*, Perth, Western Australian Office for Children and Youth.

Resources

- [Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework - Department of Education WA](#) sets expected standards for all staff when working with Aboriginal students, their parents and families, and communities. The framework supports staff to reflect on their behaviours, attitudes and practices with a view to progressing from cultural awareness to cultural responsiveness so we can maximise learning outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- [Cultural Safety Training - Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia](#)
- [Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols - Oxfam](#)
- [Aboriginal Cultural Competence Matrix - Victorian Government Department of Human Services](#) This resource matrix is designed to be used by Community Service Agencies (CSOs) in conjunction with the Registration Standards and the Evidence Guide 2008. However it is useful as it provides detailed examples of evidence for the key components of the conceptual framework for Aboriginal cultural competence.
- [Cultural Competence: Transforming Policy, Services, Programs and Practice - Telethon Kids Institute](#) – discusses some of the complex issues surrounding the notion of cultural competence and the critical need for practitioners to develop knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes to be responsive in diverse cultural settings.
- For more information about Cultural Competence courses available in your state go to [Health Infonet](#) or [Centre for Cultural Competence Australia](#)

3. Aboriginal peoples' diversity requires place-based initiatives

"Learning your language [is important] so that you can teach your children and grannies. Language is a special thing to have, it makes you different from other tribes." 17 year-old Banyjima girl, Pilbara

Aboriginal people are not a homogenous group.

The diversity of Aboriginal groups is represented in the [Tribal Boundaries map](#) based on Norman Tindale's 1974 map, each of which have their own cultural norms and dialectal groups. [Aboriginal children and young people have also shared their diverse experiences and cultures in consultation](#), which has been captured in some of our resources highlighting the need for place-based initiatives.

To be most effective, programs and services must be highly localised and designed for each individual community. This is because Aboriginal communities, cultures and

languages are diverse and the issues experienced by a region, as well as the successful approaches in addressing those issues, will vary as a result. To be successful, you must also support and respect 'local autonomy', whereby the local community (organisations and individuals) are involved through broad consultation and active involvement in decision making; this respects the cultural process of community-based decision making.¹⁶

As highlighted in the *Understanding participation* section, capturing the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in this process is essential to recognising and supporting their rights and improving their wellbeing. This includes disengaged or hard-to-reach children and young people, who are often the target of services and resources but who are rarely given the opportunity to participate in their design, implementation and evaluation.

For more information about the potential cultural differences between groups of Aboriginal peoples and even within a specific community, continue reading Part 6 – Time and autonomy and Part 7 – Communicating with Aboriginal children and young people.

For more information on how to develop an understanding of the particular needs of your target community, go to *The engagement process, Stage 1 – Planning to involve Aboriginal children and young people, Step 2: Understanding your target community*.

4. Understanding the impact of trauma

"I would eradicate racism between black and white to build respect...It is a bit confusing growing up Aboriginal in this society because we are taught to be proud but lots of times we aren't really accepted, even when we try to be like them."

13 year-old Noongar young person, Perth

Many Western Australian Aboriginal communities and families will have experienced primary (direct or personal experience of trauma) and secondary trauma (witnessing or experiencing the impact of the trauma); through bearing witness to the traumatic experiences of their family and community members. As a result of factors such as colonisation, forced removals and other government policies, Aboriginal children and young people are more likely to have experienced trauma, particularly secondary trauma.

Without adequate opportunities to overcome trauma, young people internalise their experiences and seek to find their own means of coping. This can result in negative behaviours such as:

- high rates of drug and alcohol addiction
- violence directed at themselves and others

¹⁶ Wilks S, Lahausse J, & Edwards B 2015, *Commonwealth Place-Based Service Delivery Initiatives: Key Learnings project* (Research Report No. 32), Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

- criminal behaviour and interaction in the justice system
- gang membership
- homelessness
- detachment from culture and family supports
- disengagement from school.

Trauma-informed approaches are based on a deep understanding of trauma and its impact on individuals, families and communities, respecting and drawing on Aboriginal knowledge and culture. This is critical to avoid misunderstandings and disengagement and is best implemented through consultation with the community to understand any issues or trauma in that community.

The ability to adopt a trauma-informed approach is a specifically developed skill set which requires formal training, a number of training providers specialise in the presentation of this professional development. Opportunities should be provided to staff to train in this field, with a particular focus on culturally-appropriate practice, as required to meet the needs and work of your organisation or agency.

Taking the time and making the effort to build relationships that are safe, authentic and positive is an essential component of trauma-informed practice. A trauma-informed approach with Aboriginal children and young people addresses the cycle of trauma and disadvantage they have experienced and the affect this has on their wellbeing. It seeks to strengthen protective factors to increase resilience and enable recovery from trauma.

Resources

- [Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children - Closing the Gap Clearinghouse](#)
- [Guide to Culturally-Sensitive Trauma-Informed Care - Health Care Toolbox](#)

5. Duty of care and managing disclosures

"First they need good people, which they can 100 per cent, fully trust. Which will always be there, no matter what, whatever time of the day, whatever night or the day." 17 year-old boy

A duty of care is a duty to take reasonable care to:

- identify possible causes of harm
- prevent harm from occurring
- when children and young people are in your care and control.

Taking reasonable care means balancing the risk of harm and the safety of yourself, workers, young people and others against providing opportunities to develop skills, responsibility and maturity.¹⁷

Working with vulnerable children and young people who are likely to have experienced trauma will also require you to have appropriate policies and practices in place for responding to potential disclosures in a sensitive and confidential manner and managing any challenging behaviours of children and young people (such as those described above) to ensure the best chance of participation from children and young people in a safe space.

Protective factors are characteristic(s) at the biological, psychological, family or community (including peers and culture) level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes or that reduces the negative impact of a risk factor on problem outcomes¹⁸ and may also help to build resilience and leadership.

Key protective factors for young people that can be incorporated into your practice include:

- supporting a strong sense of identity and cultural pride
- building confidence in life skills and a strong desire to succeed
- being part of an active community with opportunities to participate in the cultural life
- empowering community self-governance and influence over key areas including health and education services.¹⁹

Resources

- [Information on child safe practices including Child Safe Organisations WA Guidelines - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Risk and Protective Factors - Youth.gov](#)

¹⁷ Department of Education (WA) 2017, *Duty of Care for Students, Policy Statement*, viewed 18 December 2017, <<http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/policies/duty-of-care-for-students.en?cat-id=3457100>>.

¹⁸ United States Government 2017, Youth.gov website, *Risk and Protective Factors*, viewed 18 December 2017, <<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/risk-and-protective-factors-youth>>.

¹⁹ Healing Foundation 2015, *Growing our children up strong and healthy – healing for children and young people*, viewed 18 December 2017, <<https://healingfoundation.org.au/children-and-young-people/>>.

6. Time and autonomy

“We follow traditional lore in Derby. Sometimes this means it’s hard for young men to go to school though because they become a man and have other responsibilities.”
13 year-old boy, Derby

Keep in mind that concepts of time are often perceived and valued differently by Aboriginal peoples than by non-Aboriginal people. Particularly in regional and remote contexts, this can mean Aboriginal people are more fluid with their time and don't feel comfortable with fixed schedules as their priorities are guided by their obligations, not a schedule. Just because you think something is a priority doesn't mean that view will be shared.

For example:

- At certain times of the year, traditional Aboriginal lore occurs, which impacts upon the availability of key community members as well as Aboriginal children and young people.
- ‘Sorry business’, when Aboriginal people mourn the loss of a family/community member, and other cultural commitments and events may also affect the availability of Aboriginal community members even if a schedule was previously agreed.

As a result, it may take longer for you to hold meetings or deliver activities than you are used to, and you need to factor this into the timeline for your participation processes.

You should always consult with Elders and senior leaders regarding your visit and its purpose, and seek fully-informed permission and consent, by way of an invitation to enter and work with the community, ahead of time. An invitation to work in the community is an essential part of starting a respectful relationship with a community and is critical to ensuring that the community wants, understands and will benefit from, your organisation's or agency's activities. Engaging with the community in this way also represents the opening of the opportunity to support Aboriginal-led solutions and to develop and inform your practices in their community.

It may also not be appropriate for you to enter the community at certain times, particularly when there is community disruption, and you must be as flexible as possible with timeframes in order to be responsive to changes in the community.

Aboriginal children and young people often have considerable autonomy and independence compared to non-Aboriginal children and young people, and their availability to attend activities may be different. They may also be considered adults at a younger age, particularly in areas which practise Aboriginal law/lore. For example, you may find that Aboriginal children and young people will need to come and go at different times during an activity; therefore adapting your activity to incorporate this can support greater engagement. They may also have responsibility

to care for other younger children requiring thought to be put into the age range you are targeting, flexibility of the project to allow for wider participation and the other supports you may need to put in place.

Successful engagement includes asking your target group of Aboriginal children and young people about how they want to participate. This will help you understand their needs so you can adapt your activities to make it more welcoming and accessible for them to be involved and sets the tone for your relationship.

7. Communicating with Aboriginal children and young people

“Good people just know how to get on the kids’ level, help them...but don’t pretend that you’re trying to get along with them, just do get along with them, you know? You don’t pretend it. [It’s] just respect.” 17 year-old male

It is important to think through the way staff from your organisation or agency will communicate with Aboriginal children and young people and their communities about specific projects or work, both verbally and in written communication.

