



# BUILDING BRIDGES

COMMUNITY REPORT 2017

## WADJUK NYOONGAR BOODJA

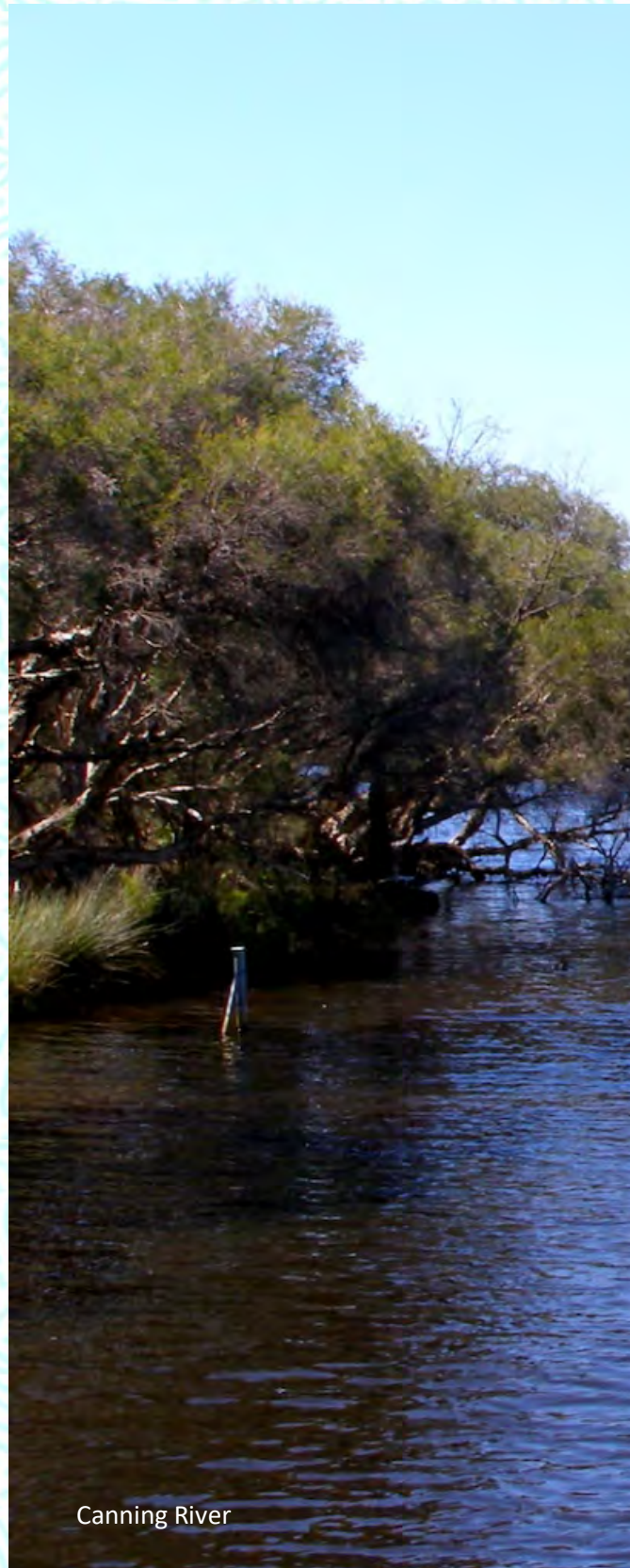
We pay our respects to the Wadjuk Nyoongar people on whose land we undertake this project and acknowledge their Elders past, present and future.

The Building Bridges Project is based in the Perth Metropolitan area of Western Australia, Wadjuk Country on Nyoongar Boodja. Wadjuk is one of fourteen clan groups that make up the Nyoongar Nation in Western Australia's southwest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team would like to gratefully acknowledge the participating Elders, young people, and service providers who are actively working together to improve the way mental health services are provided to Aboriginal (Nyoongar) youth. Your commitment to this work is invaluable and we look forward to travelling this journey with you in the years to come.

We would also like to acknowledge the large group of Nyoongar Elders and community members who contributed to the initial Looking Forward Project (2011-2015) and provided the foundations for the current Building Bridges Project.



Canning River





# KAYA WANJU

**Welcome** to the first Building Bridges Community Report. In this report, you will find stories about our project from the past year, and our plan for the next year ahead.

This Community Report is for young people and their families, service providers who are involved in the health and wellbeing of Nyoongar young people, researchers who would like to work in partnership with the Nyoongar community, and the community at large.

We hope you enjoy!  
The Building Bridges team



## IN THIS REPORT

- 5 About the artist
- 6 **What is the Building Bridges Project?**
- 8 Meet the Elders
- 10 Meet the young people
- 12 Background
- 22 Building upon the 'Looking Forward Project'
- 24 The new working together space: Elders + Youth + Services
- 26 Participating youth mental health services
- 28 Other key groups
- 30 Project activities 2017
- 37 On the horizon for 2018
- 39 Resources: mental health support
- 40 Meet the project team
- 41 More information



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

The featured artwork was created by the **talented** artist **Kamsani Bin Salleh** for the Building Bridges Project.

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

“*The design is taken from my piece ‘Reactive’ and draws on the relationship between mental state and the connection to land.*”





# WHAT IS THE BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT?

The Building Bridges Project (the project) is improving engagement between Aboriginal young people and **youth mental health services**.

The aim of the project is to make youth mental health services more **relevant** and **culturally secure** for Aboriginal young people.

When we say 'culturally secure' we are talking about youth mental health services being delivered in a way that shows true **understanding** and **respect** for an Aboriginal (Nyoongar) worldview (ways of knowing and doing).

Cultural security is about creating an environment where Aboriginal young people are treated well and in a culturally respectful way. It is important that they are **empowered**, valued, understood, taken seriously, supported, safe, **respected**, and celebrated.



Hunter, Ashton, Matthew, Jaylan, Lalin, Jasmyrn and Jessica with Auntie Gwen and Uncle Albert



The Project involves **Nyoongar Elders, Aboriginal young people**, and **senior managers and staff** from youth mental health services working together in a **shared space**.

This shared space between Elders, young people, and service providers is what makes the project unique, and powerful.

