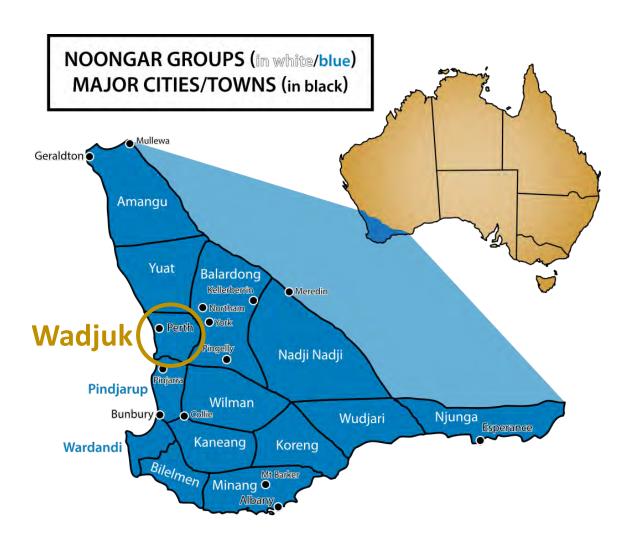


VADJUK NYOONGAR BOODJA

The *Building Bridges* project is based in the Perth Metropolitan area of Western Australia, on Wadjuk Nyoongar *boodja* (country). Wadjuk is one of fourteen clan groups that make up the Nyoongar Nation in Western Australia's southwest.

We acknowledge the Wadjuk people as the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



Map of Nyoongar country (Source: Whadjuk Trail Network)





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Hunter, youth co-researcher, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the second year of the *Building Bridges* project. It offers insight into our **co-design** approach and the impact of services and community **working together** to improve the delivery of mental health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The **key outcome** of 2018 was the co-design of a **working model for culturally secure systems change**. This model is shaped by key concepts that **hold** and **inform** our process of working together and illustrates the themes that were identified by the co-researchers throughout the co-design process. In summary, we have found:

This work is held by a **Nyoongar worldview**, through the cultural leadership of Nyoongar **Elders**, the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **young people** and the voice of the local **community**. Central to this work is youth mental health service providers' commitment to: building **trusting relationships**; deepening their understanding of **culture and spirit**; and developing **new ways of working**. Through **working together** with Elders and young people, services can work towards meaningful action across all areas of their organisation. This includes an investment in community **engagement**, facilitating easy **access** to their service and **responding** to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families. Cultural security involves both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal **workers** and requires strong **leadership**.

As this is an **iterative** process, this working model will continue to **evolve** and change as our analysis deepens in 2019.





Success Hill Reserve, 2018

+++

Applying some of our early findings, we co-designed a survey to measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' experience of a service. This survey taps into the critical importance of trust, relationships, safety, respect, culture and spirit, flexibility and community engagement. The partnering services are currently piloting this survey.

Following the co-design workshops, each service broke off into its own working group and was paired with 2 Elders, 2 or 3 young people and 1 policy officer. These working groups have begun to implement specific work practices that will be measured to evaluate their impact. We have found that that the presence of the Elders and young people has impacted greatly on the quality of the outcomes and outputs from the three working groups.

We have gained a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the unique and dynamic **working together space** between the Elders, young people and service providers. This includes the role of the Elders in building the capacity and confidence of the young people, and the importance of addressing power imbalances between adults and young people to create a safe and inclusive environment.

The commitment to the ongoing deepening work by the Elders, young people and service staff continues to produce positive results. Our results show that as a direct result of the deepening work of engagement there has been a noticeable change in the service providers' confidence in their work with the Aboriginal community and to engage in critical self-reflection. This shared confidence and capacity is building the **foundations** for trust that will be both robust and sustainable.

BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT

Building Bridges (2017–2019) aims to build the capacity of mainstream youth mental health services to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Through the development of their own **relationship**, the Elders, young people and service staff are gaining a deeper understanding of how services and community can work together effectively and identifying what systemic change is required for mainstream youth mental health services to be more **Culturally Secure**.

Guided by the **cultural wisdom** of the Elders and **lived experience** of the young people, the partnering youth mental health services are implementing these **new ways of working** with the aim of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's engagement and improving mental health outcomes for young people and their families.

CO-RESEARCHERS

Uncle Albert Corunna
Aunty Gwen Corunna
Aunty Muriel Bowie
Aunty Cheryl Phillips
Uncle Charlie Kickett
Aunty Helen Kickett
Aunty Margaret Culbong

Aggie Manel Ashah Wright Shae Anderson Hunter Culbong Ashton Ramirez-Watkins Mae Ramirez-Watkins Matthew Bill



Youth Focus headspace Midland North Metropolitan Health Service, Youth Mental Health

WA Mental Health Commission
WA Commissioner for Children and Young People
WA Association for Mental Health
Aboriginal Health Council of WA
Youth Affairs Council of WA



Last year (2017) we invested in

PREPARATION and ENGAGEMENT

Because without relationships, there is no project.

Working with and capturing young people's experience of mental health care is complex and requires significant **time** and effort. Understanding experiences with the aim of working towards systems change is even more challenging.

Meaningful relationships in a research context is essential, as it provides both the foundation and the glue for holding the research process.

The *Building Bridges* project began in 2017 with an investment in establishing safe spaces for the Elders, young people and service providers to engage in **open**, **honest dialogue**.

As **cultural immersion** allows for **deeper experiential change**, a number of activities were held, including an 'On Country' day and two storying sessions. These activities played a key role in **preparing** the working together space. They aimed to disrupt the service provider's typical ways of working and asked them to demonstrate flexibility and **trust in the process**.

We placed relationships at the centre and this built a strong foundation for the next stage of the project.

Check out the 2017 Community Report for more information. For now, let's jump in to 2018 activities!





'On Country' Day, Yagan Memorial Park, 2017

(1)—DESIGN

The first half of 2018 saw the Elders, young people, service providers and policy staff come together over three **co-design workshops**. These co-design workshops built upon our initial interviews with the Elders, young people and service providers from 2017.

The co-design workshops varied in their nature from more structured consensus building activities where group members ranked their key priorities, to informal storytelling and sharing of personal experiences around a particular topic.

We saw discussions become **deeper** and more **refined** as the co-design process evolved.



As our research is mostly qualitative (meaning we capture words and **stories**, instead of numbers and statistics), the project team used a research method called thematic analysis to dive deeper into the information we were capturing in the workshops and interviews.

This research method helped us to identify and interpret patterns and themes in what was being said by the Elders, young people, service providers and policy staff. It allowed us to organise the information in a simple way while holding its complexity, and to **join the dots** between the collection of ideas and stories being shared.