Good communication includes checking that you understand people and that you have been understood by those you are working with.²⁰ The use of language can potentially be a problem where unfamiliar words and jargon are used in a community, meaning the language is not inclusive or easily understood.

Keep in mind that, for some communities, an understanding of English, particularly written, may be limited. If you are unsure of the Aboriginal children and young people’s proficiency with English, or the best way to ensure equal opportunity to engage in a particular community, then speak with local community members with knowledge and experience in this area.

You may need to seek the assistance of proficient family members or interpreters (as appropriate) to ensure understanding of processes and an equal opportunity to participate and contribute. The approach may vary from community to community or language group to language group.

Some useful tips include:

- use inclusive and appropriate language for Aboriginal children and young people to reduce the risk of misunderstanding, frustration and distrust
- ensure people understand what is being said by repeating information in different ways or check for meaning with people

²⁰ Government of South Australia and Youth Affairs Council of South Australia 2015, *Better Together: A practical guide to effective engagement with children and young people*, Government of South Australia, viewed 18 December 2017, <<http://www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/resources/working-with-young-people>>.

- use multiple methods of delivery, including written, verbal and visual methods, to cater for different ways of learning and different levels of language proficiency
- be aware of and recognise non-verbal communication styles that may be used by Aboriginal people.

Examples of Aboriginal communication styles:

Communication Style	Comment
Being reserved when meeting people, often staying silent and making minimal eye contact.	In Aboriginal culture, extended periods of silence during conversations may be considered the 'norm' and valued as an opportunity for reflection. Silent pauses may be used to listen, show respect or consensus. Silence itself may be part of the response and should be allowed to take its course. For Aboriginal people, avoidance of eye contact may be a gesture of respect, making insistence on eye contact inappropriate.
Relying on body language to understand what is being said.	Think about the messages you are sending through your non-verbal communication. Are you open to engagement? Interested in the speaker? Paying attention?
Only revealing part of the problem or story until trust has been gained.	Ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions to extract additional information.
Using he/she (and other pronouns) interchangeably.	This is common in Aboriginal English (AE), dialects of English that are spoken by Aboriginal people and that differ from Standard Australian English in systematic ways. It is not lazy or poor English, but rather its own distinct dialect. Heavy AE is spoken mainly in the more remote areas, where it is influenced by Kriol, while light varieties of AE are spoken mainly in metropolitan, urban and rural areas. ²¹

²¹ Eades D 1993, *Aboriginal English*, viewed 29 May 2017, <http://www.nacalc.org.au/cb_pages/files/Aboriginal%20English%20in%20the%20Legal%20System%20-%20Diane%20Eades.pdf>.

<p>Saying 'yes', which could mean many things, including not understanding the question.</p>	<p>Aboriginal peoples may say yes to avoid conflict or disagreement, rather than truly agreeing with your proposal. Open-ended questions such as, "What do you think about...." "How would you...." may be more effective than questions limited to a "yes" or "no" response.</p>
<p>Preferring to engage in a non-confrontational manner, such as standing side-by-side or sitting together, rather than facing each other directly.</p>	<p>Yarning circles are a great example of an engagement method that allows everyone to be on the same level, not be placed in the spotlight and to participate equally.</p>

These are just some examples and shouldn't be generalised to all contexts.²² There are cultural differences between metropolitan, regional and remote areas and between different cultural and language groups, as well as significant diversity within and between Aboriginal language or community groups. Every Aboriginal person is an individual, which must be taken into account when considering how your organisation or agency will engage effectively.

You should also be aware that even within one region, there may be a number of distinct language and cultural groups that you are required to work with at any one time.²³ It is important to listen, ask and learn about local Aboriginal communication protocols. Where the usual or natural ways of learning in a community or language group emphasise peer-to-peer, oral, interactive and visual ways of learning, rather than written communication, your organisation's or agency's communication style will need to adapt accordingly.

²² For additional examples as well as strategies for improving learning outcomes, see Perso T & Hayward C 2015, *Teaching Indigenous Students: Cultural Awareness and Classroom Strategies for Improving Learning Outcomes*, Allen & Unwin.

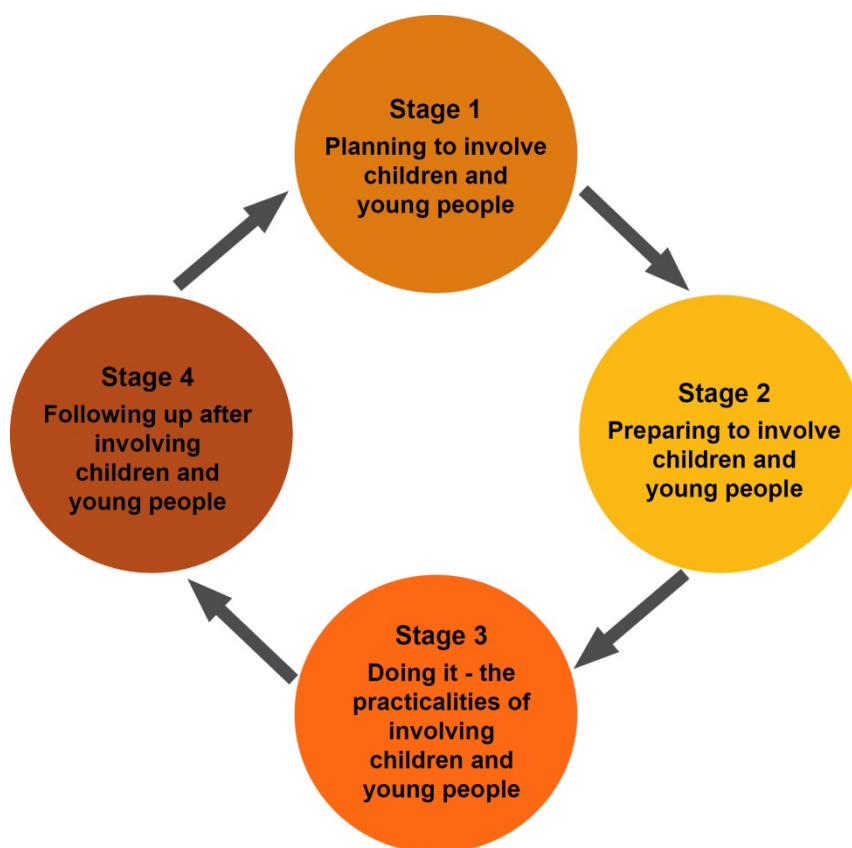
²³ A good starting place to develop an understanding of the rich diversity of Australian Indigenous culture and language at the time of European contact is by examining the N Tindale (1974a) map of Aboriginal tribal and language territories, viewed 12 May 2017, <<http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tribalmmap/>>.

Section 4 - The engagement process

This section contains detailed and practical steps outlining the processes involved in undertaking meaningful consultation and engagement with Aboriginal children and young people for a specific project or target community.

*"If people feel respected, then you feel like, you get the feeling like some people really want to help you and then there's other people who don't give a s**t about you."* 18 year-old male

The Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Participation Guidelines for Involving Children and Young People* (2009)²⁴ describe the participation of children and young people in the stages pictured below.



²⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2009, *Participation Guidelines for Involving Children and Young People*, <<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1479/report-participation-guidelines-october-2009.pdf>>

Stage 1: Planning to involve Aboriginal children and young people

"There should be different kind of programs...for different age groups of kids, girls, boys, old, young, and that sort of stuff... It encourages them to wanna be the one to win, and that sort of stuff." 18 year-old male

This stage requires you to understand your organisation or agency and the community you intend to engage in to inform the development of an internal/draft project scope. This ensures you act on an informed basis in moving to Stage 2.

Stage 1 has three steps:

Step 1: Committing to the participation of Aboriginal children and young people

"I would hire more staff members. So, let's say I had so many kids who need help, I would get, like, hire more staff members, for each single one of them, one-on-one time with them, more time, would be great." 17 year-old male

Once you understand the benefits of including the participation of Aboriginal children and young people generally, you need to investigate how they apply to your specific organisation or agency and its business.

Resources

- [Checklist tool - Is my organisation/agency ready to include the participation of Aboriginal children and young people?](#)

Why does your organisation or agency want to include Aboriginal children and young people?

A commitment to hearing and responding to the views of Aboriginal children and young people is vital for all organisations and agencies that deliver programs and services to this group. To enable this to occur consistently, leaders of organisations and agencies, including board members, chief executives, directors and managers, must take responsibility for creating and maintaining an organisational or agency-wide culture where consultation with Aboriginal children and young people is valued and respected.

It is important to know:

- what you want to achieve
- how this is meaningful
- that all parties involved have clear expectations.

Consider:

- Why do you want to engage with Aboriginal children and young people in this particular scenario?
 - to improve the service or program?
 - to encourage them to attend your service?
 - to inform policy development?
 - to gain a creative or innovative perspective?
 - to build their decision making and leadership capacity?

Case study extract

Lore Law Project – Purpose

The Lore Law project stems from a very clear understanding the purpose of the project and the content of the project, and its Aboriginal youth engagement, has been focused to support that aim.

“With the high rates of engagement of Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal Peoples with the WA justice system, the Francis Burt Law Education Programme (FBLEP), as a community law education program, determined that it had a responsibility to better engage with this audience. Instead of designing programs in the absence of Aboriginal people, FBLEP decided to find out what works for young Aboriginal people through direct engagement, including a number of consultations. FBLEP then facilitated the development of a process and a plan, led by young Aboriginal people, for how the lessons learned from those consultations would be implemented.”

