

Raising the voices of young people in remote Aboriginal communities in Australia to identify place-based support needs: The Bigiswun Kid Project



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Abstract

Purpose Adolescence is a crucial developmental period that is distinct from childhood and adulthood. There is a global push for adolescent-specific services informed by young people; such services are crucial for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because adolescents make up one-third of the population. The authors of this study worked with young people and their families to: identify the support that young people need to thrive in remote Aboriginal communities; report how young people and their parents would like this support to be delivered; and describe what was learned from piloting support during the research project.

Methods Ninety-four (83%) of all young people born in 2002–03 (aged 16 to 19 years) who were living in the Fitzroy Valley at the time and 101 (89%) of their parents were interviewed. Using an Aboriginal participatory action approach, the authors worked with young people and local Aboriginal leaders to pilot some support.

Main findings The seven most common supports that were requested were: opportunities to participate in cultural and on-Country activities, organised sports, community-based youth hubs/safe places, public

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transport, child development workshops, supported work programs, and supported tertiary education. Parents and young people wanted individual communities re-empowered to design and lead this support.

Principal conclusions The learnings and recommendations described in this paper can be used by local services to enhance existing and develop new support that enables young people to successfully transition into adulthood. This approach could identify and pilot support needs in communities elsewhere.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; Connection to Country; Rural and remote; Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; Adolescent; Young adult

Highlights

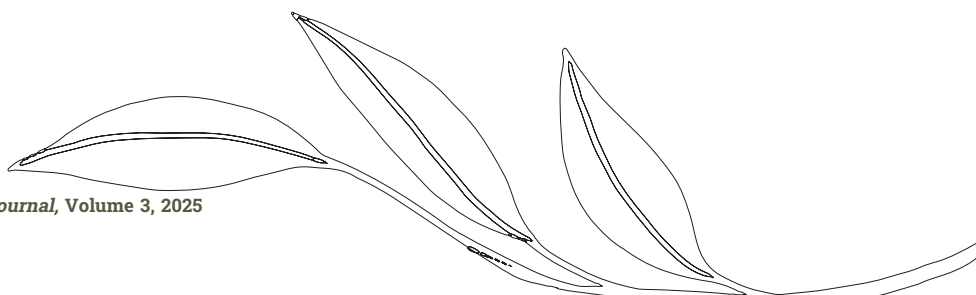
- Young people (aged 16 to 19 years) living in remote Aboriginal communities know what support they need to thrive in adulthood.
- Support should be place-based, meaning designed, led and staffed by or with individual communities or clusters of communities.
- Place-based support succeeds because it is built on community strengths and addresses individual challenges.
- Services in remote communities should identify ways to strengthen families and kinship systems and re-empower communities.
- Scaffolded support helps young people to succeed through tertiary education and enter the workforce.

Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period distinct from childhood and adulthood, involving profound physical, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional changes (Jaworska and MacQueen 2015). Many behaviours that have a lifelong impact begin in adolescence (Dahl et al. 2018). Despite this, clinical and policy approaches are often designed for children or adults, forcing adolescents into one of these categories (Jaworska and MacQueen 2015). There is a global push for adolescent-specific health and wellbeing services that are informed and co-designed by young people (World Health Organization 2024). This need is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because adolescents and young people aged 10 to 24 years comprise 30 per cent of the population, compared with 18 per cent among non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of

Statistics 2021). Adolescence is also a time when the gap in mortality widens between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians (Azzopardi et al. 2018, 2020). Investing in the health and wellbeing of adolescents can bring a ‘triple dividend’ by improving their current health and wellbeing, their future health as adults, and their future children’s health (Patton et al. 2016).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health extends beyond the Western medical model to encompass physical wellbeing and also social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the individual, family and community across the entire lifespan (Gee et al. 2014; Australian Government 2021). This holistic understanding of health and wellbeing also includes social issues, traditional knowledge and healing, and connections to Country, kinship and culture (Australian Government 2021; HealthInfoNet 2025).





Services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must acknowledge this broader definition and be responsive.