**Together**, this group will unpack what cultural security would look like in a youth mental health service.

Through a process of yarning and storytelling over a number of workshops the group will identify what changes could be made to ensure young Aboriginal people feel **safe** accessing these services and the support they receive is a good fit for them and their culture.

These new **'ways of working'** will then be **implemented** within the participating youth mental health services for 12 months. During this time we will measure and evaluate the **impact** these changes have.

By going through this process, we will get a clear understanding of what changes other youth mental health services can make to better support the needs of Aboriginal youth.

The recommendations will be supported by evidence, and more importantly, **led by** the Elders and young people.





## THE ELDERS

Elders are **central** to this work, and we are very lucky to have four Nyoongar Elders on the Building Bridges Project.

Aunty Margaret Culbong provides cultural leadership and direction to the project in her role on the Translation Group, while Uncle Albert Corunna, Aunty Gwen Corunna, and Aunty Muriel Bowie work directly with the service providers and the young people.

The recognition of **Elder status** is universal within Aboriginal communities as they are the wisdom holders and the essence of Aboriginal culture.



### Aunty Margaret Culbong

Aunty Margaret is a Nyoongar Elder from the Wadjuk clan. She began her career as an enrolled nurse working within the Kimberley and Murchison Gascoyne regions with Aboriginal communities. She has worked with both government agencies and Aboriginal organisations to develop health services relevant to the needs of Aboriginal families over the past 40 years.



### Aunty Gwen Corunna

Aunty Gwen was born in 1938 and is the eldest of 12 in her family. Aunty Gwen worked with her sisters at Caversham house, and then at York hospital. Aunty Gwen and Uncle Albert married in 1961, and had five children- three sons and two daughters.

### Uncle Albert Corunna

Uncle Albert is an 83 year old Nyoongar Elder who is a member of the Swan River clan group in Perth, Western Australia. He is the oldest male spokesperson from his clan descended from his great, great, grandfather Midgegooroo of the Swan River. Uncle Albert has been involved in native title since the 1990's.

### Aunty Muriel Bowie

Aunty Muriel is the younger sister of Aunty Gwen and was born in 1941. She is a Ballardong Elder and is married with three children, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Aunty Muriel worked at an Aboriginal Women's Refuge for 25 years, and was a founding member of Yorgum Counselling Service.



Aunty Gwen, Uncle Albert and Aunty Muriel



# THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Ashton  
Watkins

**Ashton** is 23 year old young man from Perth with family in the Pilbara. He is currently studying a Bachelor of Youth Work at Edith Cowan University. He believes that society oppresses young people and for that reason he has chosen to help mental health services through youth work. He believes awareness surrounding young people and mental health is lacking and wants to help with this issue.

Hunter  
Culbong

**Hunter** is a 17 year old young Nyoongar man who has just completed year 12, and will be studying criminal behaviour at Murdoch University in 2018. He has a keen interest in the social and emotional wellbeing of young Aboriginal people and hopes to improve their outcomes in the future.

Krystyn  
Bonney

**Krystyn** is a 24 year old Yamatji woman from Geraldton currently in her last semester of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and Sociology at Curtin University. Krystyn is passionate about her community and culture.





**Lalin** is a 19 year old Nimanburru woman from Broome who is living in Perth. Lalin has been working as an Education Assistant for Indigenous students, doing one-on-one tutoring and running an art class which she uses to build up her student's confidence whilst also having a strong connection with culture. Lalin is passionate about youth work and mental health and would like to follow this career path.

Lalin  
Mando

**Matthew** is a 22 year old outreach youth worker for the Shire of Mundaring. Matthew recently won the Community Leadership Award at the 2017 WA Youth Awards and was named WA's Young Person of the Year.

Matthew  
Bill

**Jasmyn** is a 17 year old young woman who attends at Governor Stirling High School.

Jasmyn  
Lawrence

**Jessica** is a 16 year old young woman who attends Governor Stirling High School, and is one of nine siblings.

Jessica  
Rule

Youth Participants Matthew, Hunter, Krystyn and Ashton





## BACKGROUND

# ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

**Culture** is at the forefront of our approach to Aboriginal youth mental health.

Aboriginal people determine health by the **social, emotional and cultural wellbeing** of the entire community rather than the physical health of an individual. We recognise that mental health also falls under this concept as it resonates with the Aboriginal community.