View the full Lore Law Project case study in the *Case studies* section.

Establish a statement of commitment

Commit to the participation of Aboriginal children and young people in a statement that is publicly available and explains how the commitment is actioned, relevant to your organisation’s or agency’s work.

Examples of commitment statements and supporting strategies include:

Edmund Rice Education Australia Commitment Statement to Child Safety:

"All children have a right to feel safe, and be safe. Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) is committed to creating an environment where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all children and young people is paramount. Additional focus is given to vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as children with a disability."

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Participation Policy:

"Contributions made by children and young people should be recognised for their value and merit and given due consideration in decision making. All agencies whose work affects children and young people are encouraged to involve them in decision making.....The Commissioner is committed to consulting children and young people on their views about a range of matters that affect their wellbeing."

[Create Foundation's Children & Young People's Participation Strategy](#)

[City of Mandurah Youth Strategy 2014 – 2018](#)

The statement of commitment could be published in:

- public documents, on the website, on posters or flyers across locations
- induction/welcome packs, on key internal documents and intranet
- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP).

Examples of Reconciliation Action Plan commitments to working with Aboriginal peoples across Australia made by various organisations across industries, available at [Reconciliation Action Plans - Reconciliation Australia](#)

Establish a business structure to support the commitment

Build participation into business processes and strategic planning documents, including the contracting of services, service review, project planning and budget cycles.

Identify a responsible role(s) and expertise who can provide professional advice and support about how to plan and undertake consultation with Aboriginal children and young people. For example, create mechanisms so that:

- all areas of your organisation or agency understand the commitment you will be making and are prepared to support it

- everyone understands how the organisational or agency-wide commitment to participation of Aboriginal children and young people applies to them
- there are named roles to discuss practices and any concerns
- policies and procedures set minimum organisational or agency standards (e.g. on ethics, consent, participation and rewarding young people's participation) and that refer to additional information, support and contacts
- the training and professional development concerning best-practice consultation methods are available for staff.

Leaders must consistently model and promote inclusive practices

Cultural safety and a focus on best-practice consultation with Aboriginal children and young people should be modelled throughout the organisation or agency at all levels. For example:

- engaging and consulting with Elders and senior leaders prior to entering or engaging with a community as a matter of practice
- including consultation with Aboriginal children and young people as a regular agenda item in meetings and other communications
- monitoring and evaluating the use of policies and processes in practice
- promoting consultation with Aboriginal children and young people as core practice throughout the organisation or agency.

Staff must be appropriately skilled and resourced

To enable and support the participation of Aboriginal children and young people, staff must be appropriately skilled. This will include:

- hiring practices such as having mandatory Working With Children and police checks
- additional checks and processes like interviewing staff around their views on engaging with children and young people
- interviewing staff around their baseline knowledge and views on engaging with Aboriginal people
- providing clear information and training around participation standards as part of the induction process
- having policies in place to create safe spaces and outlining how to respond appropriately to any concerns around child safety, for example:
 - acceptable staff behaviour and child safe practices
 - responding to disclosures made by children and young people

- what resources are available for referring vulnerable children to support services and/or reporting disclosures appropriately (such as frontline services and physical and mental health supports).

For more information about being child safe see [Child Safe Organisations](#) and in the context of Aboriginal children and young people see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Duty of care and managing disclosures*.

- having the training and professional development resources available for staff to undertake and revise best-practice consultation methods, including the appropriate cultural security and competency training and culturally-appropriate trauma-based practice, for working with Aboriginal children and young people

For more information about cultural security and the impact of trauma, see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Understanding the impact of trauma*.

- providing staff with timeframes that allow for the development of relationships and trust in communities, make contact with cultural brokers (where required) and incorporate meaningful consultation with Aboriginal children and young people and their families

For more information about the importance of initiatives being place-based, see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Aboriginal people's diversity requires place-based initiatives*.

- For individual projects or services, consider whether conflicts could arise for Aboriginal staff members due to cultural obligations? How will these be managed?
- Consider what resources you need for activities; this may include staffing, transport, venue hire, materials, audio visual equipment, administration, refreshments and reimbursement for young people who participate.

Step 2: Understanding your target community

“What keeps me outta trouble is staying out from town – go hunting, fishing, swimming. I mean, yeah, that’s keeping me outta trouble... Sometimes I go country sometimes I come back town and it’s trouble, it’s no good.” 15 year-old boy

Resources

- [Local mapping tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

Taking the time to understand the community context in which you will be, or already are, working is an important step. This involves gathering background information on local politics, history, culture and practices.

Have early discussions with, and seek advice from, local Aboriginal Elders, community leaders and families, Aboriginal staff members, local Aboriginal organisations and cultural consultants. This will provide a good starting point from which to develop relationships with the Aboriginal community you are working with and can help to identify the existing strengths, capabilities and resources in the community. In particular, it is useful to be aware of potential family and community dynamics that may exist to avoid misunderstandings or unintentionally causing offence.

Steps you can take to access localised information include:

- Do an online search and/or ask the library if there are any books published about Aboriginal history and culture within the area (you need to consider the source of such information, information produced by an Aboriginal person(s) will be of most benefit to your organisation or agency).
- Look at [language maps](#) and find out about the Aboriginal language groups in your area and the history of those groups.
 - Find out who the community Elders and senior leaders/ spokespersons are; who are the traditional owners and custodians of the land?
 - What other clan or community groups are present in the community?
 - Consider, are the interests of these groups aligned? How will you cater for differing interests or approaches to issues? How can you support all children and young people within your target group to participate?
- Contact local education and parenting/family groups, which can also include the local health centre and get to know the grandparents, parents and extended families in the local community:
 - Who are the dominant family groups?
 - What are their preferred names?
 - How can they help you develop local cultural security?
- Get to know the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Corporations and local Aboriginal community groups, such as the local Land and Sea Council. You can quickly learn about:
 - family links to local organisations
 - areas of expertise held by community members

- local issues and services, including service gaps, overlaps and difficulties
- what works well in engaging with Aboriginal children and young people in that community/region, including success stories
- Get to know the local issues and practices.
 - If your organisation or agency has previously engaged with the community, how was it received? Were there any issues? What commitments has your organisation or agency made?
 - Are you working with a community that prefers to break down engagement generally, or particular issues, by gender? Have you allowed for this in your staffing? i.e. female staff working with female children and young people, male staff with male children and young people, particularly where you are discussing gender specific or sensitive issues like sexual education and health.
 - What is the potential impact of your organisation or agency entering the community and asking Aboriginal children and young people their views? Does this place the young people at any risk (e.g. if their views are in conflict with Elders/other community members)? How will you protect children and young people from this? How will you support the development of a desirable outcome for the children and young people?
 - In addition to seeking permission from the local leaders, particularly Elders, to enter the community, have you scanned the environment to determine factors such as feuding or a recent death that may affect your visit?
 - What safeguards need to be in place so your organisation or agency does not create or fuel community conflict? Are safeguards needed to protect Aboriginal children and young people who participate, including from internal (conflict between participants) and external (community) conflict?
- Find out about other local or visiting organisations and agencies.
 - Are there synergies between your participation work and the aims of their project, organisation or agency?
 - Are there relationship building opportunities?
 - Have there been previous organisations or agencies that have provided a similar service? Were they successful? If not, why not? Does their previous activity provide learnings for your organisation or agency? Has

their presence created a barrier in engaging, for example mistrust, in the local community?

- Would your organisation's or agency's process be duplicating any activities with Aboriginal children and young people already underway in the community? This is important because many Aboriginal communities experience a significant burden as they are over-consulted and researched but underserved in terms of outcomes and feedback.
- If another organisation or agency is visiting/planning to visit at the same time as you and you cannot partner with them, consider spacing out your consultation.
- Are there existing leaders or service providers in the community with whom you should engage to gain support for your organisation's or agency's activities?
- Is it possible to upskill local providers or community members in the delivery of your program or service?
- Can you provide local employment or traineeship opportunities through your program or service? Remember that the time of Aboriginal community members, and children and young people, is valuable and essential to your program's success.

Step 3: Developing a draft project scope

"Yeah, it's actually really good. So we can get other kids to speak up as well, not just a little bit of the kids. We want more kids to start speaking up so you can solve problems." 11 year-old Aboriginal girl, residential care

Once you have completed an environmental scan of the community and your organisation or agency as outlined above, your organisation/agency needs to commit to, and have a plan for, acting on the views and advice they provide. Thinking this through first will minimise the risk of creating false expectations among Aboriginal children and young people and the community; eroding trust.

