

# Western District good practice case study

Community Based Koori Youth Justice initiatives in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the Kulin Nations and the Gunditjmara people of Warrnambool and Glenelg areas.

Thanks to the research participants and those who provided their experiences, practice wisdom and insights.

Particular thanks to Bobby Cunningham, the Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker, for his generosity in sharing his time and knowledge in the preparation of this case study, also to the Executive Officer of the Barwon South West Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, John Bell for his commitment to ensuring that good practice is documented and shared.

Use of the term Koori Youth Justice – for the purpose of this document Koori Youth Justice refers to all Koori Youth Justice Programs.

Further, for the purpose of this report the term Koori refers to persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origins.

## Disclaimer

The information shared in this document by the workers, and agencies consulted with, was provided in the spirit of learning and sharing between local initiatives and not with the intention of claiming to have “solved” youth offending. It is likely that despite the strength of the practices in place, there will be Koori young people in the future who offend and are placed on statutory orders.

The analysis undertaken in this review is preliminary in nature and based on conversations with a small number of organisations and stakeholders involved, not a comprehensive coverage of all parties experiences and learning.

The language used in this report has aimed to reflect the language and descriptions provided by the workers and organisations involved.

While acknowledging the parameters to this review, it remains important to acknowledge the significance of the work that has been undertaken in the Western District areas of Warrnambool and Glenelg, specifically the potential to identify elements of good practice that could be incorporated into the Koori Youth Justice Program and youth justice policy and practice.

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# Purpose

The Western District good practice case study has been completed in response to an action item from Aboriginal Justice Forum 40: Action 13: the proposed Warrnambool good practice case study. The purpose of the action was to explore and document factors that have contributed to the reduction in Koori youth justice clients in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas of the Western District, culminating in a period of no Koori young people on youth justice orders for a period of 18 months over 2013 and 2014.

The Western District good practice case study was a qualitative study focusing on the diversion initiatives, outcome oriented practices and prevention activities in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas of the Western District. This report explores the practice that has contributed to under representation of Koori young people in the justice system in this area, in contrast to the over representation in other areas across Victoria.

The project aimed to identify elements of good practice that can be shared across the Koori Youth Justice program and the broader youth service system. The findings of this project will be used to inform and strengthen programs and services focusing on the over-representation of Koori young people in the youth justice service.

## Background

The Koori Youth Justice Program (KYJP) was developed in 1992 in response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (April 1991). The socio-economic disadvantage, marginalisation and disengagement experienced by many Aboriginal Victorians places them at greater risk of contact with the justice system.

In 1997 the Victorian Government developed the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) in response to the findings of the *National Ministerial Summit into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. The AJA is a partnership between the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal community, that aims to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal Victorians in the criminal justice system.

The Koori Youth Justice Program is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (the department).

## Koori Youth Justice Program

The Koori Youth Justice Program aims to prevent offending and re-offending behaviour by ensuring that young Aboriginal people are connected to their families and communities, and are provided with access to supports and services that they require.

The Koori Youth Justice Program incorporates the following programs:

### Community Based Koori Youth Justice Program

This program is delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and one mainstream organisation. In total there are 15 funded Community Based Koori Youth Justice program agencies. The aim of this program is to assist young Aboriginal people at risk of, or subject to, youth justice orders to meet the conditions of youth justice orders while remaining in the community. This initiative is consistent with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) objective of reducing offending or reoffending behaviour. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice program is located across the State. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice program workers report monthly on the programs that they offer to young Aboriginal people on youth justice orders or those that are at risk of entering the youth justice system and the number of young Aboriginal people that attend a community program offered by the Community Based Koori Youth Justice program.

### **Koori Early School Leavers Program (KESL)**

This program is designed to divert young people from the youth justice system by focusing on the key risk factors for young offenders, particularly lack of engagement with school or other learning and employment opportunities. There are currently two ACCO agencies located in Thornbury and Mildura that are funded to deliver the KESL program. In total there are three KESL workers.

### **Koori Intensive Support Program (KISP)**

The Koori Intensive Bail Support Program and the Koori Pre- and Post Release Program were amalgamated to form the Koori intensive Support Program. There are KISP workers based in five of the department's Area youth justice teams: Dandenong; Geelong; Shepparton; Morwell; and Preston.

The KISP workers provide court advice and support to young Aboriginal people and the courts as well as the activities involved in the original programs.