Success Hill Reserve





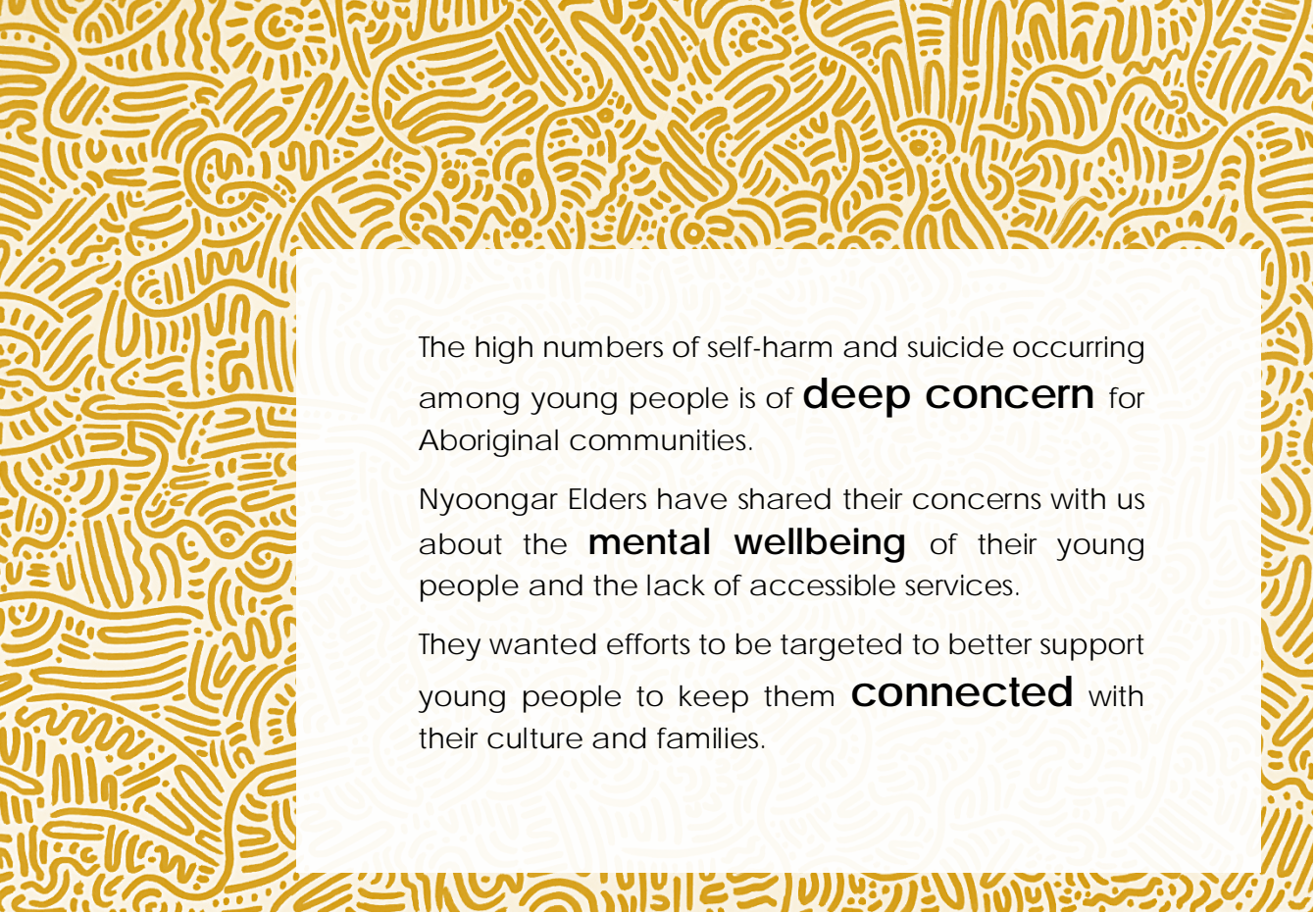
“

*Working with our mob we don't identify it as mental health you know, like we stressed or parents arguing, our young people don't identify it as mental health, it's more that social and emotional wellbeing, stay strong stuff, that's what we identify, culturally that's who we are as people.*

(Aboriginal Mental Health Worker)

”





The high numbers of self-harm and suicide occurring among young people is of **deep concern** for Aboriginal communities.

Nyoongar Elders have shared their concerns with us about the **mental wellbeing** of their young people and the lack of accessible services.

They wanted efforts to be targeted to better support young people to keep them **connected** with their culture and families.

*If a Nyoongar person comes to you for help they are already in desperate need or dire straits otherwise you wouldn't hear from them. If you hear from the Nyoongars then it's because they're crying out for help.*

(Elder)

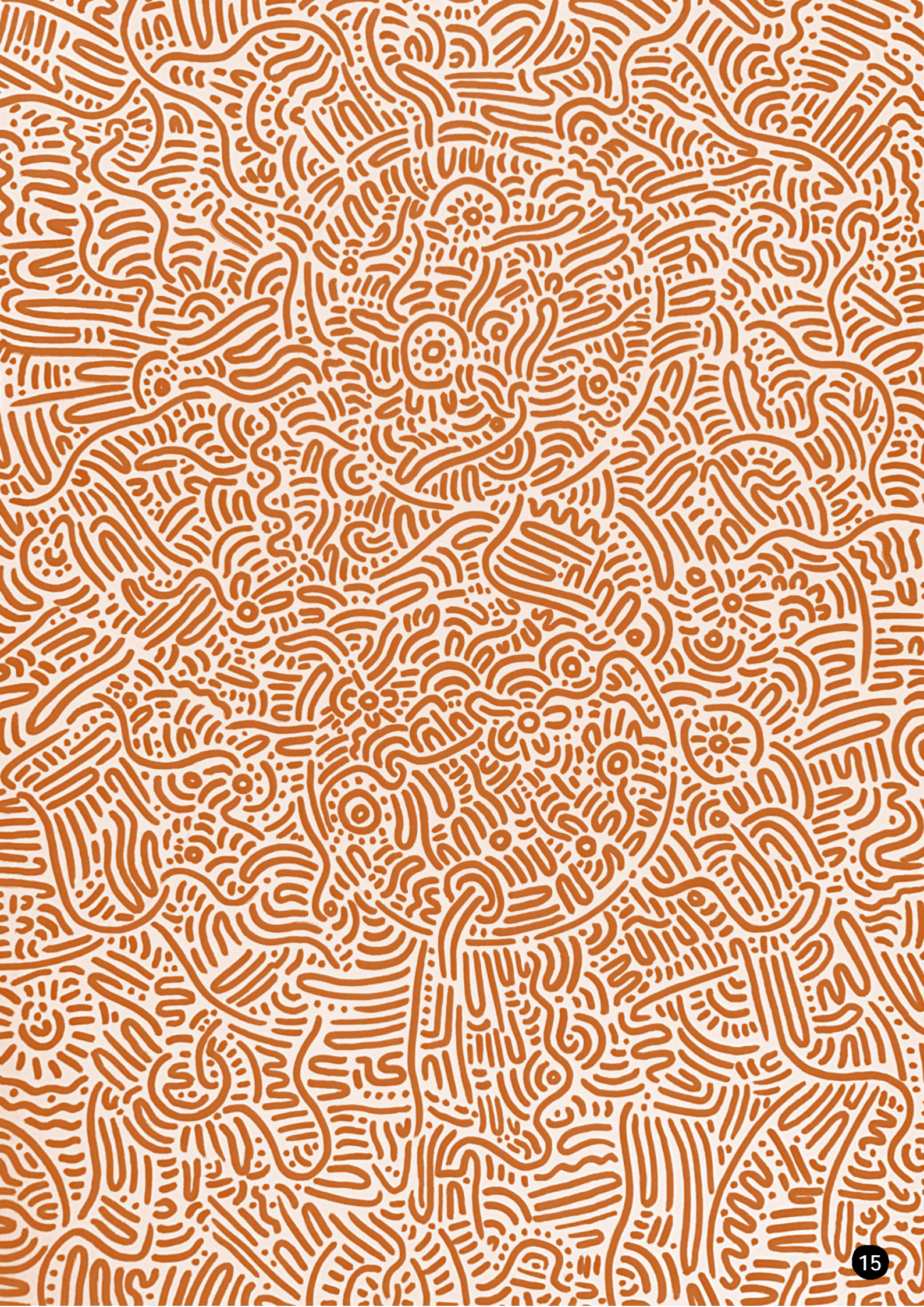
*Mental health issues are very strong in the Nyoongar community and there's not enough assistance around, nobody wants to deal with it, it's in the bad box.*