Like the nature of storytelling, the pathway to identifying these key themes was circular and required flexibility and **continual weaving** of narratives and worldviews.



Co-design workshop #1, 2018

Ultimately, through this co-design process, we want to identify

- Key ingredients for services and community working together; and
- Key ingredients of culturally secure service delivery.

the 'HOW'

the 'WHAT'

You will see in our findings that the process (the how) and content (the what) are **intertwined** and **inseparable**.

THE CO-DESIGNED MODEL



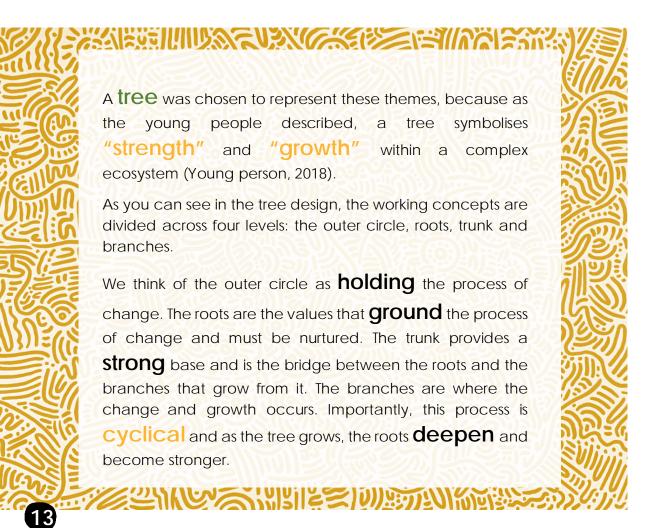
In the next few pages we aim to provide a rich description of the themes that emerged from the co-design process and how they came together to form the concepts that shape a working model for **culturally secure systems change**. As this is an iterative process, the working model will continue to evolve and change as our analysis deepens in 2019.

As we explored ways to visually represent the emerging concepts and how they relate to each other, one of the youth co-researchers stated:

"It's a complex situation we're working with and talking about, and if we don't come up with something that's complex are we actually dealing with the issue?" (Young person, 2018).

It was important that the design held this **complexity** and depicting the **relationships** between the layers was just as important as representing the individual parts.

Whilst each of the key concepts are unique, they are highly **interconnected** and it is important to represent these **holistically**.





NYOONGAR WORLDVIEW

The first of the four pillars that **hold** this work is a 'Nyoongar worldview.' By Nyoongar worldview, we mean **Nyoongar ways of knowing, doing and being**.

A Nyoongar worldview not only **guides the process** of services and community working together, but also **underpins the change** that must occur within mainstream youth mental health services if they are to be culturally secure.

Given the similar nature of the findings of the formative research of the Looking Forward Project (2015), this confirms the central nature of Aboriginal worldviews in the design, delivery and evaluation of services, in this case to young people.



Non-indigenous people don't have an understanding of the way that we work in our daily lives, so if they are able to adopt and see through a different lens, like a Nyoongar worldview, they'll be able to work with Nyoongar people. (Aboriginal researcher, 2018)

How do you overlay a Nyoongar worldview over these services in a way that Connects with young people? (Aboriginal researcher, 2018)



It is difficult to construct a theoretical concept of a Nyoongar worldview, and to do so would be counter-productive. It is more about **feeling with your heart rather than thinking with you head**. In our view, it is therefore more instructive and beneficial for youth mental health service staff to have the experience of being 'On Country' with Nyoongar Elders and listening firsthand to their stories.

It is through this **experiential** learning that youth mental health service providers are able to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of a Nyoongar worldview and Nyoongar people's connection to their **boodja** (country), their **moort** (family) and their **wirin** (spirit). In part, it is in the listening and sensing with the whole body, that non-Aboriginal people are able to more deeply connect to what it means to 'be Nyoongar.'

During the co-design stage, some service staff reflected on the fact that many young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the Perth Metropolitan area are not Nyoongar, and questioned whether it was important that the model was inclusive of other language or clan groups and the young people living away from their country. This was unpacked by the youth co-researchers, who felt strongly that a 'Nyoongar worldview' was important as opposed to something as broad as an 'Aboriginal worldview.'

What we have heard echoed is that while services provide mental health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, as they are located on Nyoongar boodja it is important that their ways of working are grounded in a Nyoongar worldview and guided by Nyoongar Elders. Simultaneously, creating a safe, welcoming, inclusive and culturally secure service for **all** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is critically important.



I think having Nyoongar worldview is important, and I'm not Nyoongar, and coming over here and living over here for so long you learn to respect and recognise where you're living. (Young person, 2018)

Because it's here on Nyoongar land it would be best to do it the Nyoongar way, and talk with the Elders because at the end of the day they know best. (Young person, 2018)

Like traditionally, if you look at the traditional side of things, Nyoongar people have a responsibility to take care of any travellers or people that come to this country until they go back to their home, so it's only right for Nyoongar people, like Nyoongar worldview, when they come here they do the Nyoongar things. (Young person, 2018)





Elders are leading the process, as they always have in this community.

(Aboriginal researcher, 2018)



'Elders' are the second **holding** pillar in the working model. Nyoongar Elders are recognized as the traditional **custodians of culture** and leaders in their community. Their status naturally affords them a position of legitimacy and authority.

Our themes that relate to engaging Elders include the **cultural** security, authenticity and **legitimacy** that Elders bring to this work.

Through the stories of the Elders we are able to develop a **deeper** understanding of history, connection to land and **spirituality**. It became evident that the Elders are the link to the past and their wisdom and guidance is greatly respected.



I think you should have a group of Aboriginal Elders, men and women, and get them together to workshop, and you get their ideas from them, and you will get so much Cultural Value you won't know where to start, so I think that's what you need to do, and you need to look around, and it needs to happen in this area, because you need to bring the culture back and you need to bring the Elders back.

(Elder, 2018)



The Elders role as **cultural consultants** has been to:

- Prompt critical reflection on the part of the services;
- Provide advice, direction, guidance and cultural leadership to services;
- Impart cultural knowledge and understanding in an accessible and culturally appropriate manner; and
- Support services to make more culturally informed decisions.



Aunty Muriel and Rachel (Youth Focus), 2018





Aunty Helen and Uncle Charlie

Krysta (CCYP) and Aunty Gwen, 2018

FLDERS BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As well as building the capacity of service staff, a **key learning** has been the way in which the Elders build the capacity of the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the working together space.