Key questions and matters for your organisation or agency to consider, include:

- what do you want to know from Aboriginal children and young people?
- the community you will be engaging with
- who your organisation or agency provides services to
- the groups of Aboriginal children and young people that your organisation or agency will engage with or impact – their demographics, and any special needs they may have

- how you will access 'at-risk' Aboriginal children and young people, who are often the hardest to reach and have limited opportunities to have their voices heard
- are you required to and have you adopted a culturally appropriate, trauma-based approach? Are your staff prepared to create a safe space and respond to disclosures from vulnerable children and young people?
- do you have a protocol around how to ethically reward/recognise the participation of children and young people?
- will your process provide a benefit to the community? New work should only be undertaken at the community's request, and if it is going to provide new information or services to benefit the local Aboriginal people.²⁵
- what do you intend to do as a result of Aboriginal children and young people's ideas/views/advice?
- what might prevent or limit action (both internally and in the community) and how could this be overcome? Make sure you can deliver on your promised outcomes
- how are you going to share the information received? How can you engage the community in supporting the views shared by Aboriginal children and young people?
- how are you going to measure the outcome? Will you seek feedback from Aboriginal children and young people?
- what is your timeframe and budget? Can you meaningfully engage and follow-up with Aboriginal children and young people within these boundaries? If not, what changes can be made?
- who is the target group? What is their profile? How would you engage with them in a meaningful manner?
- do the staff/personnel facilitating the process have a strong understanding of participation principles and the knowledge, skills and cultural competence to work with Aboriginal children and young people on this project/service and in this community? If not, what additional training and support might they need?
- does your activity require any research approvals (such as ethics)? Or any other approvals or permissions, including from the community itself?
Remember that there are additional ethical requirements and safeguards for working with Aboriginal communities.

Include this thinking in your draft/internal project scope, which will be tested, reviewed and revised in Stage 2.

²⁵ Vicary D, Tennant J, Garvie T and Adupa C 2008, *Can You Hear Me? The Active Engagement of Aboriginal Children in the Development of Social Policy by Non-Aboriginals*. Perth, Western Australian Office for Children and Youth.

Resources

- [Project planning tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Business Plan Template and Guide - Department of Industry, Innovation and Science](#)

Case study extract

Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY)

Engaging with 'at-risk' young people

KEY had a clear understanding of who its target audience was - at-risk kids in the community. KEY knew that it would need to consult with at-risk Aboriginal children and young people to understand what was driving the negative behaviours that the program was seeking to address and what children and young people wanted from the program.

"KEY used the following process to engage with hard-to-reach children and young people.

- Speaking with young people in their familiar environments. i.e. school or hang out places – pre the school holiday period
- Ensuring that those agency staff who have existing relationships and regular contact with young people were aware of the engagement required, and could undertake these conversations i.e. police, youth justice, Save the Children, Waringarri's One Family At A Time, and back to country programs
- Holding community events that catered for the interests of 'at risk' youth, and where engagement with young people by agency staff could occur in an informal setting
- Ensuring local Aboriginal community controlled organisations and not for profit organisations were engaged in the activities, as well as the planning and delivery work.

View the full KEY case study in the *Case studies* section.

Stage 2: Preparing to involve Aboriginal children and young people

"I think it is good when people like you come out and ask us what we think because then they know the real truth. So they don't just guess and there's things they can work on so things can get better." 15 year-old Aboriginal girl, foster care

This stage requires you to engage with the community you intend to target to check your previous assessment and inform the development of your internal/draft project scope. This ensures that you act on an informed basis in moving to Stage 3.

Stage 2 has two steps:

Step 1: Build relationships

"They have some mentors but they never have male mentors. My grandson needs a male mentor who's ongoing, who's in there for the long run. I'm old, I struggle to walk to the front gate. I can't go and kick a footy in the park with him. He needs someone who will stick with him. Not just like with JJT [Juvenile Justice Team] where there's someone for four months and then that's it, you're on your own."

Grandmother

Remember the importance of starting the relationship properly. Before commencing work in the community, the community must invite you in and request your involvement in addressing the issues being targeted by your organisation or agency. Together, your organisation/agency and the relevant community leadership and stakeholders will need to decide the best way to approach the issues being targeted by your organisation or agency.

Resources

- [Working with Indigenous children, families and communities - Australian Institute of Family Studies](#)

Taking time to build relationships provides opportunities to foster mutual respect, trust and reciprocal exchange; all of which are critical elements to working effectively with Aboriginal communities and which will require a significant period of investment from your organisation/agency to develop. These networks can enhance the process of involving Aboriginal children and young people in your organisation or agency and the outcomes of your project or initiative for the community. These relationships will also help you to manage any issues that arise during the consultation, such as whether it is appropriate to run planned activities following a disruption or loss in the community.

Consulting with the community

“I help these kids out, like talk to them and sometimes we even cook dinner for them. I also help with the kids programs on the weekends. There are things like girls and boy’s fishing trips. Girls and boys aren’t allowed to socialise together up here. It’s just how it is. I don’t mind, we still have fun.” C Jai, 17 year-old girl, Kununurra

This is your opportunity to introduce yourself, your organisation/agency and the work you are planning to undertake in the community.

Having identified local leaders and stakeholders as part of your community mapping, now is the time to have preliminary discussions about:

- the concept you have come up with and what the community thinks about it
- the community’s level of interest in what you are proposing
- the community’s expectations on how you will recruit children and young people to participate and how you will implement the program
- the community’s expectations on their involvement and feedback they will receive.

If the community is not responding well to your draft concept, you will need to develop a new concept with the community that meets the needs of your organisation/agency and the community. Remember, even after you have agreed a concept and plan with the community, you must remain flexible in order to be responsive to community needs.

In addition to exploring and reflecting on your own cultural beliefs and learning about cultural differences (see Section 2 of this toolkit), there are many things you can do to help build rapport with Aboriginal children and young people and their community. A few examples are:

- seek guidance about local community protocols
- always be open, honest and respectful
- use clear and plain language, uncomplicated by jargon (see Section 2)
- avoid speaking in a manner that is condescending or paternalistic
- do not make promises that you may not be able to deliver
- be prepared to admit mistakes and/or lack of knowledge and seek guidance from young people and community members
- avoid acting as though you are the ‘expert’ – demonstrate that you want to listen and learn from Aboriginal children and young people and their community because you value their views and ideas
- agree next steps for progress or feedback during the engagement and ensure they are delivered upon.

Consulting with other service providers and stakeholders

Organisations or agencies already 'on the ground' in the community will have insight into what does and does not work in that community and are a valuable resource to your organisation/agency.

Taking the time to introduce yourself, your organisation/agency and your proposed work is also an opportunity to bring other stakeholders on board who have established relationships and communication with your target audience.

These early conversations will help to prevent service overlap, create valuable partnerships and respect the existing systems and services in place in the community.

Case study extract

Lore Law Project – Build relationships

The Lore Law Project has a number of stakeholders as well as its core working group, so it has been important to develop clear lines of communication between the groups to ensure that the project remains focused and on track. Part of the success of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Team (IYLT) is the strong relationship between its members and their common focus on achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

"The IYLT first presented the Project and a pilot film to the Steering Group, the FBLEP Advisory Committee and the Law Society Council with the aim of having the Project proposal approved and signed-off. From that point, the Law Society, with input from the Project team, facilitated sessions with the IYLT to promote and advocate the Project to stakeholders. This ensured wider community participation and buy-in so the Project did not develop in isolation, while also gaining project ambassadors from stakeholders in the wider community to support the Project's sustainability."

View the full Lore Law Project case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 2: Review your processes

“Adults have to start listening more to us kids, instead of just telling us what to do all the time.” 16 year-old girl, Great Southern

Once you have agreed on an approach with the community and stakeholders, it is time to revisit and update your draft project scope and finalise a project plan, including a communication plan.

Resources

- [Project planning tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

Once you have a project plan, host a session for all staff and volunteers working with the Aboriginal children and young people on the project and cover:

- the plan for the activity/participation
- the applicable processes and protocols as agreed with the community, including on obtaining consent
- the information sharing/communication plan and materials
- revisit your duty of care requirements and processes
- contact numbers of responsible staff for any queries, concerns or issues on the day
- any questions staff or volunteers may have.

Stage 3: Doing it – involving Aboriginal children and young people

“We need to focus on the youth, they are our future...” 17 year-old Nyikina young person, Kimberley

This stage requires you to think about your communication and continue to test your processes as you begin to actively engage with Aboriginal children and young people.

Stage 3 has seven steps:

Step 1: Communication – be genuine and clear

“White people they will just...they don't care. They just look at us and say nothing to us. They just walk away and have no respect for us... When we speak our language or anything like that, or when we talk, they just look at us and laugh and copy us and then make fun of us.” 15 year-old girl

The engagement and participation methods your organisation or agency chooses need to be appropriate to the age, background, interests and capabilities of the Aboriginal children and young people you wish to involve. Adopt a strengths-based perspective that builds and develops the existing strengths, skills and capacities of Aboriginal children and young people.

The successful participation of Aboriginal children and young people depends on genuine and effective communication. You need to clearly tell young people:

- who you are
- what you are trying to achieve
- how you plan to achieve it
- what role children and young people will play
- where, when and how you will be engaging with them (time frame and commitment required)
- why you are engaging with them both generally as children and young people and that specific target group
- how you will check back with them to ensure that you've heard, and will share, their views accurately
- who will see/hear their contributions and what will be done with them.

Step 2: Test your processes

“The most important thing in my culture is to be a good role model, stand up for what’s right, stick up and protect family and be proud of myself.” 13 year-old young person, Pilbara

It is useful to test your communication resources and activity/service on an identified group of children and young people who can provide feedback to you prior to launching and implementing your project. This group may be identified through:

- your consultations with the community
- your consultations with stakeholders
- previously engaged Aboriginal children and young people
- students from the local school
- a targeted recruitment process for your project (as outlined below).