- **Koori Intensive Bail Support Program**

This program aims to reduce the number of young Aboriginal offenders who are detained prior to sentencing. The program provides intensive outreach support to assist young people to comply with bail conditions or on conditions placed on deferred sentences.

- **Koori Pre and Post Release Program**

This program aims to provide assistance to help young Koori offenders to reintegrate into their communities. The program provides support within the correctional facility pre-release and is continued in the community after release from custody.

### **Koori Court Advice worker**

The Koori Court Advice worker is based in the North Eastern Melbourne youth justice team. The Koori Court Advice position is a specialist role, acknowledging the over-representation of Koori young people in the criminal justice system and the need to provide a culturally based approach with a commitment to diversion, rehabilitation and re-integration into the community. The Koori Court Advice worker provides court advice and support.

### **Custodial Aboriginal Support Workers**

The two Custodial Aboriginal Support workers provide young Aboriginal people with culturally sensitive support, advocacy and casework when young Aboriginal people are placed on remand or sentenced to detention.

### **Koori Youth Justice Program Advisor**

The Koori Youth Justice Advisor's role is to develop innovative policy and program responses for young Aboriginal people in contact or at risk of contact with the youth justice system and provide support to the KYJP, including coordinating forums for networking, learning and development among Koori Youth Justice Program and youth justice programs.

The only element of the Koori Youth Justice Program operating in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas of the Western District is the Community Based Koori Youth Justice program.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Western District

### Western District

The Western District is one of five departmental Areas in the West Division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

This case study has focused on the Community Based Koori Youth Justice initiatives implemented in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas in the southern part of the Western District Area. The southern part of the Western District includes the local government areas of Warrnambool, Moyne, Glenelg, Corangamite and the Southern Grampians.

According to the 2011 census data there were 791 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 0-24 year olds living in the five local government areas captured in the southern part of the Western District. This is slightly higher than the Victorian average and represents 2.4 per cent of the 0 - 24 year old population, in comparison to the 2.05 per cent of 0-24 year olds in Victoria that identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

In regards to overall Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population in the five local government areas all have equal to, or greater than, the overall proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population in Victoria. On average, 1.6 percent of the community is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, in contrast to 0.7 percent of the broader Victorian community. These figures are provided in Table 1 *Western District (Southern) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*.

Table 1. Western District (southern) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Western District (southern)							
	Local Government Areas						
Age	Corangamite	Glenelg	Moyne	Southern Grampians	Warrnambool	Western District (southern) TOTAL	Victoria
0 – 4 years	16	36	16	27	76	171	4690
5 – 14 years	22	114	60	55	113	364	8696
15 – 24 years	20	56	30	25	125	256	7394
<b>TOTAL</b>	58	206	106	107	314	791	20780
% of 0 – 24 year olds in LGA	1.3	3.5	2.0	1.8	2.8	2.4	2.05

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census Profiles

# Research methodology

The catalyst for the research project was the under representation of Koori youth justice clients in the Western District area, specifically in the local government areas of Glenelg and Warrnambool. The project was a qualitative study focusing on the implications for practice within the Koori Youth Justice programs as well as the learning for the broader service system. The research methodology involved consultation with programs in the Western District responsible for services to Koori young people, including the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker.

The project aimed to identify, document and disseminate the good practice elements in Glenelg and Warrnambool, in partnership with Western District youth programs and the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee.

The project was a case study of practice in the Warrnambool and Glenelg. It did not aim to answer questions of causation, but to identify lessons learned, with the recording of experiences and practices applied in this area, and translating these lessons into beneficial learning and emerging good practice for further consideration.

## Research questions

The research focused on identifying practices and initiatives that are occurring prior to statutory involvement in the areas of Warrnambool and Glenelg, where under-representation of Koori young people in the youth justice service is occurring, specifically:

- the local context and relationships that supported and sustained the outcomes
- experiences, practices and outcomes, and
- understanding the implications for practice, connections and dependencies between the elements of good practice.

## Data collection

The project drew on quantitative indicators from youth justice records that demonstrate the consistently low numbers of youth justice clients in the Warrnambool and Glenelg areas over the past six years. The project also drew on qualitative data, which was collected through interviews and program observations of the youth justice and other activities in the Warrnambool and Glenelg.

The project focused on initial questions and did not explore the change in outcomes before this period or draw on education and other data sources relevant to validate the data provided or the lessons identified. Accessing relevant and valid data to explore what other factors might also be affected, or involved, would form the basis for an additional follow up piece of work.