(Elder)

*It's very epidemic in the Aboriginal community. I don't think there's a single family in Perth that can put their hand up and say they're not being affected by mental health.*

(Elder)







## ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Although** many Aboriginal young people experience mental health issues, they are often not accessing services for support.

There are many reasons for this, which can include **stigma** and **shame**, **mistrust**, and the belief that mainstream services **do not understand** the Aboriginal worldview and culture.

*I think it creates a sort of otherness you know especially if you're talking about mental health. The stigma of it creates the otherness with it.*

(Young person)





“

*I don't know if this is just my experience but I feel like in my family there's a real shame factor around mental health or illness for Indigenous people.*  
(Young person)

”

“

*It's hard (seeing a non-Aboriginal counsellor) sometimes and having to explain every single little term that you say. 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 favourite thing to do, but sometimes you don't want to have to explain to someone, sometimes you just want someone to know.*  
(Young person)

”





## BRINGING A NYOONGAR WORLDVIEW INTO SERVICES

There is a call from the Aboriginal community for youth mental health services to **recognise** the Aboriginal worldview within their services.

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

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

*I have this idea, I think there needs to be awareness around spirituality within non-Indigenous services. I think if you walk up to someone and say something has been happening to you and that person looks at you like 'yeah, alright but tell me your other issues' then there's no rapport built there, total distrust. (Young person)*



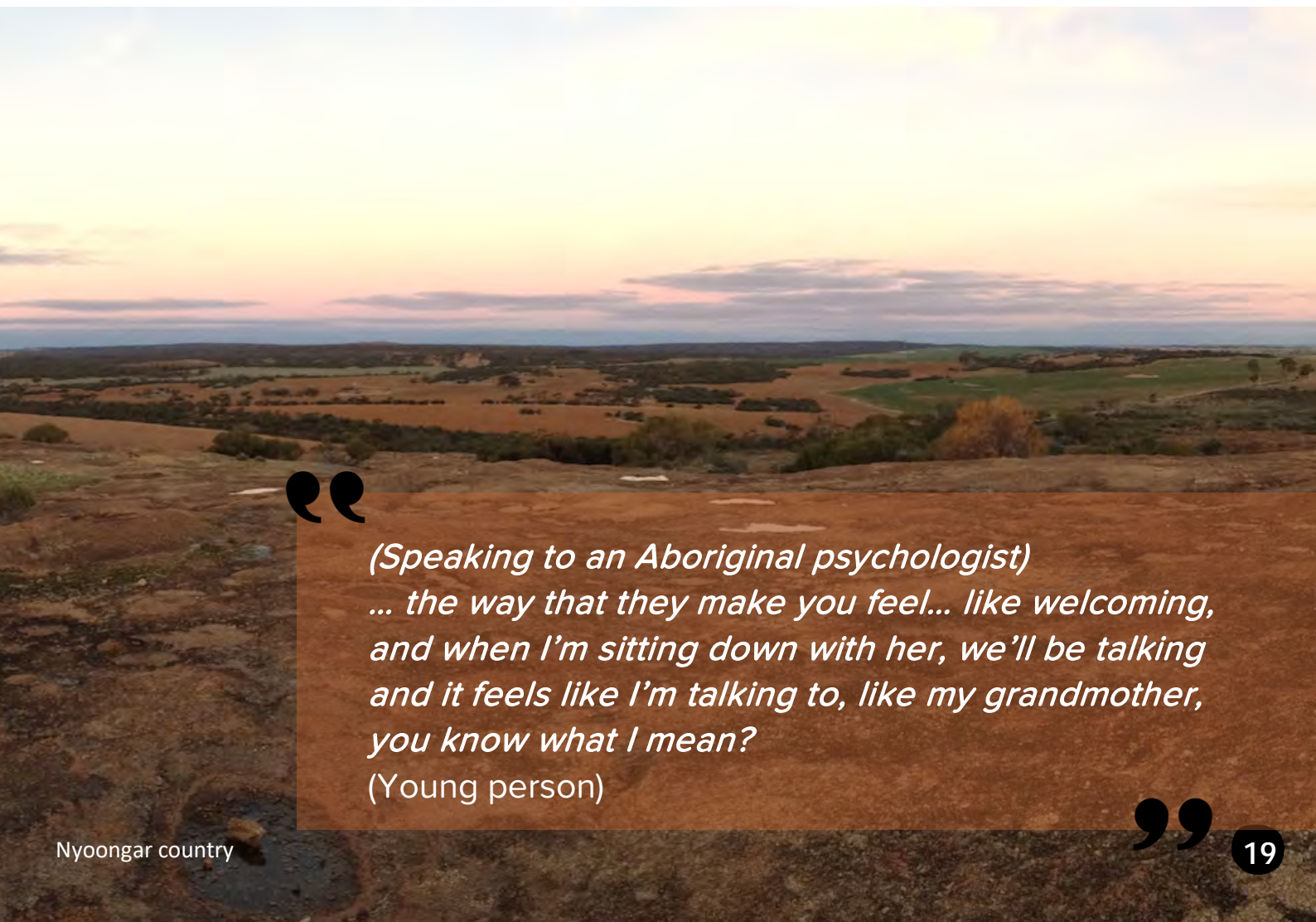


“

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

(Elder)

”



“

*(Speaking to an Aboriginal psychologist)  
... the way that they make you feel... like welcoming,  
and when I'm sitting down with her, we'll be talking  
and it feels like I'm talking to, like my grandmother,  
you know what I mean?*

(Young person)

”











## BUILDING UPON THE 'LOOKING FORWARD PROJECT'

The current Building Bridges Project builds upon the initial **Looking Forward Project** that was led by Dr Michael Wright and ran from 2011 to 2015.