This will help to ensure your resources are clear, understood by and effective with your target audience.

Step 3: Recruiting Aboriginal children and young people to participate

“I would change a lot of things in my community if I was a boss like having more role models for the younger kids to teach them right from wrong and have respect and to encourage kids to get to school ‘cause learning is very important in life.” 11 year-old young person, Goldfields-Esperance

Aboriginal children and young people tell us that they want to be role models for other members of their community, particularly those younger than them. In the initial stages of seeking to engage with Aboriginal children and young people, you may need to use multiple forms of communication (including local language(s) if appropriate) to reach them. These communications may target families as well as children and young people directly by:

- word of mouth – utilise existing service providers and other key stakeholders and their established relationships and communication systems
- local radio, television and newspapers
- social media, including community social media (for example the Everything Geraldton account/page)
- promotion in community and sporting groups, cultural spaces, schools and youth centres
- local community boards, including at the local shopping centre.

Step 4: Implementing consent

“My parents thought it was important that I build a future for myself so encouraged me to go. I’m glad they did.” Jasirah, 18 year-old girl, Perth

Children and young people must provide their consent to be involved in an activity; what this looks like will depend on the protocol you have agreed with the community in your earlier consultations.

Remember that children and young people can withdraw their consent at any time, even once they have started the activity, this is another reason that participants/contributors will need to be kept informed as throughout the different stages of the project or activity. You will also need to specifically obtain consent to take and use photographs, and for the use of the information gained through the participation activity. Always be clear about what the information will be used for. For an example of a consent form, take a look at the [Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Consent Form](#).

In some communities Aboriginal young people may be considered adult by the community, having been through ‘lore’ ceremony/process, and consequently able to give their own consent.²⁶ It is important to consult with Aboriginal Elders and leaders in the community to seek their advice on this.

In most cases it will be necessary to obtain the consent of the child or young person’s parent or guardian too. Consider your organisation’s/agency’s duty of care and its processes around obtaining parental consent. At times, it may be difficult to obtain consent from parents or guardians of certain children and you will need to plan and set out the process you will follow when this occurs. Remember that the parents and guardians of the children and young people you are working with are important stakeholders and the appropriate time and effort needs to be allocated to ensuring they understand what you are doing with their children and young people.

Particularly in regional and remote communities, the practice of obtaining consent may involve a combination of visiting families door-to-door and organising family friendly community events (such as a BBQ), which provide opportunities for you to speak with parents and guardians about your organisation or agency, seek their feedback on your proposed activities and, ultimately, obtain their informed permission and consent to work with their children and young people.

Don’t forget to bring additional consent forms with you on the day of the activity to ensure all participants have a signed consent form and are familiar with the terms of participation on the day.

²⁶ Vicary D, Tennant J, Garvie T and Adupa C 2008, *Can You Hear Me? The Active Engagement of Aboriginal Children in the Development of Social Policy by Non-Aboriginals*. Perth, Western Australian Office for Children and Youth.

For more information about consent, see the Commissioner for Children and Young people's consent and participation policies on the *Understanding participation* page.

Step 5: Working together - involving the community

"Family keeps you safe, we have a culture of sharing." 7 year-old boy, Perth

Where possible, this should be done through direct feedback from the children and young people themselves, who can help shape the information provided back to community and develop their own communication and leadership skills in the process.

Case study extract

Kimberley Community Alcohol and Drug Service

Theatre of Transformation Project – project partners

The Theatre of Transformation Project is an excellent example of a partnership between different community sectors to achieve a common goal.

"The Theatre of Transformation project was a community-based activity conducted in Halls Creek by the following project partners:

- Kimberley Community Drug and Alcohol Service (KCADS)
- Melbourne based theatre director, Bryan Derrick
- the local Aboriginal Medical Service, Yura Yungi
- Halls Creek High School."

View more on the Theatre of Transformation Project in the *Case studies* section.

At what stage of the project/service community participation takes place and what it looks like will depend on what is appropriate in the context you are operating in and what you have agreed with the community. For example it may include a high level of involvement in the development and implementation of your project or service from the outset, or it may be limited to feedback following engagement with children and young people.

Participation by community stakeholders allows for valuable relationship development and information sharing between key stakeholders and supports children and young people, community members and service providers to work

together, respectfully and in an integrated way, to develop solutions for the challenges in their own community.²⁷

Through involvement, either by active participation or in receiving feedback, community members and service providers are more likely to feel motivated and empowered to enable the children and young people's vision.

Step 6: Methods and activities

"Always know that children and young people are looking for someone who will really listen. Keep youth projects fun with a positive outcome for them, and listen."

Kennah Parker²⁸

Involve Aboriginal children and young people in choosing the methods and activities they prefer and ask them how they would like to be communicated with.

Enable Aboriginal children and young people to determine their own priorities both during the development of, and within the context of, your participation activity, and to develop their own problem solving approach, and to decide on how they will contribute their views.

General ideas include:

- asking children and young people to help plan activities
- using creative, engaging and fun activities (for example, that include sport, arts and crafts and cooking)
- using mediums they value, such as online tools, music or videos and social media platforms (where appropriate)
- opportunities for local 'doing' activities such as going out bush, camping and fishing (particularly in remote and regional areas)
- using trusted Aboriginal community members and mentors to facilitate discussions
- upskilling young people to peer-to-peer facilitate discussions and mentor other children and young people
- encouraging and training young people to be co-facilitators
- selecting child and young person friendly venues and facilities, such as recreation centres and youth hubs – children and young people can offer good suggestions on this

²⁷ The Australian Centre for Social Innovation 2013, *Enabling change with Aboriginal families and services: A frank look at challenges & opportunities*. Adelaide, South Australia: Australian Centre for Social Innovation, <<http://www.tacsi.org.au/project/report-enabling-change-with-aboriginal-families-and-services/>>.

²⁸ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2008, *Young People's Panel, Children's Week Forum 2008: Making a positive difference in the lives of WA children*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

- scheduling plenty of breaks and variation in activities.

For more examples of a range of participation activities see the *Case Studies* section of the toolkit and our [Participation Guidelines examples](#).

Case study extract

Kids on Country – local ‘doing’ activities

Kids on Country is an activities based program that engages young people by taking them out on Country to complete various science related tasks.

“The program was developed through conversations with Aboriginal children and young people held around a fire, starting from the first day-trip. As the facilitators, Millenium Kids (MK) arranged food and logistics and asked simple, open questions to determine the priorities of the young people involved: What do you like about your community, what don’t you like and what would you change?”

View the full Kids on Country case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 7: Implementing participation

“Being a role model to the younger ones is important to me.” 15 year-old girl, Pilbara

Children and young people need to have fun, find the experience meaningful and benefit from it. Aboriginal children and young people like to take part in participation activities that:

- are challenging but achievable
- are meaningful
- are socially and culturally respectful
- build knowledge and confidence
- develop leadership skills
- make a difference
- take them seriously and treat them with respect.



Practical tips and steps for implementation on the day:

Resources

- [Practical tips for implementation on the day - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

After the participation activity:

- recognise the participants and celebrate their achievement through stickers, certificates, accreditation or references (where appropriate)
- reward them with vouchers, products, publications or similar
- acknowledge their contributions in publications.

²⁹ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2013, *Are you listening? Guidelines for making complaints systems accessible and responsive to children and young people*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth.

Stage 4: Following up with Aboriginal children and young people who participate

“Other things worry me too like what if the world keeps going the way it is and no one is prepared to make change and be nicer to each other. Right now it feels like nothing is going to change and people are not coming to together like they should.”
Jay, 17-year-old boy, Perth

This stage requires you to provide and receive feedback to and from the Aboriginal children and young people you have engaged with, to ensure that you accurately reflect and incorporate the information provided by participants during the activity, to inform your participants and their community and to further develop your practice for next time.

Stage 4 has three steps:

Step 1: Give them feedback

“Dancing is great. It lets you see other people’s points of view and teaches us about how when you work together you can create something amazing.” Grace, 12 year-old girl, Perth

Children and young people have given time, energy and commitment to your project and it is important to them. Children and young people have the right to receive feedback on how their involvement in your organisation’s/agency’s participation processes influenced and affected the decision making process, and to see that their contribution made a difference.

Provide feedback from the beginning through two-way conversation, using methods preferred by Aboriginal children and young people. Ask them how they would like to be contacted with feedback and how they would find it easiest to provide you with theirs.

Important feedback includes:

- acknowledging their attendance and work they completed (personally and also publicly through your organisation’s/agency’s website, social media and community-based platforms)
- describing and evidencing how their views have been responded to and influenced your work, including any actions taken and decisions made
- updating them about the project’s progress and explaining changes (including delays) to the plan
- allowing them to review and comment on documents that record their views prior to circulation/publication to double check the accuracy of the analysis and interpretation as well as improve program design and outcomes

- providing an opportunity for and responding to queries, requests and suggestions
- your response(s) to their feedback received so far
- share the value/praise of their contribution with community stakeholders.

Step 2: Get their feedback

“Thank you for listening to me because it finally gave me a chance to speak.” Girl of unknown age, South West

Asking Aboriginal children and young people for feedback about what it was like to be involved in the process will improve your participation activities in the future, improving results for Aboriginal children and young people and your organisation/agency.