## Limitations

The research approach focused on a small number of workers and agencies working in Warrnambool and Glenelg. The research did not draw on a valid sample size or conduct validation across the available qualitative and quantitative data sources.

The qualitative data gathered through interviews with workers, and agencies, provides a capture of the experiences, practice wisdom, perspectives and lessons learned in Warrnambool and Glenelg. The interview participants do not claim to have 'solved' youth offending, and shared their perspectives in the spirit of learning and sharing.

The analysis undertaken in the review was preliminary in nature and based on conversations with a small number of organisations and stakeholders involved; it was not a comprehensive coverage of all parties' experiences and learning.

The qualitative and quantitative data available provide insights into emerging best practice. However, further work would need to be conducted to firmly identify causal linkages between practices applied and the outcomes. The findings indicate emerging elements of good practice that require further consideration in relation to the Koori Youth Justice Program and the youth justice policy and practice more broadly.

# Data summary

## Quantitative data

Quantitative data was sourced from youth justice records which are based on court, police and youth justice service data. A breakdown of data for the local government areas of Warrnambool and Glenelg, in the southern part of the Western District between 2008 – 2009 and 2014 – 2015 (YTD) financial years is provided in *Table 2. Western District (Warrnambool and Glenelg) youth justice clients 2008/09-2014/15* (page 9). The quantitative data available demonstrates the numbers of Koori youth justice clients have remained consistently low for over six years, and youth justice clients in general are decreasing.

Table 2. Western District (Warrnambool and Glenelg) youth justice clients 2008/09 - 2014/15

Warrnambool and Glenelg summary										
Area	Status	2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	Total	Percent
Glenelg LGA	Aboriginal	1	1	1	3	0	0	1	7	15.2%
	Non-Indigenous	5	4	11	9	6	2	2	39	84.8%
	Total	6	5	12	12	6	2	3	46	100%
Warrnambool LGA	Aboriginal	2	3	2	3	1	1	1	13	18.6%
	Non-Indigenous	7	10	17	5	5	6	7	57	81.4%
	Total	9	13	19	8	6	7	8	70	100%
Aboriginal total		3	4	3	6	1	1	2	20	17.2%
Non-Indigenous total		12	14	28	14	11	8	9	96	82.8%
Grand Total		15	18	31	20	12	9	11	116	100%

Source: Youth Justice records

## Qualitative data

Qualitative data was collected through interviews and program observations between February and May 2015. Seven face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Western District, with some additional data provided via email and telephone between visits to the Area.

Qualitative data was collected from seven interviews with program staff and stakeholders in the Western District. A breakdown of the participant organisations and positions is detailed in *Table 3. Summary of interviews conducted*.

Table 3. Summary of interviews conducted

Title / Role of Interview participant	Organisation
Youth Justice team leader	Department of Health and Human Services
Gunditjmara Family Services team leader	Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative
Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker	Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative
Koori Education Support Worker (x3)	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer	Victoria Police

# Elements of good practice

The catalyst for the project was the low numbers of Koori youth justice clients on a statutory order in Warrnambool and Glenelg, in the Western District. The quantitative data available demonstrates that the numbers of Koori youth justice clients have remained consistently low for over six years, and that youth justice clients in general have, and continue to, decrease. Identifying practices and initiatives that occur prior to statutory involvement is a critical part of the case study.

Those interviewed identified that the key difference between now and previous years was that they 'do not see the next wave coming' of young Koori people who are likely to become youth justice clients in the future. Those interviewed recognised that while there were, and will continue to be, individual cases where statutory intervention is required, the general consensus was that the collaborative and preventative processes and programs have created a positive culture with expectations and aspirations for young people and their families that create an alternate pathway other than the justice system.

## Local context

### Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice program

The Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative delivers the Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice program. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice position is full time and based in Warrnambool with coverage provided for the Glenelg area, including Portland, Heywood and Framlingham. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker is managed by the Family and Community Services team leader.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice program in the Western District applies the model as it was initially developed. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker provides:

- secondary consultation to departmental youth justice workers
- cultural support and engagement for clients on statutory orders, and
- diversionary activities for young Aboriginal people at risk of entering the youth justice service.

The Youth Justice team in the Western District Area stressed that the responsibilities of the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker do not include case management.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker is supervised within the employing agency and has regular contact with the departmental youth justice team leader to discuss client allocations, case plan direction and co-working strategies. Strategies utilised by the workers include communicating about visit times to a client. This strategy ensures that there is no duplication and that the maximum amount of supervision / contact is provided. For example, scheduling contact with youth justice at the start of the week, and contact with the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker at the end of the week.