The Looking Forward Project was about **learning** from Nyoongar Elders what was required for service providers to **work more effectively** with Aboriginal people.

The Project led to the development of a framework called the Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework, meaning '**sick head to good head**' in Nyoongar language.



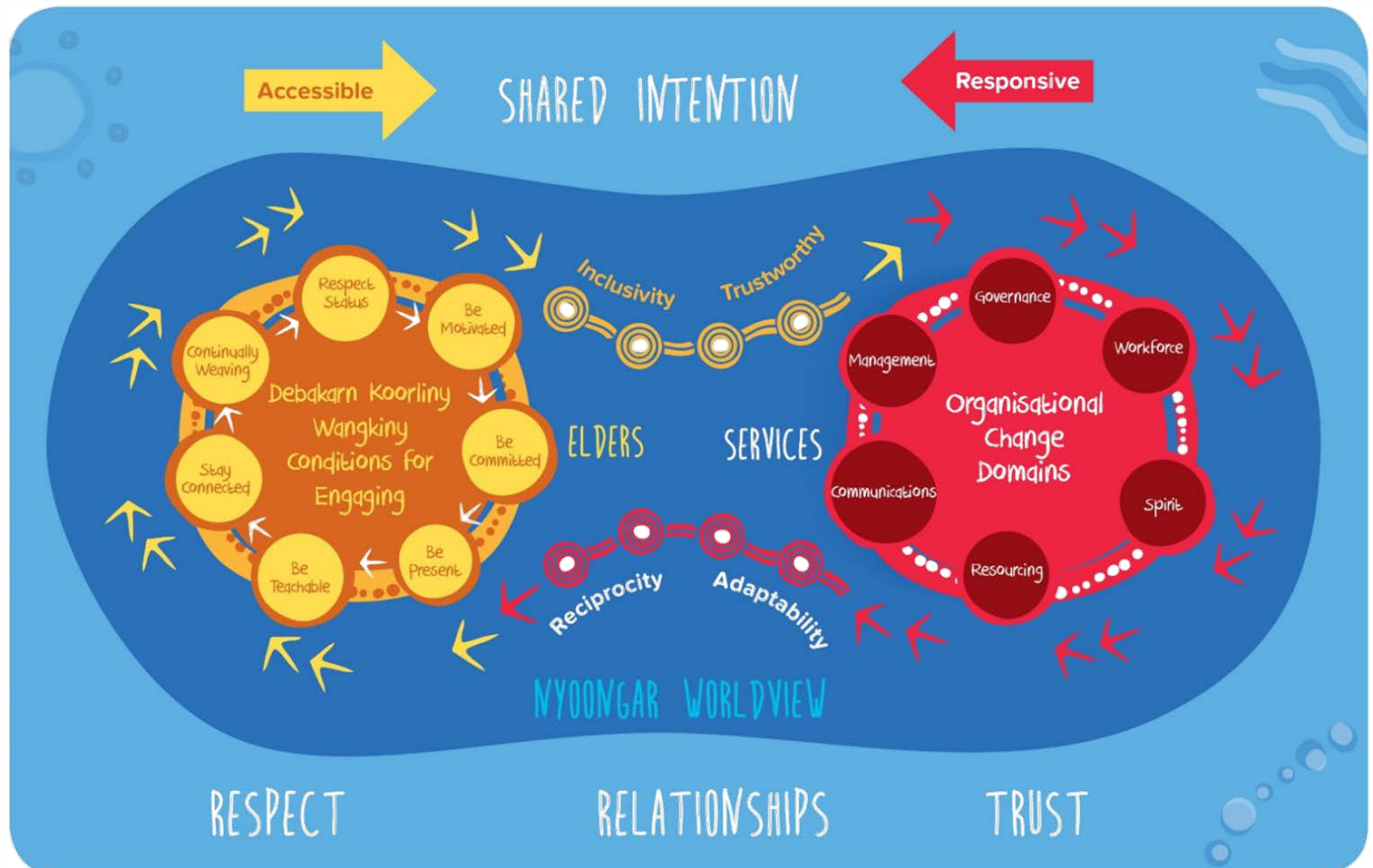
The **Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework** is held by a **Nyoongar worldview**.

It is about Nyoongar Elders guiding service providers to better **understand** Nyoongar culture and the impact of Colonisation, and building service provider's **capacity** to work with Aboriginal people in a more **culturally secure** way.

The Framework sets out the conditions for working together, and what **preparation** is required for services to engage meaningfully with Elders. These are: be motivated; be committed; be present; be teachable; stay connected; respect status; and continual weaving.

This work is held together through building and sustaining relationships. Attributes for **meaningful relationships** are: Inclusivity, trustworthiness, reciprocity and adaptability.

Six **organisational change** domains show where services can make changes according to their learnings from the Elders. This is because change at a system level, as well as an individual level, is necessary to make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal families.