Seek feedback by:

- observing children and young people’s body language and behaviour – use their feedback to adjust what you are doing as you are doing it, for example change the activity, the pace or have a break.
- asking them what they thought about an activity (individually and collectively)
- reviewing at the end of the activity (for example through a yarning circle or while sharing a meal)
- providing an opportunity for anonymous feedback (such as a survey or ideas box).

There a variety of tools that can be used to collect feedback, including stories, activities, child-friendly questionnaires, yarning circles and role play.

Resources

- [Models of Participation, Involving Children in Decision Making - Commissioner for Children Tasmania](#)

When asking Aboriginal children and young people for feedback after a workshop or activity, ask about their experience of participating, including:

- what went well, what they enjoyed
- what they learnt
- what could be done differently
- if they feel they were taken seriously and treated fairly
- if they feel they were listened to and safe (including in their identity and culture)

- what they think of the action or outcomes
- what they would like in the future.

Seeking the feedback of Aboriginal children and young people also helps to increase the evidence base around the issues affecting them and how best to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. This is important to improve policy and practice, to design effective interventions and use as a basis for advocacy.

Case study extract
Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY) – Feedback

KEY has continued to evolve its feedback process as a reflection tool for the success of past programs, a planning tool for future programs and a way of demonstrating anecdotal success of the program.

“Feedback from young people was obtained after the school holiday period, which contributed to the next phase of planning for future school holidays programs – many young people reported attending more than one event as part of the school holiday program; they were positive about family/community involvement and felt more confident about talking to agency staff at these events.”

View the full KEY case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 3: Make sure you've delivered

“Listen to what young people have to say, and if you promise you are going to do something, do it, otherwise their trust in adults diminishes.” Dianna Wright ³⁰

It is important to deliver on what you agreed on in the beginning. If a different outcome or project has resulted from the consultation or participation activity, you will need to re-negotiate this, and any additional activities arising from it, with the community as part of your reporting back.

This can be particularly important when you don't receive the kind of engagement or results you expected, to ensure the approach or program is improved for future activity.

Formally monitoring and evaluating how well Aboriginal children and young people's participation is working for them and for your organisation/agency is an important part of this. Evaluation should be embedded in the process from start to finish. It

³⁰ Young Panel member, *Children's Week Forum 2008: Making a positive difference in the lives of WA's children*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

provides opportunities to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses during and on completion of the process.

Involving Aboriginal children and young people in the evaluation process can improve the quality and integrity of the evaluation and be empowering for them. When involved in the evaluation, young people will often feel more ownership and commitment to the initiative and its aims. It also supports their development as young leaders as it is an opportunity to think critically and express their views.

Section 5 - Case studies

The Commissioner has compiled this case study resource to highlight some practical examples of the processes outlined in this toolkit in action.

The examples included within this toolkit are a small sample of the great work occurring around Western Australia that involves Aboriginal children and young people.

The Commissioner will continue to build upon these examples to ensure the toolkit remains up-to-date and is reflective of current practice.

Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY)

In October 2016, the East Kimberley District Leadership Group (EKDLG) decided a priority for the group was to focus on children and young people in Kununurra, to ultimately reduce the significant youth incarceration rates during school holiday periods (particularly during Dec/Jan holidays), and to increase community and child safety during this same period.

Overview

The group adopted a collaborative approach and developed school holiday programs that aimed to engage children and young people during a time of the year when young people historically become vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and on occasions, incarceration. Part of the focus was to encourage the participation of family members in the activities and to ensure appropriate supports were in place for the 'at risk' youth who attended the program. In addition, the collaborative approach sought to identify and implement mutually reinforcing activities that enacted the East Kimberley Empowered Communities five social norms.

The Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY) working party consisted of Government agencies (all levels), not for profit organisations, local Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and volunteers. The methodology was based on Collective Impact design principles with the underlying premise that no organisation can create large-scale lasting social change alone. The approach ensures there is partnership and leadership in the design, planning and implementation of community specific solutions and outcomes.

The common agenda of KEY includes:

- improving the content and coordination of programs available for young people in Kununurra, during school holiday periods
- ensuring programs encouraged children and young people to make good choices
- promoting positive family time and strengthen relationships between young people, their families and the wider community

- ensuring the views and ideas of local young people are included in the planning and implementation
- reducing anti-social behaviour, juvenile offences and periods of incarceration.

To develop the program and calendar of events, advice was sought from the young people, local Aboriginal leadership, and service providers. Feedback was specifically obtained from the identified 'youth at risk', mostly aged between 10 to 15 years and who are generally disengaged from education and other mainstream activities.

Activities offered as part of the program included basketball, football, pool parties, weaving, discos, movie and skate nights, indoor soccer, street art, bush tucker trips back to country visits, make up evenings and performing arts events.

The calendar of events document used to promote the activities incorporates artwork by a young person from the local community, who won a competition ran by the working group to design the logo for the KEY initiative. The [KEY social media](#) page for the program is also available.

Development of focus

The success of KEY has been underpinned by a collective impact response to an issue that affects the whole of community. It quickly became a vehicle for the whole community to work together as one, for positive results.

Part of the focus needed to be on those young people with complex needs and who were already vulnerable to being further engaged in the criminal justice system. Often the young people had prior, as well as current, contact with police, justice and child protection systems, were disengaged from school and had already spent time in Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Young people in this high risk category were identified by government and non-government agencies and a deliberate effort was made to consult young people about how their time could be better spent during the holiday periods. It should be noted that for many, there was no difference between holiday and school term periods, as they were either partly engaged in the education system, or not at all.

The conversations between service workers and the young people aimed to ensure the young people were very much a part of the discussions around the construction of the school holiday activities and focus; and attempted to create a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcomes, particularly for themselves, but also for their peers.

KEY was promoted through other mediums and agencies for their information, to ensure people were aware from a participatory point of view, and also to make a supporting contribution. KEY was re-enforced at a youth sector planning session, in which all organisations in Kununurra in the youth space were invited to attend. At the planning session, there were opportunities to learn about the aims and

objectives of KEY, to gain ideas and resource information from the broader sector and from Aboriginal Elders, and to develop conversations about future focus areas. The involvement of disengaged young people in the education system was one of the areas raised, and where there was an appetite for a collective focus on this issue, including the development of an education forum.

Engaging with at-risk children and young people

KEY used the following process to engage with hard-to-reach children and young people.

- Speaking with young people in their familiar environments. i.e school or hang out places – pre the school holiday period.
- Ensuring those agency staff who have existing relationships and regular contact with young people were aware of the engagement required, and could undertake these conversations i.e. police, youth justice, Save the Children, Waringarri's One Family At A Time and back to Country programs.
- Holding community events that catered for the interests of 'at risk' youth, and where engagement with young people by agency staff could occur in an informal setting.
- Ensuring local Aboriginal community controlled organisations and not for profit organisations were engaged in the activities, as well as the planning and delivery work.

The themes of the conversations with young people included the why (the need), the how (what works/where best/interest based/incentives) and the what next (future possibilities/learnings). Conversations focused on activities that would engage families with their children, ideas of sporting related activities to release energy/team dynamics/mutual enjoyment for whole of family, activities that could cater for children of different ages and opportunities for older children to look after the younger ones, activities that could happen on country and activities where kids could learn and then replicate in their own homes. As a result, there was a marked increase in the number of parents and older siblings attending events with the younger children, to such a level that service providers running the events commented, saying they had never seen this level of engagement from families before.

Feedback from young people was obtained after the school holiday period, which will contribute to the next phase – many young people reported attending more than one event. They were positive about family/community involvement and felt more confident about talking to agency staff at these events.

Lesson learnt

A number of learnings were taken from the project:

- A number of young people were identified as having leadership traits, potential and willingness to be strong role models for their peers, observed through behaviour exhibited during events, such as helping the organisers to assist in setting the events up, cooking food for the events, and speaking up.
- Gaps in youth services and coordination in Kununurra exist, despite the good intentions by agencies and their staff. The prospect of what 'shared responsibility' means and how service providers, community members and young people can work together better for shared outcomes is an ongoing conversation.
- The KEY Collective Impact project has demonstrated the effectiveness of achieving small social change by targeting mutually reinforcing activities for young people, their families, agencies and community. In Kununurra, it demonstrated the large-scale community appetite for better outcomes for young people in the community, and the recognition that everyone has a part to play.
- The positive engagement of children and young people in the program promotes ownership, positive energy and relationship building.
- People can do things with limited resourcing with the KEY project demonstrating the value of building relationships between agencies, organisations and other local stakeholders, to share resources.
- 'At risk' children are usually well known to service providers, but not necessarily engaged in discussions about what will work for them. Data received from the last school holiday program showed 23 out of 30 identified 'at risk' children and young people attended and engaged in the program.

Next steps

Specific areas for improvement were highlighted following the conclusion of the project, including the next steps for Kununurra Empowering Youth.

- Explore the possibility of an allocated budget as this allows better security in the financial sustainability of the project.
- Ensure the results of the program and key information is circulated to community in an easy-to-read format, especially community Elders and leaders, to assist in developing other community priorities.
- Develop further strategies to address the needs of an identified 'very high risk' cohort.
- Expand the youth engagement to include either participation on the working group or a separate youth council or another structure.

- Address transport issues, which affects the ability of children and young people to participate in programs and access services.
- Develop youth leadership opportunities alongside other agencies/bodies.
- Develop the focus of KEY in accordance with the regional young people and families focused agenda, in partnership with key Aboriginal organisations and Empowered Communities.