The departmental youth justice team leader has regular, though less frequent contact, with the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker's manager to ensure that the focus of the role remains clear and that the expectations of both parties are aligned.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker indicated that there are a number of factors that contribute to the declining numbers of young Koori people coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The worker was clear that it is not only the activities of the Community Based Koori Youth Justice program, but a range of programs in Warrnambool and Glenelg areas that contribute to the low number. Education participation and attainment was identified by the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker as a significant contributing factor towards the low numbers of Koori young people in contact with the criminal justice system in the area. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker attributed the very

low numbers, in particular, to the strong working relationships with KESO, police, parents, Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer and the Aboriginal Justice Panel.

## Aboriginal organisations and the community

The Western District has four Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the Western District Area: Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, Kirrae Whurrong Aboriginal Corporation, and Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service Inc (DWECH).

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker primarily works from the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, and provides services to Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. These two organisations deliver a range of programs to support the community. The programs offered include, but are not limited to:

- Health services
- Housing support
- Koori Preschool Assistant
- Aboriginal Best Start
- Bringing Them Home
- Closing the Gap
- Koori homework classes
- Lake Condah heritage development project, and
- Tourism and business development initiatives.

One of the contributing factors to the under representation of young people in the justice system identified by those working in Warrnambool and Glenelg was the leadership and governance of the two organisations which has focussed on developing a wide range of programs with a focus on whole of family, and whole of community development.

Workers in the area noted the presence of a number of adult role models within the Koori community and the positive impact this has had on the younger generations.

## Education

There are three Koori Education Support Officers, employed by the Department of Education and Training, who work in the Western District area. The Clontarf Academy (the academy) also operates in the two Warrnambool secondary colleges. The academy works with Koori young men to provide access to sporting opportunities as a result of attendance and success at school.

Warrnambool Secondary College operates a second campus called “WAVE” for students who have disengaged or are struggling in a mainstream setting. Students can attend the program for up to three years as an alternative to the main college. The Department of Education and Training also funds a Koori preschool officer position that is based in an Aboriginal community organisation.

The three Koori Education Support Officers have developed a model of working that is based on ensuring every Koori child in that area is accessing education services.

The key features of the model include:

- Koori Education Support Officers are based in the Department of Education and Training Warrnambool office rather than in specific schools.
- Support for Koori children is monitored from birth to secondary school with a specific focus on key transition points.
  - Koori Preschool Officer, in partnership with the Koori Education Support Officers, aims to ensure that all Koori families are made aware of the Koori playgroups and supported to attend. Families are supported in the enrolment process for kindergarten and the Koori

Education Support Officers monitor the process to ensure all families have been contacted and engaged.

- Koori Education Support Officers provide oversight of the transition to primary school with a similar model of support and engagement. In one school the prep teacher runs a “Flying start” program for students and parents, for which the Warrnambool City Council provided funding for Koori students and parents to attend.
- The transition to secondary school has been the focus of a more significant program which captures all Koori students entering secondary school and delivers a program over several sessions including classroom visits and a reflection session. A Celebration Day is held for Grade 6 students to mark the end of their primary education. Koori Education Support Officers monitor all students’ initial transition at the beginning of the Year 7 year.
- All schools in the area have access to Koori Education Support Officers support but a particular focus of work is the five schools with the highest number of Koori students.
- At the five key schools the Koori Education Support Officers have worked to develop reference groups consisting of the principal, wellbeing staff and careers staff to share information about students’ progress and identify any risk issues that need to be managed. The reference groups occur monthly and are chaired by the principal. The purpose of the meetings is to ensure that responsibility for the Koori students is shared and a collaborative planning process is undertaken.
- Koori Education Support Officers have accessed funding through the School Focussed Youth Service to run “Celebration Days” throughout the year to mark occasions such as NAIDOC week. These events bring Koori children together from all the different schools as well as providing a focus for community strengthening. Older students from Clontarf are expected to support the event as a way of giving back to the community.
- Koori Education Support Officers have run groups for parents about issues such as career planning for their children and host a monthly parent forum in the community for questions or issues to be raised.
- Koori Education Support Officers have worked hard to develop a program of activities that engage Koori students in their culture (Elders attending school, Koori curriculum content) as well as accessing mainstream educational programs that assist with raising aspirations (visits to BioCats, EarthED etc)

## Police

Victoria Police deliver a number of Koori specific programs that are operational in the Western District. The Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer and the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer both play a significant role in developing and maintaining positive relationships with the local Koori community. These roles, at both Warrnambool and Heywood, organise and deliver a range of community events that bring together police and Koori young people to share activities such as surfing and snorkelling.