Elders play a critical role in providing **cultural** leadership and support to young people moving through life transitions. This partnership draws on the wisdom of the Elders to facilitate the development of leadership qualities amongst the young people, providing them with expertise to continue to work in consultation roles in the future.

As the young people have described:

I felt **stronger** with having them there, they have that experience of speaking their mind even when met with defensiveness, that's their resilience.

Because we're so young, we don't have that cultural authority, we have a young outlook on life. It's reaffirming when we say the same thing as the old people, same thought process, same level. There's saying won't be questioned by the next Aboriginal person coming through. It creates cultural authenticity when giving direction. Having old people there is important.

for young people to interpret that guidance.



Elders are the keepers of the knowledge and a very important part of the process, but just as much are the young people, their voices need to be put out there.

> (Community Reference Group member, 2018)





Hunter, Aunty Helen, Uncle Charlie, Ashton, 2018 Aunty Muriel, Aggie and Aunty Gwen, 2018 Aunty Margaret, Tiana and Aunty Cheryl, 2017

YOUNG PEOPLE

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people' is the next pillar holding the working model. Young people are **emerging leaders** of their communities and every opportunity should be made to enable their input into decision-making about services aimed at improving their wellbeing. Working together with young people is critical to developing programs that meet their expressed needs and to ensure successful implementation and sustainability.

It is important that mainstream youth mental health services **validate the lived experience** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their role in shaping culturally secure service delivery.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have the ability to **prompt critical reflection** on the part of service providers by each sharing their own experience as a young person. They are able to provide advice and direction on youth-friendly, culturally appropriate ways of working and support services to **meaningfully engage** and build trusting relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



Ashton and Hunter, youth co-researchers, 2018



Whilst building the leadership capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, it may also be necessary for youth mental health service staff and managers to critically reflect on their own attitudes towards working in partnership with young people and their capacity to do this well. This requires acknowledging the power difference between adults and young people and actively working to create a safe environment for young people to provide their input. Service managers have begun to implement actions such as the young people chairing meetings to redistribute this power and strengthen the young people's **Voice** and leadership in the space.

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I do see that young people are the **future** and I have a lot of faith in young people.

(Service manager, 2018)

This is tremendous to see, giving the reins to the young people. (Elder, 2018)

It's a very different set of skills working with young people on service level compared to as a client.

(Policy officer, 2018)



COMMUNITY



'Community' is the fourth pillar holding the working model. Throughout the project, the Elders, young people and other Aboriginal participants have stressed the importance of community and the way in which it is vital to culture.

As one of the youth co-researchers explained:

"The concept of community is ingrained in culture, it's almost the most important thing you could bring up to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. They have self-awareness about community and engage and interact with it, and rely on it. Community is important because we use it as a guiding force." (Young Person, 2018)

The participants explained that the term 'community' means many things but encompasses a sense of **identity and belonging** that is like no other:

"Community is the basis of which Aboriginal people form their identity and belong in the world. Without communities, people become lost within society not knowing who they are. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been in this country for thousands of years, our community has existed for millennia and to be disconnected now is to lose thousands of years of knowledge and strength, especially at a time when we have to face so many disparities." (Young Person, 2018)

Community is the white person's term, the importance is moiety, kinship and obligation. Traditional Aboriginal society was governed by this as well as dreaming, dance and lore and was passed down and around.

Community is important because who else has your back?

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(Community Reference Group member, 2018)

It takes a community to raise a young person.
You provide services to young people but have to engage with the community to do that.

(Elder, 2018)







'Trust' is the first of the three roots of the tree in the working model. The roots are the values that **ground** this work and must be nurtured.

The importance of trust was emphasised right from the beginning of the project, when the project team were sitting at the kitchen table with two of the Elders in their home, sipping cups of tea and yarning about the project. One of the Elders' sisters was quietly listening to our conversation from the lounge room. She then burst in to the room, apologised for interrupting and exclaimed profoundly:

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The word you're looking for is trust, you've got to find the trust from Aboriginal people.

(Elder, 2017)

She then joined the project on the spot, and along with all of the Elders, has emphasised the importance of trust ever since.

Specifically, Aboriginal participants have **echoed** the need for non-Aboriginal staff and mainstream services to understand **the context of a lack of trust**.

By bearing witness to the stories of the Elders about the impact of Colonisation, of the Stolen Generation, of intergenerational trauma – service providers can begin to understand the history of Aboriginal people's lack of trust in mainstream systems and non-Aboriginal service providers and understand why trust is central to this discussion.



It comes back to **history** again, you know, like the us and them, and I suppose no real sense of community or belonging or, like there's black fellas and then there's wadjellas you know, there's **us and them**.

(Aboriginal worker, 2017)

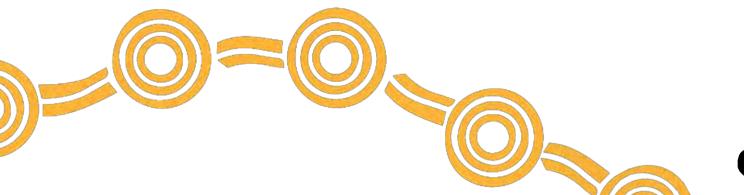
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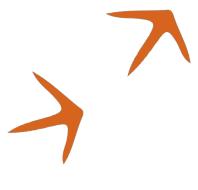
It's always been a black and white situation, there is no trust in mental health services across the board because of past history and the intergenerational trauma that's been handed down to the young ones who've learnt not to trust organisations and therefore don't go to them for help.

And that's validated when you do go and try to get help, and there's nothing there for you, it validates all that distrust.

(Young person, 2018)







The Building Bridges project understands systemic change through this lens of trust and relationships as it speaks to both the barriers currently in place and the pathway to meaningful change that must be based on trusting relationships.

Let me tell you something as an Elder and an Aboriginal person, it's called ignorance, all ignorance is; is a lack of knowledge. There is a wall between you and another person and you can't see that person, how are you going to trust that other person? For Aboriginal people we don't know who we're dealing with in the organization. The first thing you do is look at them, and say hello, breaking down that wall of ignorance. The more you talk, the more you become friends, and when you become friends, you start trusting. If we can break down that wall of ignorance, that ignorance is from not knowing history, so once they start learning about who we are and where we come from we become really good friends. And we tell our story, and our stories might be really similar. As you learn together you become friends and you start trusting, we start learning together.

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(Elder, 2018)

For us as young people it is about relationships.

(Young person, 2018)

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I really want to **invest** in building relationships with the people in the room, to invest in sitting down and building relationships with them.