The Australian Government has committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) (Australian Government 2020). Nine of the 19 CTG targets aim to improve the lives of young people (Targets 1–7, 11, 12). The Agreement also sets out four priority reforms to inform and measure improvements in how the Government works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Priority reform one requires that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress* (p. 3). The second and third priority reforms discuss the need to build the Aboriginal community-controlled sector and transform existing government services. Reform four identifies the need for governments to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap (Australian Government 2020). To achieve these priority reforms and address the CTG targets, opportunities must be provided for young people to be consulted and heard. Including young people in discussions about their lives is crucial for ensuring autonomy and self-determination (Yap and Yu 2016). These opportunities must be place-based, meaning that young people can inform the services in their local area. Place-based policymaking allows for the complexities specific to a region, such as geographical remoteness, culture and language, to be considered in service design. The place-based approach aligns better with traditional Aboriginal governance than other policy design and implementation models (Yap and Yu 2016).

The very remote Fitzroy Valley, located in the Kimberley, Western Australia, consists of one service town, Fitzroy Crossing, and 32 Aboriginal¹ communities spread over a 400 km diameter. Approximately 4,500 people live in the Fitzroy Valley, of whom 80 per cent are Aboriginal and come from five language groups: Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka and Nykina. Aboriginal people from the Fitzroy Valley have fought to maintain their culture, language and connection to Country. They have also worked hard to protect their land, much of which remains undeveloped, ancient natural landscape (Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attraction 2019; Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation 2015).

In 2019, Senior Aboriginal women from the Fitzroy Valley initiated the Bigiswun Kid (Kimberley Kriol for ‘adolescent’) Project to consult with young people about the support they needed to improve their health and wellbeing and thrive in adolescence and early adulthood (Rice et al. 2022). This study adopted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept of health and wellbeing as defined above. The women focused on older adolescents because they recognised a service gap for this age group and the need to support young people transitioning out of school. The overarching aim of the Bigiswun Kid Project is to identify the needs and inform the development of local services to improve the health and wellbeing of adolescents in the Fitzroy Valley. This article reports some of the qualitative data collected in the Bigiswun Kid Project.

This study was reviewed by the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum Research Subcommittee and

¹Consistent with Western Australian Government reports, this article uses the term Aboriginal people in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, recognising that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia.





received ethics approval from the Western Australian Aboriginal Human Research Ethics Committee (#914) and the Western Australian Country Health Ethics Committee (#RGS3424). A values and ethics statement was developed for the project, which was prepared in line with the following three documents: Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders ([National Health and Medical Research Council 2018](#)); Keeping Research On Track II: A companion document to ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders ([National Health and Medical Research Council 2018](#)); and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research [National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007](#)).

The specific aims addressed in this study were to:

1. Identify the support that young people need to thrive in adolescence and early adulthood in remote Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley.
2. Report how young people and their parents would like this support to be delivered.
3. Describe what was learned from implementing some support during the research project.

Methods

Positionality

The Bigiswun Kid Project was initiated and conducted by Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (MWRC), an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation (ACCO), in partnership with researchers from the University of Sydney with whom they have a longstanding relationship ([Pickard et al. 2025](#)). The authors include Aboriginal researchers from the Fitzroy Valley (EB, MB, CC, JD, EC), and non-Indigenous

researchers (LR, EE, ST) and youth mentors (NR, FW). Non-Indigenous staff received formal cultural awareness training and ongoing cultural supervision and guidance. Reflexive practices were used to consider how lived experiences shaped perspectives throughout the project.

Project design

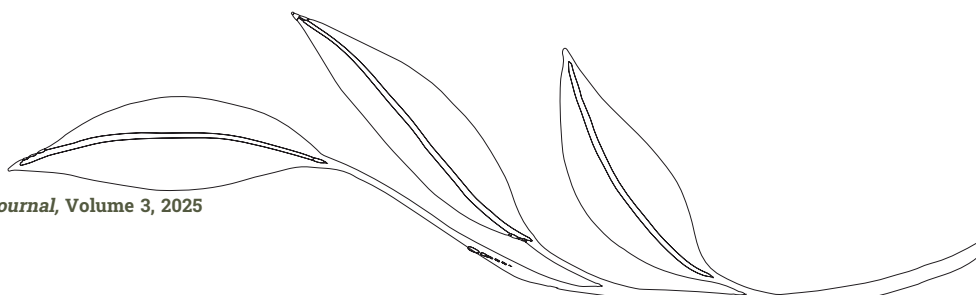
The research methods are described in a protocol paper ([Rice et al. 2022](#)). An Aboriginal participatory action research (APAR) approach was used ([Dudgeon et al. 2020](#)). This critically self-reflective approach prioritises Aboriginal knowledge, promotes knowledge translation, and empowers individuals and communities to determine and interpret the research and its dissemination. Details about how the APAR approach was incorporated into the Bigiswun Kid Project have been described elsewhere ([Rice et al. 2025](#)). The methods specific to this paper's aims are described below.