The Police Youth Resource Officers are active in engaging with the community and building relationships.

The Aboriginal Community Justice Panel is a panel of volunteers that is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day to attend the police station if an Aboriginal person is brought in and to advocate on their behalf.

Comprising of volunteers from Koori communities, the role of the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel is to assist people at risk and, where appropriate, take custody of the person.

The relationship between police and the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker is positive and has provided a mechanism for police to divert young people prior to issues escalating into offending behaviour. The Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer also performs this role.

The strength of relationships and the time invested in community building can be framed as early intervention as it provides opportunities and mechanisms to address behaviour that is problematic, but not offending behaviour.

# Local experiences and practices

## Western District Community Based Youth Justice program summary

The key features of the role in the southern part of the Western District have been developed over 16 years by the Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker, stakeholders and the community.

The program is oriented around core activities and values as outlined below.

### Activities

#### Access to activities

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has prioritised transport for young Koori people to their desired activity (often sport based) to help them engage in a program and community that would not otherwise be available. These opportunities are often made possible through the contacts and networks that the Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has created over time, but also include the youth group run by the Community Based Koori Youth Justice program.

#### Home and outreach visits

Active outreach is a core activity: the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has consistently visited the homes of young people to meet with their parents/carers directly and ensure that genuine engagement and support is provided at home for the activities that the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker organises.

#### Weekly youth group

The Marr-ang youth group has been operating for the last five years after hours on a Friday night. In this time the program has engaged between 70-100 young people by giving those young people a chance to start their weekends in a fun way with a wide range of activities. The activities range from sports, video games, movies nights, cultural activities, go-karts, arts and crafts, excursions, guest speakers and team building activities. The young people who attend look forward to the group and attendance numbers over the years have been exceptional. The pre-requisite for attending the "Marr-ang Youth Group" is school attendance: this is "a must" for young people who want to be a part of the group.

#### School visits

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker, whenever possible, has made time to visit local schools across Warrnambool and Glenelg. The district is large and client visits are linked to a visit with the local primary school as much as possible. When visiting schools, the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker participates in the daily activities of the school; this may include sitting in classes, assisting in a reading session, playing some basketball at lunch, or joining in a science lesson.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has worked hard to develop relationships with local schools. The schools are supportive and principals will pro-actively contact the worker when they begin to have concerns about a young person.

### Values

#### Family oriented

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has developed partnership with parents and carers when working with children. By pro-actively partnering with parents and carers, this has provided young people with consistent boundaries, messages and support.

This is highlighted in the following comments.

*“The last group of people that the Koori youth justice program would like to acknowledge are the parents / carers. This group of amazing people have to be given a lot of credit too.*

*The parents are onside from a disciplinary standpoint where the young person might think twice about playing one off against the other. Our parents have been on side when it comes to the welfare and education our young people and the Koori youth justice program believes that this is paramount when it comes to looking after the young people today. If all of these programs are allowed by our parents and carers to instruct, care for, discipline etc. We feel that we would be able to keep the numbers low with our proactive approach to looking after our young people.”*

Email correspondence  
Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker March 2015.

### **Culturally sensitive and respectful**

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has gained respect within the Aboriginal and wider community of Warrnambool and surrounding areas. A mark of the significant respect that the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has gained is that parents have given permission for the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker to morally discipline a young person if required. To morally discipline a young Aboriginal person means that a person outside a child’s family group has been given permission from a young person’s parent, or parents, to talk to and advise the young person about what they may have done wrong.

It was identified that the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker in the Western District has struggled to get young people to engage with and agree to complete a cultural plan. This is consistent with the experience and challenges faced by other Koori youth justice program workers.

### **Client centred**

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker aims to engage the young person with their interests and has experienced significant success in linking young people to sporting clubs and activities.

## **Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice program worker characteristics and length of tenure**

The program worker characteristics, personality and length of time that the worker has been in the role has influenced the development of the program, the strength of the stakeholder partnerships and working relationships established throughout Warrnambool and Glenelg.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has been in the role for approximately 16 years. The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker is originally from Brooklyn, New York, and was recruited to Australia to play professional basketball. He has a profile in the community as a successful basketball player and now as a coach for the Warrnambool team.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker has been effective in developing and sustaining strong working relationships in the southern part of the Western District area with the local Aboriginal communities, schools and educational programs, sporting and recreational services, justice and the police.