(Young person, 2018)

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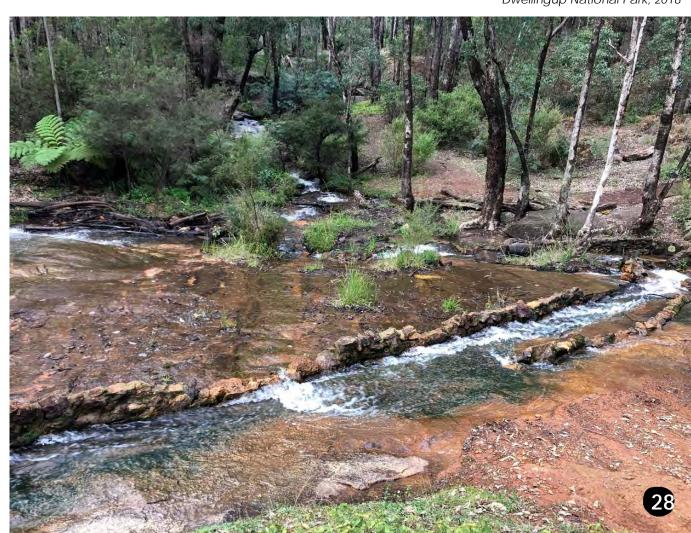


What relationships are going to make this **feel** different in 12 months?

(Service manager, 2018)



Dwellingup National Park, 2018





We found that as well as in the working together space, it is very important that youth mental health service staff demonstrate **reciprocity** and **authenticity** when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and their families.

The value of a worker sharing with a client about who they are **personally** was emphasized throughout the co-design stage. We also explored how this may come more naturally to Aboriginal workers, and is a skill that non-Aboriginal workers may need to practise and become more comfortable with.

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I suppose what I do as well with my clients is that I'll actually kind of go there, like I'll tell them a bit about I suppose my background, you know **WhO I am**, and where my mob are from, and all of that, and that's to build that trust and rapport with them as well. Then they're more likely to open up and actually engage.

(Aboriginal worker, 2017)

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It's natural for an Aboriginal clinician to be able to give their story whereas it might not be as normal or easy for a non-Aboriginal to give their story because it's how we grow up, you meet someone 'aw who's your mob?' it's just **natural**. So, I feel like that's an important factor in trust and relationship is, you know, even though we're still clinicians we still have to **give a little bit** to build that trust.

(Aboriginal worker, 2018)

(Aboriginal worker, 2018)

The way we connect, we know where we come from, it's our strength.

(Elder, 2018)

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Service managers also started to explore how this can be promoted beyond an individual clinician's own practice, and what this means at an organisational level:

When we talking about building trust really it should be around how do organisations demonstrate that they are trustworthy,

and so it's not, it's actually, the onus is actually is not really building trust at all, I mean that's part of it, but it's actually what does the organisation do to say to a young person 'hey you can trust that you are going to come here and we're going to look after you and we're going to support you.'

(Service manager, 2018)

Having those informal conversations to strengthen that rapport so that there is safety and trust and respect. I think those are the values that a lot of staff already have here, but I think it needs to be set at a higher level so that it filters down and it's sustainable.

(Service manager, 2017)

CULTURE AND SPIRIT

'Culture and spirit' is the second root of the tree in the working model. The roots are the values that **ground** this work and must be nurtured.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people culture is a source of **strength**, **resilience**, **happiness**, **identity and confidence** that has a positive impact on wellbeing.

Young people have expressed their concerns that mainstream youth mental health services lack understanding and inclusion of Nyoongar knowledge, particularly around culture and spirituality.

We have found that **the lack of trust** between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and mainstream youth mental health services is predominantly due to this **lack of understanding of culture and spirituality**. This creates a significant **barrier** to accessing services and prevents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from seeking mental health support early and timely.



Deeper Understanding



Sometimes you don't want to, I love talking about our culture and where we come from and all that sort of stuff, that's my favorite thing to do, but sometimes you don't want to have to explain to someone, sometimes you just want someone to know.

(Young person, 2017)

I think there is many things that we would need to do, not only in kind of in people, but even our own, from the Board down, more knowledge, and so an understanding of **What spirit means** to an Aboriginal person and Elders.

(Service manager, 2017)



Respect and Value

Co-researchers have reiterated service providers need to respect and **value culture**:



If you think you have nothing to learn from Aboriginal people, if you don't value that knowledge then you're going nowhere. So I think once people start to realize the **strengths** of Aboriginal culture, understanding history is part of it, then you are going to have that **Curiosity**, you are going to want to know, because it's a fantastic culture, there's so much to **learn**, there's so many strengths.

(Aboriginal policy officer, 2018)







History

The Elders along with other participants have stressed the importance of understanding Australia's **history from an Aboriginal perspective** and acknowledging a shared history:



It's important, it's very, very important, because history it was told on lie, it was not the **truth**... Absolutely, there was nothing about the Aboriginal, how, how **brilliant** our people were, you know how they can go out and live in the bush, you know and live off the land, but still survive. But none of that is in history, because they don't want it to be told. But you know what, our people are that **strong**, we're still here, we're not going nowhere.

(Elder, 2018)



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It's really important we have staff who are culturally competent, and part of that cultural competency comes from having a good understanding of our history. If you don't understand the history of Aboriginal culture and Australian culture or whatever, then it's hard to work with our mob, because we've got racism, we've got identity, we've got all the impacts of Stolen Generation. If people don't have an understanding of our history then how can they work with our mob?

(Aboriginal worker, 2017)



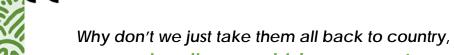


You actually need to know history, you actually need to know what's happened, and you know my experience growing up as a young person, my schooling, it was **colonial** history.

(Non-Aboriginal worker, 2018)



The young people and Elders have shared how connection to country aids with **social and emotional wellbeing**:



let's start healing our kids on country.

(Elder, 2018)

If I'm feeling down or overwhelmed I'll go back to country, you know? That's where you can **clear your head**.

(Young person, 2018)



Family

The participants have voiced just **how important family is** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and that youth mental health care needs to be family-inclusive:



I usually sit back at one old fella up north, call him Mali, it means pop. Every time it gets stressful I just ring him up for a yarn, I don't even talk about my problems, you know, I'll just ring up for a yarn. Usually, if things are too stressful I'll tell him, yeah I think it's just keeping in contact with family if anything.

(Young person, 2018)



Working with family, not just individual young person but across generations.

(Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)



'Ways of working' is the third root of the tree in the working model and speaks to the **Values** that are key to the development of cultural security:

Recognising the need for change



Let's talk about change. We can give you the pathway to change, but you need to recognise the need for change.