# THE NEW WORKING TOGETHER SPACE

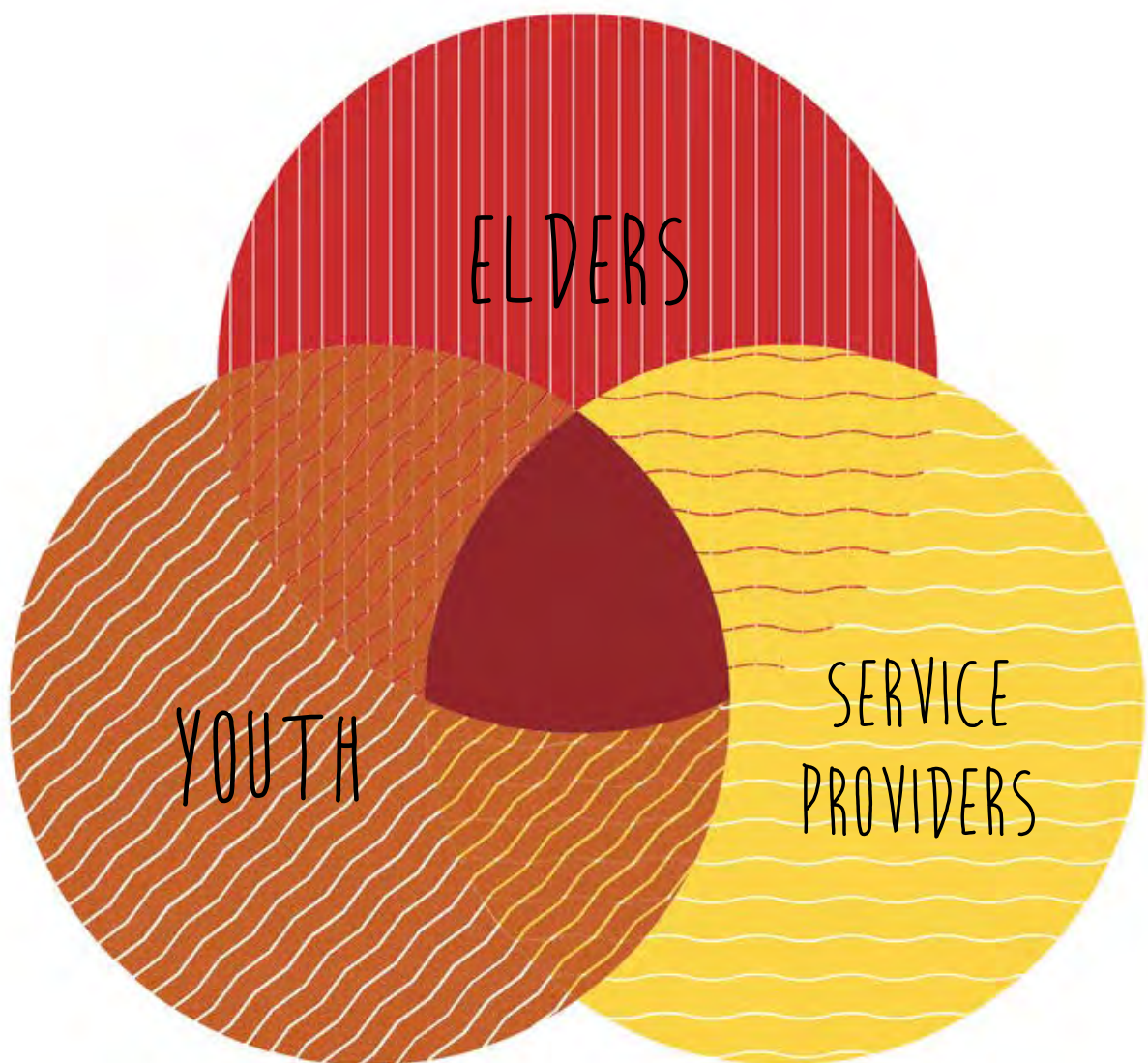
## ELDERS + YOUTH + SERVICE PROVIDERS

Building Bridges uses the Minditj Kaart –Moorditj Kaart Framework to guide the current project, in particular the **engagement process** between the Elders and services.

As Building Bridges is about Aboriginal **youth** mental health, it was important that Aboriginal young people are part of the working together space and are a part of the **relationship dynamic**.

This **shared space** allows for Nyoongar Elders, Aboriginal young people and youth mental health providers to engage in a process of adaptation and cultural exchange.







# THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The project has partnered with **three** mainstream youth mental health services.

These services are referred to as 'mainstream' because they are designed for youth in general, rather than for a particular target group (such as Aboriginal youth).

These services recognise the importance of culturally secure mental health care and have committed to implementing their learnings from the Elders and young people.



An independent not-for-profit organisation.

This service provides specialist support for young people with depression, anxiety, self-harm or suicidal thoughts or behaviour.

In addition to their offices in the Perth Metropolitan area they also work in up to 40 schools across WA.



A local centre under the federal initiative headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation.

This service provides support for mental health, physical health, work and study, and alcohol and other drug use.

The headspace Youth Early Psychosis Program also operates out of this centre providing specialist support to young people affected by psychosis.



**Government of Western Australia  
North Metropolitan Health Service**

Youth Mental Health Program  
(Youth Link, Youth Reach South  
& Youth Axis)



Three services make up the Department of Health's Youth Mental Health Program, which sits under North Metropolitan Health Service.

Youth Link and Youth Reach South provide specialist support to young people who are homeless or experience other barriers to accessing services.

Youth Axis provides specialist support to young people who are at risk of psychosis or an emerging personality disorder.



# THE SERVICE PROVIDERS

In **recognition** of the Elders cultural status as the **Budiyas** (leaders) of their communities, it was expected that the **senior managers** of each of the services work **directly** with the Elders.

As well as senior management, other key staff from each of services are also engaged in the project, including board members, clinical leads, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mental health clinicians.

Service providers are encouraged to move away from conventional business-like interactions and connect at a more personal level. There is a focus on **building relationships** through being **present** and sharing portions of **self**.





## OTHER KEY GROUPS

As well as our key players (the Elders, young people, and service providers) the project has a number of other important groups to ensure the project is conducted in a **culturally secure** way, and has the biggest **impact**.

## POLICY AND ADVOCACY PARTNERS

The Policy and Advocacy Partners will work with the project team, service providers, Elders, and young people to ensure that the participant group's plans for **change** can be effectively brought into **broader practice and policy**.

These partnering organisations include:

- The Mental Health Commission;
- The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA); and
- The Youth Advisory Council of Western Australia (YACWA).

Collectively, they bring knowledge, skills and experience in **mental health policy**, **Aboriginal health policy**, and **youth policy**.