Kids on Country program - Coolgardie

What happens when you bring together Aboriginal Elders, children and young people aged 10 to 25 years and scientists on country in a citizen science program, and ask the kids what and how they want to learn?

Over a series of weekend-based day-trips and group discussions, young people explored various sites in the woodland, learnt how to monitor local malleefowl for Birdlife Australia, produced a book and a film of their activities and hosted an international citizen science field trip, sharing their knowledge with other young people from Indonesia and Malaysia and are now working towards developing a sustainable business model that includes the development of a smart mapping application and tours for tourists to the local area.

Overview

Since 2008 Millennium Kids (MK) has been working with young people in the Goldfields' Great Western Woodland using a 'skills for life' learning process in a co-designed program addressing: what do you like about your community, what don't you like, and what would you change?

In 2014, a Ngadju Elder invited MK to extend the program to the Coolgardie Aboriginal community. This invitation stemmed from a Goldfields field trip which travelled through Coolgardie, where MK invited the Elder to come and meet with the students to introduce and welcome them to the country they were travelling through.

The program started with a picnic being held on Country, which was attended by fifty-two children and young people and their families. Of those who attended, 90 per cent had not been to Cave Hill, a nearby camping spot, before. The Elders were shocked. Parents involved stated the causes as being a lack of suitable vehicles for bush trips, and no fuel money. One of the issues identified by the parents and Elders was that children and young people were stuck in the small township on weekends, and there was a lot of anti-social behavior created out of boredom.

Community engagement

The program was developed through conversations with Aboriginal children and young people held around a fire, starting from the first day trip. As the facilitators, MK arranged food and logistics and asked simple, open questions to determine the priorities of the young people involved: What do you like about your community, what don't you like and what would you change? There was strong consensus between the young people that they were bored on weekends and wanted more activities like weekend fieldtrips, where they could learn from Elders, reconnect with country, share stories and get to know more about their landscape and their culture.

The young people also said that they wanted a program which ran on weekends and which was different to learning in the classroom.

MK then started talking to stakeholders about the project. It was important to MK for stakeholders to understand the co-design process and the objectives of the project – kids leading and a sound understanding of the methodology was required. Kids' ideas form the basis of the next steps. MK scaffolds each step and supports with grant writing, seeking partnerships and training opportunities to upskill the whole team.

With support from stakeholders, Wyemando Bequest supported the language acquisition, IGO Holdings supported the field trips and on country experiences, ERM Foundation and Tellus Holdings funds were used for training adults to support the initiative, and Gondwana Link was used for expert land use and biodiversity. These stakeholders provided an opportunity for kids out on Country, to learn new skills and to reconnect with Ngadju language. Each stakeholder had a certain role in the project. The aim is to keep these partnerships alive so kids can see connection to real work opportunities in the future.

MK worked with Elders and kids (MK members aged 10 – 25 years) around a picnic table in the local park to design *Kids on Country* - a program based around the kids' desire to learn more about the woodland, centered on traditional culture. As part of the program, kids explored various local sites with scientific and technical equipment including binoculars, iPads and GPS, and participated in painting, writing poetry, managing the barbecue and playing with each other. During this time, the kids also participated in skill-building workshops. Importantly, some of the local Indigenous stakeholders are employed through the program.

Project development

Using the Millennium Kids inquiry methodology, young people have been visiting the woodland alongside scientists and Elders, showcasing cultural knowledge through citizen science applications. In the program kids are allowed to explore the woodland to discover areas of interest to them. These areas of interest form the basis of program planning and development with MK, creating a youth led process. Through the program kids learn life skills that can be used in the school setting and in the workplace. Areas of interest for the kids included:

- Can we build a fire? - taught risk management and Department of Parks and Wildlife fire and firewood protocols
- Can we cook on the barbecue? – the kids learnt about food preparation, nutrition and hygiene protocols
- What bird is that? – the kids learnt how to use binoculars, cameras and a bird-identifying book, as well as learning Ngadju language by experience – seeing

objects and animals and learning their names from Elders, the kids also learnt from Elders about Malleefowl Dreaming

- Can you eat that plant? – the kids had the opportunity to develop their knowledge by sharing with scientists and Elders.
- Why do you need a GPS? – the kids had the opportunity to collect information to help us understand where we live and to contribute towards Birdlife Australia's tracking and understanding of the malleefowl around Coolgardie.

The kids were interested in malleefowl. They had seen them, knew where they crossed the road, and knew how to find their nests. Millennium Kids secured funding for a group of 30 young people from Coolgardie, based on their desire to learn more about the woodland, with a particular emphasis on traditional culture and protection of a threatened bird, the malleefowl. The program also gave the kids the opportunity to lead the program and found that with the recognition of their knowledge and skills and the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, they blossomed; keen to share their knowledge.

When the circus came to town, the kids met with the Chinese circus hands and decided that they wanted to take them out on country because they were from a different country and would not have experienced the bush that the children had become so familiar with. The circus moved on, but it gave birth to a new idea. Why couldn't the kids take tourists out bush and share their knowledge with them? The kids designed and hosted an international fieldtrip, starting with a list of important places and deciding what they wanted to teach their guests, before sharing their knowledge with other young people from Indonesia arranged through MK's partnerships. Each of the Indonesian participants paid their own way to the field trip, showing the local kids the value others place on their knowledge and country.

On a separate occasion, the kids also presented their work at the MK20 UNconference in Perth with over 150 young people and sustainability educators. They met with the previous Chief Scientist of WA and showcased the book they had created about their project. They reported to stakeholders from local, regional and international partnerships focusing on sustainability education.

At this event the kids also pitched new ideas for 2017. In 2017 we aim to meet indigenous rangers on country working at Credo Station. This opportunity has been facilitated by Department of Parks and Wildlife and will provide kids with invaluable interaction with indigenous role models.

Project outcomes

Through the program, the kids developed real world skills that have application in the classroom and workforce. Indigenous adults participating in the program have also since been upskilled to lead part of the program, have achieved a formal

qualification in environmental work and found local employment, creating role models for the kids.

The kids also developed stronger relationships with local Elders and have developed from not knowing their cultural connections to proudly identifying with their language group, speaking confidently in public, and effectively communicating their project outcomes.

The kids have seen and experienced mutual respect between Elders and scientists and understand that their culture and ideas are important and have a place in the science world.

The kids are now independently reporting malleefowl sightings, contributing to the environmental knowledge and sustainability of their local area.

The kids have helped write a book, assisted in the production of a film about malleefowl and pitched new projects ideas as a result of their interest in the landscape and environmental health of their local community; they:

- want to help control feral cats
- are planning a revegetation project
- want to collect data on threatened species.

This shows the enthusiasm with which the kids have embraced the project and the potential opportunities to further develop their civil participation in the future.

Lessons learnt

- It's important to be invited in to work with a community.
- It takes time and energy to connect with the families and guardians of children and young people to obtain their consent, we spent a lot of time going from door to door to introduce ourselves and the project to parents, carers and guardians and help them to understand our objectives.
- Support from local leaders is critical to the success of a project, the project would not be what it is without our local leadership team.
- When you listen to children and young people, innovative ideas can be generated. It was up to us to listen and work out how to respond to those ideas to put them in action.
- Upskilling local people, including young people, to implement the program is essential to its sustainability.

Next steps

- When consent for a young person had not been obtained, or a young person was new to the group, the decision was to stay in town to ensure our duty of care needs were met. You need to learn to be flexible when operating in communities that experience transience.
- It is recommended that various communication tools are set up at the beginning of the program – whatsapp, instagram etc to ensure communication with kids.

Lore Law Project – Perth

The total number of Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal Peoples participating in the Law Society of Western Australia's Francis Burt Law Education Programme (the FBLEP) in the average year is less than 1 per cent of total participants. With the high rates of engagement of Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal Peoples with the WA justice system the FBLEP determined that it had a responsibility to better engage with this audience.

Overview

The Lore Law Project originated from a consultation with Aboriginal communities (252 young people and Elders in 27 group consultations) about a project to better engage with Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal peoples about their legal rights and responsibilities. Importantly, the consultations included young Aboriginal people with direct experience of the criminal justice system through the Banksia Hill Detention Centre. As a result of the desire to spread service delivery beyond the metro region, both regional and metro-based consultations were held. The project first commenced in April 2012 and is nearing its final stages of development prior to implementation.

From the outset of the project the FBLEP identified the need for Aboriginal peoples, representatives from Aboriginal organisations and representatives from organisations working with Aboriginal communities to oversee and be involved in the planning, development and implementation of the project, as these are the project's key stakeholders.

The project is intended to provide a means through which Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal communities can present and voice the local lore/law matters of interest and/or concern to them. In turn, this creates an opportunity for local stakeholders such as the police, the judiciary, the legal profession and relevant support services to engage with Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal communities through a two-way engagement process.

In the short term, the project aims to establish interest and relationships on lore/law issues amongst Aboriginal youth and in Aboriginal communities across Western Australia. In the long term, these relationships will inform the development of a framework from which the Indigenous Youth Leadership Team (IYLT), with the support of the Law Society and the Steering Group, can create and develop future lore/law projects.