(Elder, 2018)

We've been told to change in order to live within this society for however many years, now it's time for **you** to change.

(Elder, 2018)



Critical self-reflection



Staff to understand their own culture and spirit and where they come from, recognize their own disconnect, strongholds, and values.

(Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)

Need to build ability for workers to be **Self-reflective** in their practice and build rapport effectively.

(Young person, 2018)

Open and teachable

I think the main thing is that you always know that you'll never even remotely know everything and you have to be really open to continually learn, which is why you have to sit back and listen and ask questions if you don't understand and not be afraid to ask questions, yeah like I think some people do have a tendency to just you know do one course and think they're an expert.

(Non-Aboriginal worker, 2017)

We've been here but I don't think we've been listening.

(Service manager, 2018)

Shared decision making

Meaningful involvement of young people in the decisions that affect them and promoting involvement.

5/1/20/200

(Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)



Flexibility

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"If they can't come in, more to the point we'll go out to them, and meet somewhere where it's safe for them, and we can meet that need."

(Aboriginal worker, 2017)

It is vital that flexibility is seen at all levels of the organisation to support new ways of working, especially with leadership. In order for staff to engage in new ways of working and provide flexibility, they in turn require this flexibility from executive leadership, from their systems, and from their funding in order to do so. Otherwise, reporting systems and a focus on meeting outcomes can undermine this intent. Flexibility needs to sit with everyone.

(Policy officer, 2018)

Well I think **just by talking about** it we're starting to develop, so that's important, so we're already started to develop because we're talking about it, and we're already flexible so let's continue to be flexible, and I think it's great.

(Elder, 2018)

Consistency

Flexible model of service delivery that allows time to build trust, continuing to be there and provide a consistent, genuine service. (Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)

Consistency of relationships between young people and their communities and workers, as it is detrimental to send different workers out to communities / individuals as **trust only builds gradually** and needs to be earned through relationships not just the "brand" of an agency. (Service manager, 2018)

Consistent and regular dialogue between the service and local community. (Participant, 2018)



Youth co-researchers, co-design workshop #2, 2018



Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River)

WORKING TOGETHER

Community and services 'working together' is the trunk of the tree in the working model and keeps this work standing **strong**. It involves **Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal** people coming together into a shared space to work towards shared goals for change.

When participants were prompted to reflect on 'the best experience they have had in the project so far', the theme of working together shone through:

"Seeing different people from different organisations and walks of life coming together to work towards a common goal."

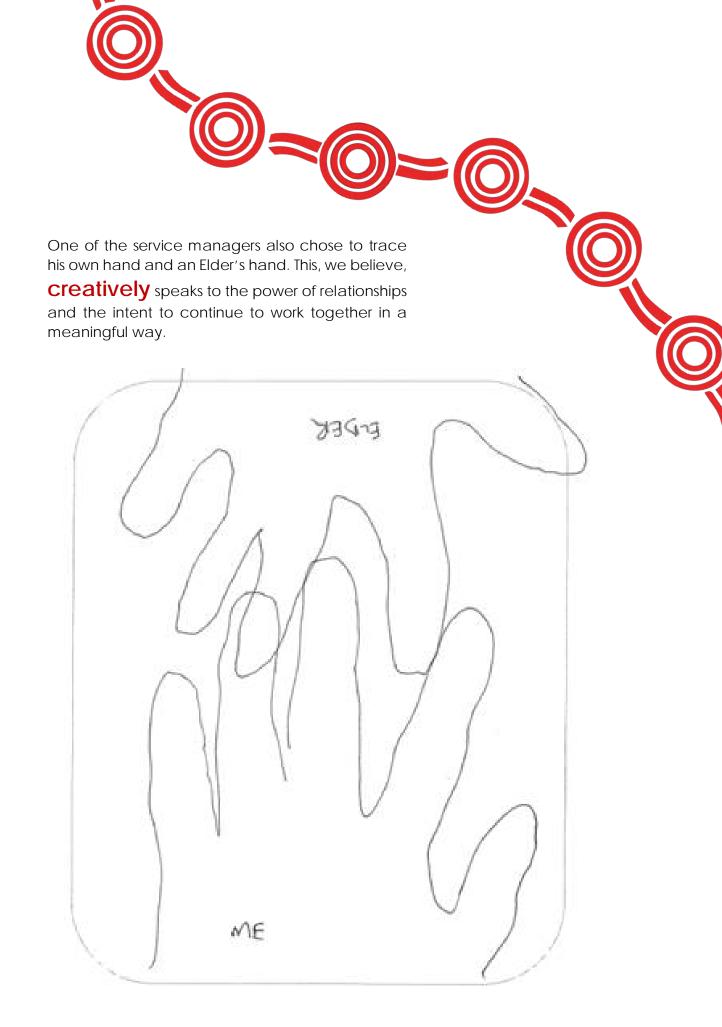
"Listening – the opportunity to listen to people from all different perspectives/backgrounds coming together to help solve these issues/make the system better."

"Meeting and hearing from other stakeholders – particularly the value in hearing directly from the young people and Elders. Really helps broaden and challenge own understanding, gaps in knowledge, things we haven't thought about. Makes me realise how far we have to go and how much we need to shape up – but this is exciting! Thank you!"

"Embracing different cultural worlds. Inspired by Aboriginal young people, Elders and research team. Connection to other mental health providers. Authentic process. Natural relationships."

"Sharing our stories. Hearing different experiences and points of view. Working together."

"Hearing and discussing issues with Elders and young people. More **connected** to the group. More aware of the community's experience."





Although *how* participants spoke about the importance of services and community working together and of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together varied greatly, their voices come together to sing the same chorus:

22

Have you mob seen what's happened here? Have you seen the Aboriginal language map? That's what's happened here. We have something in common. Even with the diversity of everyone around the table, we can work as one team.

(Elder, 2018)

You should exchange, you know, knowledge and culture and actually look at yourself, look at your own models you know, because that's where it comes in, and that's where otherness comes in, that's what's important, that's what we're really getting at is like, that's why they say only black fellas can help black fellas, but if only black fellas help black fellas we're not going to get anywhere because we're

need the allies.

all black fellas you know, that's why we

(Young person, 2018)



...our cultures are tied up together, our futures are tied up together.

(Non-Aboriginal worker, 2018)

Ve want to be act

99

We want to be action oriented towards how we want to change – moving out of comfort zone and moving closer to the people we want to work with.

(Service manager, 2018)

99

There needs to be some sort of actual direct **CONNECTION** that people have with Aboriginal people and Nyoongar communities, so they actually need to continue to have that on an ongoing basis in order to be able to form I guess their own sense of what I guess an effective way to work together is.