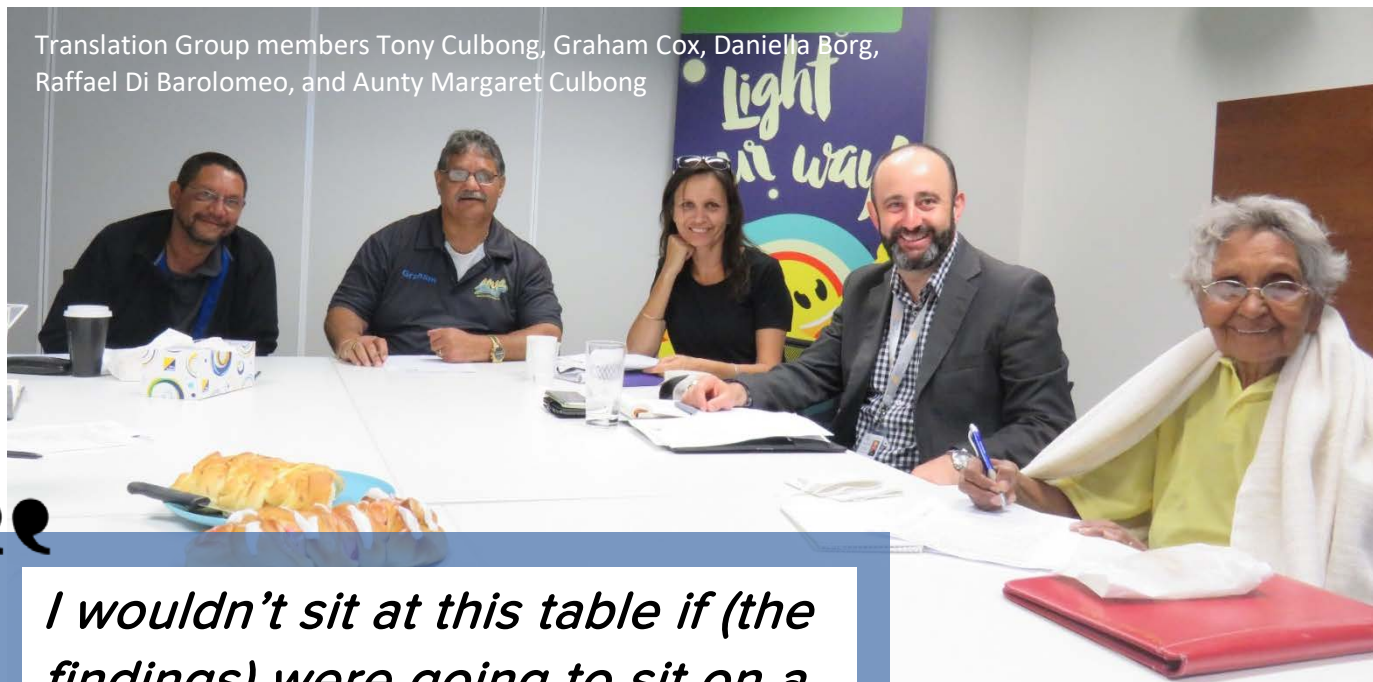


## THE TRANSLATION GROUP

The Translation Group has been established by the project team to ensure the project has a bigger **impact** beyond the participating youth mental health services. It's about expanding the work more broadly, and helping others use the **learnings** in a meaningful way. The Translation group will work together to co-design creative strategies for **sharing** the research findings with the community, and translating research outcomes into broader settings.

The group includes:

- Nyoongar Elder Aunty Margaret Culbong, who provides cultural leadership and direction to the project team and the Translation Group.
- Representatives from
  - Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Midland;
  - Centrecare Djooraminda;
  - Swan City Youth Service;
  - headspace Midland;
  - Swan Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service;
  - Maali Centre, Governor Stirling Senior High School;
  - Clontarf Academy, Swan View Senior High School;
  - Aboriginal Health Council of WA;
  - Youth Affairs Council of WA; and
  - Neami National Suicide Prevention.



*I wouldn't sit at this table if (the findings) were going to sit on a shelf. I'm here for change. (Elder)*



# PROJECT ACTIVITIES 2017

## (ENGAGEMENT + BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS)

### Community Event

In July 2017 we held an event to **share** the project with the **whole community** and **invite** Aboriginal young people to join the project as youth participants.

Uncle Ben Taylor performed a **Welcome to Country**, project team member Tiana Culbong spoke about the project, and we spend the afternoon listening to live music performed by local young people (and even some karaoke).

It was great to start **conversations** about the project and a number of young people were keen to sign up as participants.

A huge **thank you** to Swan City Youth Service for hosting the event and Midland's Derbarl Yerrigan Health Promotion Team for providing lunch.









## 'On Country' Day

In September 2017, the **Elders** of the project Uncle Albert and Aunty Gwen Corunna took the group out on Country to some places that are special to them, including Yagan Memorial Park and Success Hill Reserve.

This is the first of many activities that will help the service providers learn more about **Nyoongar culture** and **history** through the Elders.







Aunty Margaret Culbong with service providers at Yagan Memorial Park

*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 Mental Health Worker)





## Storying workshop

In November 2017, we held our first storying workshop.

Nyoongar Elders, Aboriginal young people and mental health service providers came together to **share their stories** and personal journeys as a means to build **relationships**.

Sharing stories and yarning plays a vital role within Aboriginal culture, and enables **engagement**, **inclusivity** and **reciprocity**. This process can be transferred to enable trusting relationships to be formed.

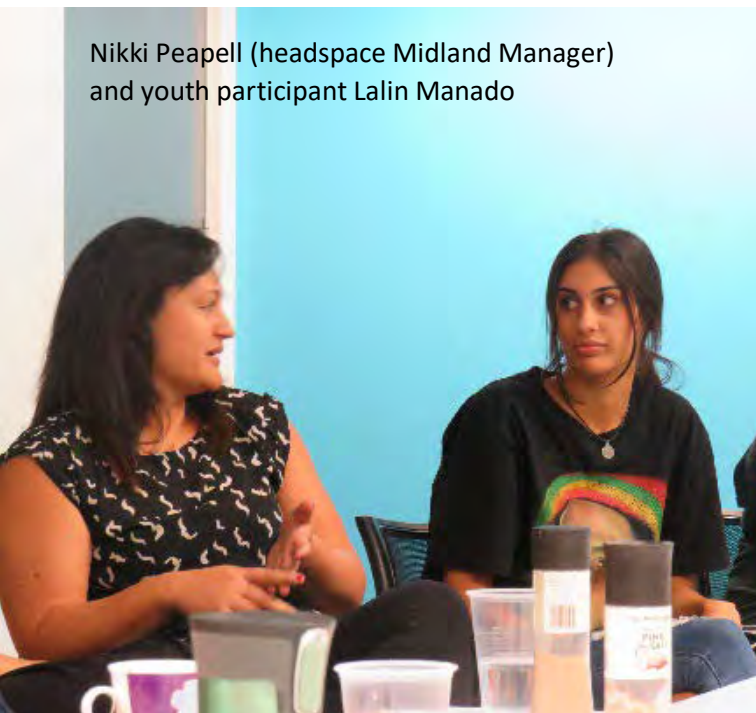
“*The stories were **personal** and **powerful**.*”  
(Service provider)