# Emerging themes and implications for practice

There are a number of lessons from the Western District good practice case study that could have potential implication for practice, and could strengthen prevention and diversion initiatives for children and young people.

## Focus on the child and their family group

### **A clear focus on the child or young person's needs, opportunities and interests**

There is a recognition of the need to meet the young person “where they are at” both in terms of physical locations, going to schools, home visits, transporting, and also in regards to the young person's abilities and interests.

### **A greater focus on engagement with family groups**

The Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice program works with family groups and aims to establish partnerships with parents and carers to allow for early identification of risk and early intervention, and provide a non-threatening avenue for parents to express their concerns. All the programs have a clear focus on working “with families’ not just with the child or young person.

## Early intervention

### **Age range: A more focussed and structured approach to early intervention activities**

One of the key features of the work in Warrnambool and Glenelg by the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker is the preventative activity with children of primary school age. This focus is structured and embedded within the program.

The focus of the weekly youth group is late primary school age (8-11 years). In school visits the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker's contact will include children in grade prep. This early contact establishes a relationship with children at a time before there are any issues regarding offending, and establishes a strong foundation for ongoing engagement, early identification of risks and early intervention.

In different ways, all of the program workers spoken to were working to engage children and their families very early so that relationships were established prior to the issues of adolescence, and problems were resolved during childhood so that the transition to adolescence and secondary school was well managed. Relationships have been established and maintained between workers, agencies and communities over a period of many years so that contact for support occurs informally when an issue arises, rather than through statutory intervention at crisis point.

## Strong links with education

### **Engagement with school staff**

The Western District Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker's pro active engagement with school staff means that they are comfortable to make contact with the worker when they began to have concerns regarding a child or young person. This partnership approach to identifying risk enabled pro-active and early intervention with children and young people and risk, and allowed the worker to work with the school, the family and the child to prevent issues from escalating.

### **Focus on school attendance: activities linked to school attendance and attainment**

The work of both the Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker and the Clontarf program utilises school attendance as a pre requisite to access “fun” and/or “desired” activities. In this way, school engagement is supported by both programs. This link is an embedded focus of the program, and has established

participation in the Community Based Koori Youth Justice as an incentive to encourage and support children and young people to attend and work hard in an educational setting.

## Community based partnerships

### Community based and aspirational

The provision of community events and activities on a regular basis showcase positive cultural traditions and role models as well as bringing professionals and community members together on an informal basis.

The focus is on providing Koori young people with opportunities to experience success and exposure to a range of environments which encourage and create aspiration.

### Collaboration

A range of informal and formal networks has been established between services over time in Warrnambool and Glenelg areas that work to support each other and each other's programs. Funding was creatively accessed from a range of sources to assist with delivering different programs that were also supported in kind by many agencies.

### Use of mainstream sport clubs and organisations

Adolescents linked to the worker are supported in engaging with local sporting clubs. The worker provides transport support as well as assisting in the provision of uniforms and materials.

## Staff networks, coaching and mentoring

### Worker characteristics, length of tenure, and peer mentoring by more experienced Community Based Koori Youth Justice workers

All workers interviewed for the report have been in their position for over a decade and spoke about impact of their work now being seen across generations. The relationships and interventions that took place ten years ago have helped with developing older male positive role models that are part of the community.

The Community Based Koori Youth Justice worker in the Western District is an experienced and successful sportsman who utilises coaching support for his role outside the Community Based Koori Youth Justice program. There is significant interest and use of coaching techniques in terms of staff development and student achievement and it would be valuable to explore further how coaching techniques could be used by Community Based Koori Youth Justice workers as part of their role.

## Next steps

The Western District good practice case study explored and documented factors that have been identified by staff and stakeholders in Warrnambool and Glenelg areas in the Western District as likely to have contributed to the reduction of Koori young people involved with youth justice in the local community.

The report has identified a number of implications for practice that require further consideration and exploration and will be a useful tool to inform and strengthen programs and services that aim to reduce the number of Koori young people in custody.

This report will be tabled at the Aboriginal Justice Forum 42 in July 2015. The report will be distributed to participants and stakeholders to encourage further actions to effectively address and understand prevention and early intervention for children and young people at risk of engaging with the criminal justice system.