(Service manager, 2018)

ENGAGEMENT

'Engagement' forms the first of the five central branches of the working model.

Engagement is frequently considered the biggest priority for mainstream youth mental health services. We have found however, that the way services think about and 'do' engagement needs to be **expanded** if it is to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

A comment by one of the service staff members gives us insight into the current ways of working within mainstream youth mental health services:



We always prioritise engagement over anything else with the young people no matter who's coming through the door.

(Non-Aboriginal worker, 2017)



Whilst services do prioritise engagement once young people have accessed the service, the community have emphasised that engagement happens before this – **in the community**. This is key to supporting early and timely access.

As one of the Aboriginal workers described, service staff being present in the community is key to young people feeling safe to access a service:



Being consistent, and they're coming and see that 'oh they're normal people, we're not going to go to Graylands.'

(Aboriginal worker, 2018)





Investing time in community.

22

(Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)

(Unidentified participant during group activity, 2018)

22

As a young person, we don't relate to a service logo, we relate to people.

(Young person, 2018)

99

99

What I've picked up on is – improving access is through improving engagement.

(Service manager, 2018)

For our mob it's a lot about relationships.

(Young person, 2018)

ACCESS AND RESPONSE

'Access' and 'Response' are the second and third branches of the working model which participants have discussed as being **intrinsically linked**. The Elders and young people identified these themes to be major factors in determining whether or not a young person would use a service.

Through this process of working together, service staff have had the opportunity to listen and learn firsthand about the significant **barriers** facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people when trying to get help.

"There are barriers everywhere when our people try and go anywhere, as soon as they see a little black face, back of the line, otherwise they're hanging themselves in the back yard. If people (services) are going to do things, do it." (Elder, 2018)

The complexity of this topic is evident and many barriers were identified. For example, the concern of young people **falling through the gaps** was echoed, and this was frequently linked to services working in silos and how this complicates access:

"When you work in silos you get clients falling through gaps. We've got to close those gaps." (Elder, 2018)

"That's the silos, and the more services there are the more complicated it is to access support. There is a lack of services when they need it the most, when they need that direct response." (Service manager, 2018)

Even when young people do access a service, the complicated **process** that young people have to go through was also identified as a barrier:

"Process. You have to go through a process. And don't make that process too long or too hard because they will walk out that door and they won't come back." (Elder, 2018)

Participants also spoke about services having a "culture of referral" (Service staff member, 2018) and the common experience of young people attempting to access a service but not fitting intake criteria and being referred on.

"I think that flexibility and that integration needs a safety net too, because young people get really great support when they find the right service but it's that process sometimes of finding the right door." (Non-Aboriginal worker, 2018)



A lot of our young mob aren't being seen by anybody.

(Aboriginal worker, 2018)

Aboriginal participants emphasised the importance of services providing an **immediate response** when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reach out for support:

"The immediate response is more crucial than anything." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)

"And to provide an immediate response and start to get these kids seen by services, that's achievable, this can be done." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)

The Elders in particular spoke about the serious consequence of services not providing an immediate response and how important this is in consideration of the high rates of suicide occurring among young people:

"Because if you don't have that immediate response, you're going to find someone hanging out the back of the house, which our people are finding every week, they're finding someone." (Elder, 2018)

Factors such as lengthy assessment processes and long waitlists were identified as significant barriers. Operating hours were also discussed and services' inability to provide support at times when young people may need it most, such as at night time or on the weekend.

The co-researchers grappled with these difficult discussions around access and response, as can be seen in the dialogue below between a service manager and Elder:

"We want to be clear about expectations about what we can and can't do, like we can't respond at 8 at night." (Service manager, 2018)

"Why not? We do. We respond 24/7. We don't get paid, and you mob get paid." (Elder, 2018)

VORKFORCE

'Workforce' is the fourth branch of the tree in the working model.

A key theme that was echoed by the young people in particular was the critical importance of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers within mainstream services. They stated that they felt **Safer** going to a mainstream service if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander worker were present.

29

Why can't you employ more
Aboriginal people, you know,
men and women, so you've got
your team, you've got your team
of people there who are going to
be ready to do what you want
them to do and who will do it in a
culturally appropriate way.

(Elder, 2018)

99

I wouldn't go to a service that didn't have an Aboriginal worker, what would be the point?

(Young Person, 2018)

Participants also discussed the importance of not over-working Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who can be at risk of being the 'go-to' for everything Aboriginal-related within mainstream services.

"I think Aboriginal workers in this space are incredibly important. I think it's empowering to see your own mob driving, however we only make up 3.5% of the population, and with that expectation I think comes a lot of burnouts." (Young Person, 2018)

"That responsibility is always left to the Aboriginal workers and that's frustrating, because the narrative should be that it's a work load for all Australians, like it's a work load for everyone, so why can't we all just get on board with that." (Young Person, 2018)

It was emphasised that **cultural security is dependent on both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce**.

The group reiterated the importance of **building the confidence and capacity of non-Aboriginal workers** and doing this in a culturally relevant way, such as going 'On Country' or yarning with Elders. As one of the Aboriginal policy officers stated:

"I think part of the problem is how we already approach 'cultural competency', we have this idea that you do a two hour lesson and you've ticked a box, and I don't know who came up with that because it definitely wasn't Aboriginal people." (Aboriginal policy officer, 2018)

The Aboriginal staff reflected on their own experiences working alongside non-Aboriginal staff and some of the **knowledge and ways of working** that they have shared:

"We've helped our staff understand things like one client was talking about wanting to go camping all the time and they didn't pick up the cultural importance of that and how that can be them being called to land, so just by explaining that to them." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)

"Even assessing someone, it's done in a Circular way. You know, it's done our way, a therapeutic and cultural way... so that's my style but also I tune into how it is they like to engage as well you know. I think that's really important. You have to sort of adapt your own style, even if it's like that to how they are and how they sort of connect as well, because we're all diverse." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)

"You come up against our mob and you introduce yourself, you tell them who you are and where you're from, it's just a natural conversation that you have. We've also educated the non-Aboriginal staff on how important it is to communicate, even if they're not Aboriginal. Just tell them a little bit about where they're from, they don't have to give them all their nitty gritty details, just something to make them more human." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)







Taylor-Jane Bellotti, 2018



Steven Feehan, 2018

LEADERSHIP

'Leadership' is the fifth branch of the tree and the final concept in the working model. Some of the themes that emerged around leadership include **leading change**, **commitment**, **accountability**, **governance**, and **resourcing**.