Project development

The IYLT, are a core element of the project as they are responsible for directly consulting and engaging with Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal communities and local justice related stakeholders. They will facilitate discussions around local lore/law

issues of significance and/or concern to the local Aboriginal youth and will work with the local youth to create short films focused on a local lore/law issue of significance and/or concern from the youth's perspective. The IYLT consists of young people who have previously worked on a series of youth to youth engagement processes and have the skills to facilitate the above processes. Their networks will form the basis of the first delivery pilot sites and will ensure the Project is invited by the community and culturally appropriate when engaging with Aboriginal youth in those communities. The IYLT is supported by a project facilitator, who also reports in to the Steering Group (made up of the projects stakeholders) and the project owner, the Law Society of WA.

After much discussion and research, the chosen methodology is one which uses a youth to youth focus for consultation. In choosing a process to facilitate a youth to youth focus, using familiar and engaging tools were deemed critical for soliciting open conversation, buy-in, storytelling and raising awareness. The Project utilises digital technology for storytelling, allowing Aboriginal youth in various communities to create screen-based stories (i.e. short films) about either local traditional Aboriginal lore or Australian law matters of significance and/or concern to them. The process of filming, using the camera as the conduit for interaction, is seen as an excellent tool to break down barriers and inspire positive interactions and engagement with the Project and local justice related stakeholders.

This methodology also provides training and upskilling in film production, and empowerment to control their own stories and messages for young people to participate and interact around the lore/law topic. We are also upskilling of IYLT team in project management, project implementation, advocacy skills, marketing/fund raising skills, business plan development, evaluation and assessment, and providing mentoring opportunities. We pay all of our team for their involvement in the project, and as the local community engagement process is transferrable and can applied to any issue of interest and/or concern, we anticipate that it will lead to further employment opportunities.

The IYLT will first present the project and a pilot film to the Steering Group, the FBLEP Advisory Committee and the Law Society Council with the aim of having the project proposal approved and signed-off. From that point onwards the Law Society, with input from the project team, will facilitate sessions with the IYLT to promote and advocate the project to stakeholders. This ensures wider community participation and buy-in so the project does not develop in isolation, whilst also gaining project ambassadors from stakeholders in the wider community to support the project's sustainability. Inherent in that process is the raising of funds to deliver the project across Western Australia.

The project has also considered risk management and has arranged public liability and indemnity insurance and workers' compensation insurance, implemented

requirements for Working With Children checks, designed consent forms for parents and guardians, established a confidentiality process to manage the sensitive and serious issues being discussed with youth, and created a clear review and approval process for the ideas generated and filmed by youth.

Lessons learnt

- Meaningful stakeholder engagement is vital to establishing stakeholder relationships and networks
- Meaningful stakeholder engagement takes a long time and the focus of engagement needs to be long term not short term

Next steps

The project team discussed what could be done differently in the future and determined it would have been valuable to get funders and/or financial support to contribute earlier in the project as it is hard to retain the IYLT members when there is no money, or very little money, available.

Theatre of Transformation Project – Halls Creek

The Theatre of Transformation project was community-based activity which aimed to create a safe space to support a group of young Aboriginal people 12 years and older to write, rehearse and present their own play for the Halls Creek community that captured and communicated their experiences of alcohol-related harm.

Overview

The two-week project was conducted in Halls Creek by the following project partners:

- Kimberley Community Drug and Alcohol Service (KCADS)
- Melbourne based theatre director, Bryan Derrick
- the local Aboriginal Medical Service, Yura Yungi
- Halls Creek High School.

It was expected that the final product would be both compelling and confronting, and act as a trigger for parents, carers and the community to listen to their children's description of the profound and damaging impact alcohol was having on the younger members of the Halls Creek community.

Like many remote communities in the Kimberley Region, the incidence of alcohol-related harm in Halls Creek far exceeds state averages.

The project partners chose to work with this group of young Aboriginal people because they are deeply affected by alcohol-related harm but rarely have an opportunity to voice how it affects them or to exert any influence on how to prevent or treat it.

Project development

Theatre of Transformation has a number of theatre models that aim to give voice to the lived experience of the voiceless. The forum model was adopted as it is a short and powerful style of play comprising a number of scenes where dialogue is kept to a minimum and, at the end of the play, audience members are invited to suggest how a better outcome could have been achieved and to act out their suggestions with the actors on stage.

A significant lead time was required to develop a joint program between the project partners.

Key considerations for the project included:

- Ensuring the young people had the full support of their primary carers to participate in and out of school hours
- Ensuring permission was given before photos and videos of the young people were taken and shared
- Providing a safe, quiet and secure space for rehearsals

- Identifying and managing cultural security - attention was given to what topics could be included and what may be contentious.

The project partners were also mindful that the content of the play may provoke strong emotional responses in participants, some of whom were considered at risk. The project partners identified these young people and developed a strategy to manage and mitigate this risk, which would include:

- Ensuring the students' teacher and an experienced, well-known personal helper and mentor from *Yura Yungi* attended all rehearsals and the public performance
- Ensuring an experienced drug and alcohol counsellor, and a team leader and psychologist from the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team at *Yura Yungi* was on call during the rehearsals, and attended the public performance
- Negotiating as a group, a code of conduct before rehearsals started based on zero tolerance, which would be applied equally and without exception
- Children attended the performance only if they were accompanied by a parent or adult carer
- Early warning signs were monitored, and early intervention, such as time out or break away groups with one or more students, were applied as required.

A number of initiatives were implemented to promote the project:

- Flyers were designed and posted among the community, town camps and outstations a month before the project start date
- Radio interviews with staff from the partner organisations and the director were conducted on local radio PRK. This provided the opportunity for the project partners to issue an invitation to interested actors and their families to attend a community barbeque
- Project partners visited stakeholders in town to introduce the director and talk about the forum theatre model. This included visits to the high school and Kimberley Training Institute, where the director entertained the students with storytelling and invited them to attend the community barbeque, and subsequent rehearsals
- The director met with local Aboriginal elders for dinner to talk about the project and listen to the elders' stories and advice.

The key lessons learnt during this phase included:

- Effective coordination and collaboration between partners is critically important during the lead up phase
- The importance of recognising and harnessing partner capacities (for example, Yura Yungi made valuable contributions regarding the risk of trauma and how best to respond)

- Being aware of the project partner's capacity gaps to avoid attributing a role to them that they are unable to fill.

Implementation

Twenty male and female Aboriginal young people attended the first day of rehearsals but, over time, the young people in attendance ebbed and flowed. A core group of eight actors developed. Unexpectedly this group was made up of high school students whose academic performance and attendance were the lowest amongst their peers.

The rehearsal process included:

- Negotiating a code of conduct; the group identified unacceptable behaviour and agreed on consequences. While the project partners had planned on a zero tolerance approach, the group reshaped the policy and decided instead to take a 'three strikes and you're out' approach
- Ensuring the director, one of the personal helpers and mentors and the actors' high school teacher were present at each rehearsal
- Having the actors share their stories and using them to write the play
- Assigning the characters and agreeing on a running order
- Providing healthy lunches and drinks.

The play, which they called 'Given Half a Chance', told the story of a young Aboriginal boy who has a father who drinks heavily. The drinking leads to family violence directed at the boy's mother. The pressures at home causes the boy's poor performance at school, his subsequent drift into petty crime, a car theft, a fatal accident and a broken hearted mother.

On the day of the final rehearsal, the main actor developed stage fright and returned to his home on a station outside of the town. The group's response was a last minute reallocation of roles so the public performance could go ahead as planned.

The final performance was held on 4 June 2015 and the audience included family members, the principal and teachers from the high school, the local radio manager who operated the lights, and the KCADS and Yura Yungi teams.

The key lessons learnt during this phase included:

- A safe, secure, private space for rehearsals, shared only with their peers, the director, their teacher and one of the personal helpers and mentors, meant that actors who felt shy, ashamed or vulnerable had the support to work through these emotions.
- At the first rehearsal the director suggested that he call the group 'actors' rather than by their first names and all agreed. This moniker removed any negative connotations associated with their real names and encouraged participants to re-invent a more positive version of themselves.

Follow up

After the public performance, a number of evaluations occurred:

- Project partners spoke to the actors and audience about the highlights and challenges of the project, and the courage and skills of the actors. This included the young actor who had stage fright and did not perform.
- Once the audience had departed, all involved in the production gathered to share their experiences, with feedback overwhelmingly positive and the actors inordinately proud of their achievements.
- Project partners met to debrief without the actors, focusing on critical success factors and constraints as well as lessons learnt.

The final performance was viewed as a remarkable and courageous achievement by the young actors, and the director gave one last radio interview to thank the community for their generosity and participation. A month after the performance, one teacher reported that the project had had a significant and positive effect on her high risk group of students.

“This project empowered students at educational risk to create and perform their own plays. Students responded exceptionally well, attending rehearsals during school and after school hours. This was an incredible surprise as some students who would rarely come to school whole-heartedly participated in the creation and performance of the play. The success of this project has empowered students to feel a strong sense of achievement and it has inevitably increased their confidence in themselves and in their learning.”

The participation of young Aboriginal people was critical to the success of the project, while the adults provided the space, cultural security, privacy and boundaries. In this context, young people produced and performed a play that was an honest and confronting representation of their lived experience of alcohol-related harm.

The project had high levels of community support, and the high school was a strong and willing partner, offering its Performing Art Centre for use by KCADS to stage the next Theatre of Transformation project.