Dr Michael Wright, Aunt Gwen and Uncle Albert Corunna sharing their stories



Nikki Peapell (headspace Midland Manager)  
and youth participant Lalin Manado



*I feel privileged to hear the stories which have been shared today. It's always powerfully moving and stirs up a lot of sorrow and emotion to hear about the deep injustices and terrible things which have happened in the course of the shared life stories, but also good to hear of the successes and strengths which came through. Thank you.*

(Service provider)

Elders, young people, and service providers at the Storying Workshop





**2017** was about establishing the participant group, building relationships, and creating a **strong foundation** for working together.



“

*The experience so far has been incredible, the stories shared and knowledge passed on is invaluable. Either in a room or out On Country, hearing and working in hand with the Elders is key to sustaining the future. Sitting in on and being a part of something on this scale is great for personal growth.*  
(Young person)

”





# ON THE HORIZON FOR 2018

**2018** will be about building upon these relationships and working together to **co-design** the 'intervention.'

The 'intervention' is what we call the **new 'ways of working'** that the group will come up with. It is the changes that the group believe will make the services more culturally secure for Aboriginal youth.

The discussion will be led by the participants themselves, but we expect that topics may include:

- What does a **culturally secure** youth mental health service look like?
- How can youth mental health services acknowledge **Nyoongar worldview** within their practice?
- How can youth mental health services assess mental health in a more **culturally relevant** way?
- How can youth mental health services include **family** more?
- How can youth mental health services build better relationships with the **community**?


The group will explore these questions and others over a number of workshops and small group discussions.

The conversations will be working towards a set of ideas that will then be **implemented** within each of the participating services for 12 months. The group will design the **strategy** for bringing these changes in to the services, as well as designing how the **impact** of these changes will be **measured**.

We are very excited to capture these conversations and transform the group's **ideas into action**.







## THE WHOLE PROJECT PROPOSED TIMELINE (2017–2019)

2017

- ✓ **Establish** Project Team
- ✓ **Engage** Youth Mental Health Services + Policy and Advocacy Partners
- ✓ **Recruit** Elders and Youth Participants
- ✓ **Establish** the Translation Group
- ✓ **Build** relationships and a strong foundation for working together

2018

- **Co-design** the intervention
- **Co-design** how the intervention will be implemented into services
- **Co-design** how the impact of the intervention will be measured
- **Implement** the intervention into services

2019

- **Measure** the impact of the intervention
- **Process** and understand the overall findings
- **Share** the findings with the community
- **Guide** other youth mental health services to implement the findings
- **Use** the findings to change policy



# RESOURCES: MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Building Bridges is a research project and we are unable to provide mental health support.

If you are going through a tough 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 also call:

- Lifeline: 131114
- Mental Health Emergency Response Line: 1300 555 788 (Metro) or 1800 676 822 (Peel)
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- eheadspace: 1800 650 890 or [www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)





## THE PROJECT TEAM



### **Dr Michael Wright, Project Lead**

Michael is a Yuat Nyoongar man, and his family is from the Moora and New Norcia area of WA. Michael previously worked in a hospital as a social worker, and as a manager of an Aboriginal mental health service. The Looking Forward Project expanded on Michael's PhD, as the Building Bridges Project now does. Michael is currently an Early Career Research Fellow at Curtin University.



### **Dr Ashleigh Lin, Senior Researcher**

Ashleigh was born in Johannesburg in South Africa. Ashleigh has completed Master of Clinical Neuropsychology and PhD degrees at Orygen The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. She is currently a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Early Carer Research Fellow, and runs the Youth Mental Health research group at the Telethon Kids Institute.



### **Tiana Culbong, Research Assistant**

Tiana is a Nyoongar woman from the south west of Western Australia. Tiana is a research assistant on the Building Bridges project, she completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Melbourne and is currently completing a Master of Public Health at Deakin University.



### **Nikayla Crisp, Research Assistant**

Nikayla is a wadjella yorga (white woman), who was born and raised in Perth, WA. Nikayla completed a Bachelor of Psychology at Murdoch University and previously worked as a youth mental health clinician.



# FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Project Lead Dr Michael Wright on 9266 1637 or email [m.wright@curtin.edu.au](mailto:m.wright@curtin.edu.au).

## FUNDING

The Building Bridges Project would not be possible without the support of the Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation (Healthway), through research grant 31935.

## ETHICS

The project has been approved by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (762) and the Human Research Ethics Committee at Curtin University (HRE2017-0350).

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Wright, M., Lin, A., Crisp, N., Culbong, T. (2017). Building Bridges Community Report 2017. Curtin University, Perth, Australia.

© Copyright 2017. Curtin University, Peth, Australia.

## NYOONGAR KNOWLEDGE

*The knowledge in this work embodies traditional knowledge of the Nyoongar community. It was created with the consent of Elders of the Nyoongar community. All rights reserved. Dealing with any part of this knowledge for any purpose that has not been authorised by the Elders or their representative may breach customary laws and may breach the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth) and amendments. Use and reference is allowed for the purposes of research or study provided that full and proper attribution is given to the author, knowledge holder and traditional custodian group. The traditional knowledge/traditional cultural expression rights and the Indigenous communal moral rights over such aspects always remain with the Nyoongar people. For enquiries about permitted use of this information contact Dr Michael Wright.*