So I went back to that place of quieting, and being quiet and not speaking up about these obvious differences again and it's taken a while to start opening up and saying hey this isn't good enough. So I think that I'm excited that we're at that stage and I know there will be a lot of staff who are uncomfortable, and I think we need to have courageous conversations, we've been having some of them, and that's where myself and the Aboriginal staff have already identified a few people who may not stick around, and that's fine, we're prepared to do that, because at the end of the day it's about servicing our community's needs and that something that's constantly being fed back to us.

(Service manager, 2017)



Commitment or influencing others and being a lead in bringing about that change.

(Service manager, 2017)



"It definitely needs to start from the top down because they need to give you the permission to make those choices and to spend the money where it needs to be spent." (Non-Aboriginal worker, 2018)

"Within the higher level of governance, there are no Aboriginal people making decisions." (Aboriginal researcher, 2017)

"(The services' governing body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's engagement) doesn't need to be led by a senior worker, it needs lots of cultural direction." (Aboriginal worker, 2018)

"I think our aspiration is actually to be, and from a board level, is to be more inclusive of young people, and diversity, where ever that comes from in young people. I feel comfortable in saying that the board itself is probably a well-established and probably commercial board, in all honesty, when you have a look at the board, and there's an absence of say young people, and an absence of the people that we're with and at a community level." (Service manager, 2017)



CLIENTS' EXPERIENCE OF A SERVICE

Listening to the key themes that were identified by the co-researcher group, we worked with service staff and young people to develop a client survey to be administered within each service. The survey aims to capture the experience Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people have of a service provided to them.

The survey draws on the key themes that came out of the co-design process and the critical importance of **trust**, **relationships**, **safety**, **respect**, **culture and spirit**, **flexibility**, and **community engagement**.

The partnering services are currently administering these surveys and collecting responses. The information obtained from the surveys will be used by each service to better understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **clients' experience** of their service and respond to their needs.

Next steps include **validating** the survey tool. In 2019 we will review how well the survey is capturing young people's experiences and how we can improve it. We want to make sure it is appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and offers **meaningful** information to the service.

Stay tuned to see how this survey develops!

How was your experience of this service? ABOUT YOU I am _____years old My gender is: _____ I am: □ Aboriginal □ Torres Strait Islander □ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander How long have you been coming to this service? ___ Today's date: ___ Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience?

For each statement, circle, cross or tick the face that matches your experience. Strongly Neither Agree Disagree disagree agree I trust the people here I can relate to the people here I feel safe here I feel respected here The people here understand my culture and spirituality This service is **flexible** and works to meet my needs People in the **community** know about this service

WORKING TOGETHER MEETINGS

The co-design workshops provided a great opportunity to develop an **overarching** understanding of what systems change is required for more culturally secure service delivery.

Following this process, the group decided that it would be effective for each service to break off and work on **specific goals** for that service.

Each service was paired with 2 Elders, 2 or 3 young people and 1 policy officer, who would **work closely together** for 12 months, from July 2018 to June 2019.

This has allowed the Elders and young people to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how that service currently operates, allowing them to be more confident in the priorities, suggestions and insights they provide. Working on specific service goals has also allowed for the fact that each of the services are at different stages in their journey of relationship building and working together.

These working together groups provide an opportunity for **shared** decision making to be put into practice and to better understand what is needed to truly work together.



I feel like we're a team, but also there is a lot of accountability that sits within the organisation.

(Service manager, 2018)



It sounds like a lot of work, but it can be done, that's the most important thing, that it can be done.

(Elder, 2018)







Youth Mental Health working together meeting, 2018



Youth Focus working together meeting, 2018

IMPACT ON SERVICE PROVIDERS

We have found that working together with Elders and young people has had a significant impact on participating service staff, as demonstrated in the survey results below:

We asked 10 staff members about their experience of the project



6 managers / team leaders

3 mental health clinicians

1 policy officer

7/10 strongly agreed

Working with the Elders and young people has **positively influenced my attitudes** towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

6/10 strongly agreed

Working with the Elders and young people has increased my confidence in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

5/10 strongly agreed

Working with the Elders and young people has **prompted**me to reflect on my own worldview and identity



We wanted to know what impact the project has had on service staff, personally or professionally. We asked: what has been the most significant change?

"Personally, the project has given me the space to reflect on the rich culture and knowledge held by the Elders and passed on to the generations that follow. It makes me feel quite culturally poor...being Caucasian and a 'bit of this and a bit of that', not really feeling connected to anything specific.

Professionally, it has made me understand more so the need to communicate with community and people that are involved in our young people's lives."

"Increased respect and knowledge regarding issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Increased appreciation for collaborative decision making. Increasing flexibility in my role to allow for more prompt responses...I have always intuitively felt that these issues were important but was content to work within the confines of the systems offered. I now realise that our systems allow for and require appropriate changes to facilitate improved collaboration."

"Increased knowledge in understanding cultural considerations when working in a mainstream service. Understanding the importance of engaging with Elders and young people when reflecting on service delivery. More proactive in seeking further Aboriginal historical information, and the cultural models to enhance our practices."

"Bringing the Elders, young people, community and mental health service providers together, strengthens the basket of knowledge to provide a stronger foundation to deliver culturally appropriate mental health services to Aboriginal young people and their families."

"Being a part of Building Bridges has helped to keep the need to not only support Aboriginal young people, but look at HOW we embed systems within our organisation to support Aboriginal young people at the front of my mind. Also thinking about how we not only support Aboriginal young people but how do we support the community to better support young people... Thinking broadly and systemically about how we approach our goal of increasing Aboriginal engagement with our service.... We're also in the process of reviewing a lot of policies, procedures and overall approaches to service delivery, so being part of Building Bridges has helped to strengthen the cultural lens that we use to re-think the work we're doing."

TRANSLATING THE EXPERIENCE FOR OTHERS

ELDERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTING AT CONFERENCES

Youth Co-researchers Ashton and Hunter presented alongside Elder co-researcher Uncle Charlie Kickett at the **Association of Australian Magistrates Biennial Conference** to Magistrates from across Australia, May 2018.





Ashton and Hunter, 2018

Extract from Hunter's speech:

"Building Bridges has given me the opportunity to contribute my perception of the health issues my people face to mental health services, to interact with the community and assist as a young person as I can. It has provided me with an opportunity to learn about the complexity of an intervention on this scale, gain an understanding of the perception of my community on this issue, and given me a learning experience in which I'm able to contribute for positive change for Aboriginal people.

Building Bridges provides Aboriginal people and services with the opportunity to help develop a way of working to better Aboriginal health by truly understanding Aboriginal people and culture, and can be an example to other public entities in working for the advancement of Aboriginal people.

I believe that if the justice system, health system, education system or any other public services can implement a model such as the one Building Bridges has developed, in which engagement with Aboriginal people and communities is valued as key component of working, and acknowledging the differences Aboriginal people face in our society, then we can bridge the societal gap Aboriginal people have in our path. I call on public services, including the justice and legal system, to work with Aboriginal people to integrate a way of working which interacts and values an Aboriginal contribution and perspective."



Extract from Ashton's speech:

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By now, I'm hoping you all are aware of the past Government Acts, policies and interventions that have significantly displaced and impacted Indigenous Australians, and have severely affected the way in which Indigenous people interact, adapt and belong within the world.

Knowing that today as a young Aboriginal man living in Australia I am 40% more likely to take my own life compared to our non-Aboriginal mates, this is not acceptable. As of recent I know of two suicides in the Indigenous community that has taken place in the last two months. The need for Indigenous people to reach mental health services is more crucial than ever.

The discussion around why Aboriginal related issues are not being addressed can be seen on a social level, therefore it's this reason we are here to unpack and deconstruct the stigma around mental health in the Indigenous community. It is also important whilst unpacking these stigmas to understand the social construct of 'othering' and how it has shaped many realities for Australian Indigenous people.

Othering is a form of social exclusion of a person/s or group within a society. The major diversities faced by Indigenous Australians relate to racial targeting and social stereotyping where we have created the fear of the "other" or "othering". This notion is especially vital when relating to Indigenous youth in today's society, as no-one should feel excluded due to their background. It is also for this reason I'm here doing my part in raising awareness on this issue of the "other" and "othering", and how it can impact not only my mob but the wider Australian society.

Othering can impact the Australian society by the dehumanisation of social issues surrounding its Indigenous people, it can impact on its society as it goes against everything to do with reconciliation, and reconciliation is the way our nation's people are currently trying to move towards. These concepts of 'othering' have been formed over hundreds of years of displacement through intervention stemming from the first day that this country became colonised.

Now what could this feel like for some if not many of my people? They could feel the sense of isolation and vulnerability within society: they can then also; to be specific, start to create a sense of 'distrust' towards accessing westernised services and the healthcare workers involved. This then causing what we are now seeing among our Indigenous Australian people, where services are not being accessed and their mental wellbeing further deteriorating.

It is for these reasons we are here today discussing new ways of working as a community. It is for these reasons we are also trying to close the gap between service providers and the Australian Indigenous youth, and it is for these reasons we should take this national crisis seriously. And, it's projects such as the Building Bridges project that can create a space to help address the gaps between westernised service providers and the Indigenous community.





Youth co-researchers Aggie and Ashton presented on the *Building Bridges* project alongside Elder co-researcher Aunty Cheryl Phillips and project team member Nikayla Crisp at the 2nd National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Conference, November 2018.





Nikayla, Aggie, Ashton, Aunty Cheryl, 2018

OTHER TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES



- Lead Researcher Dr Michael Wright presented at the Mental Health Services Conference (theMHS), August 2018
- Research Associate Tiana Culbong was on the Mental Health Deep Think panel at Un-Fair Ground, WA Youth Sector Conference, October 2018
- Senior Researcher Dr Ashleigh Lin presented at the Society for Mental Health Research Conference, November 2018
- Research Associates Tiana Culbong and Nikayla Crisp presented at the Social Policy Symposium: Research in Demand, November 2018

Translation is about bridging the gap between research and practice; between knowledge and action.

ON THE HORIZON FOR 2010





2019 marks the final year of the three-year project!

So what do we have planned?



Each of the services will have at least 3 more working together meetings with their partnering Elders and young people.



We will work together to **measure and evaluate** the co-designed initiatives being implemented by the services.



The services will continue to administer the Client Experience of Service Survey to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. We will collate these results and identify how we can improve the survey to meet the needs of both clients and services.



We will hold another meeting where all the Elders, young people, service staff and policy staff can come back together and reconnect as a whole group.



We will continue to deepen our analysis of the data being collected and the co-designed working model will be reworked and updated. This will allow us to shape up some really clear recommendations by the end of the project.



We will conduct one-on-one or small group interviews with all of the Elders, young people, service staff and policy staff. During these interviews we will get feedback on the development of the project and the emerging findings.





In 2019 we will co-design an effective **translation** plan to share the project with the community and translate the findings into practice and policy. This will be done with support from our Translation Group and Community Reference Group, who collectively, allow us to look at translation **from a local community level as well as a broader policy and sector level**.

The **Translation Group** includes policy partners and peak bodies from both the *Building Bridges* project and our larger parallel project the *Looking Forward Moving Forward* project.

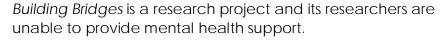
Membership includes senior representatives from:

- Western Australian Mental Health Commission;
- Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia;
- Youth Advisory Council of Western Australia;
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia;
- Western Australian Association for Mental Health;
- Western Australian Council of Social Service; and
- Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies.

The **Community Reference Group** is made up of Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal workers from local organisations involved in youth health and wellbeing, such as mental health services, alcohol and other drug services, physical health services, schools and youth centres. Nyoongar Elder Aunty Margaret Culbong provides cultural direction and leadership to this group, alongside three of our youth co-researchers.

As part of our translation strategy we will produce a **final report** to capture the three years of the project.

RESOURCES: MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT



If you are going through a difficult time, it can be helpful to go to your local doctor or Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service who can link you with some extra **SUPPORT**.

For urgent mental health support you can call:

• Lifeline: 131 114

• Mental Health Emergency Response Line: 1300 555 788

(Metro) or 1800 676 822 (Peel)

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

eheadspace: 1800 650 890 or <u>www.eheadspace.org.au</u>



ABOUT THE ARTIST



The signature *Building Bridges* artwork was created by the talented artist Kamsani Bin Salleh.

Kamsani descended from the Nyoongar Ballardong people in the south west region of Western Australia, and the Banuba, Yawuru and Nimunburr of the Kimberley.

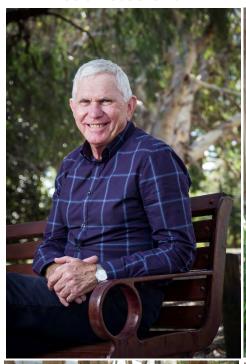
A big congratulations to Kam for being awarded Young Person of the Year at the WA Youth Awards 2018!



Dr Michael Wright Lead Researcher

Dr Britta BiedermannSenior Researcher

Dr Ashleigh LinSenior Researcher















Tiana Culbong Research Assistant

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WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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Project team based at the School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology at Curtin University.

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