Community consultation

An extensive 18-month consultation was undertaken with senior community members, parents, young people, local government services and ACCOs at the start of the project. Consultation also continued throughout the project. During the initial consultation, the authors met with 70 people, of whom 50 were Aboriginal. During the consultation, senior community members requested that support be provided to young people during the data collection to ensure immediate knowledge translation and the benefit of the research. The authors spoke with 30 parents and 17 young people to determine what type of support young people would like, as described below.

Participants

Young people aged 16 to 19 years (born 2002 and 2003) living in the Fitzroy Valley in 2020–22 and their parents/caregivers were eligible to participate. The





names of the young people were obtained from school records collected during a research project conducted in 2010, known as the Lililwan (Kimberley Kriol for ‘all the little ones’) Project (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017). The Bigiswun Kid Project team collaborated with 11 community navigators to review the original list and identify individuals within the same age range in each community. Young people not included in the Lililwan cohort but within the target age range and living in the Fitzroy Valley in 2020–22 were also eligible to participate. Local Aboriginal researchers and community navigators informed parents and young people about the study and the support being piloted as part of the research and sought consent for participation. Young people were advised that they could access support without having to complete the interview.

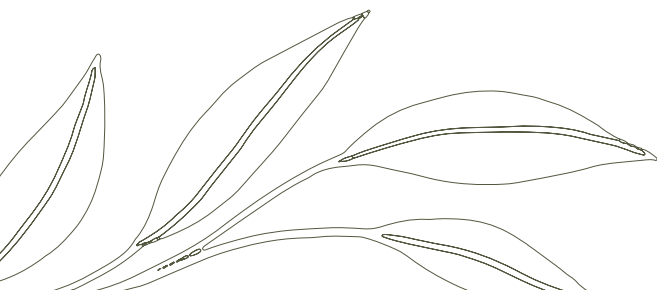
Interviewers

The project employed two full-time Aboriginal researchers and 11 casual Aboriginal community navigators. Everyone working on the project received training in research, including instruction on the protocol and confidentiality. The full-time staff were offered additional training (Rice et al. 2025). The 32 remote Aboriginal communities in the Fitzroy Valley are typically clustered in groups of three to six. The Aboriginal researchers and community navigators (at least one from each cluster) supported participants in their community. Community navigators were well known and respected, most often senior community members with local language skills and extensive community and cultural knowledge, who provided cultural governance and helped ground the research and support in individual communities. They ensured that participants had someone they knew well from their community cluster to inform them about the study, answer questions, offer support and, if needed, translate the interview into Kimberley Kriol or a

traditional Aboriginal language. The interview was conducted by one of four Aboriginal researchers/youth mentors (EB, MB, JD, CC), a non-Indigenous research fellow (LR), or one of two non-Indigenous youth mentors (NR, FW) – referred to as The Bigiswun Kid team. Participants could choose whether the interview was conducted by an Aboriginal or non-Indigenous interviewer and could invite the community navigator and/or another support person to sit in on the interview.

Interviews

Young people and their parents participated in semi-structured interviews with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The interviews with the parents and young people were conducted separately, which was suggested by the parents and young people during the initial consultation. The Bigiswun leadership team developed the interview schedule, which was reviewed and modified by the Aboriginal researchers. During the initial community discussions about the project, it was learnt that some young people prefer multiple-choice responses over open-ended responses or to have options suggested to aid open-ended response discussions. This reduced the pressure of people needing to come up with responses on their own and improved their understanding of the questions. Therefore, during the consultation process, 30 parents and 17 young people were asked what types of support young people need. The responses were reviewed by LR, EC, MB and JD, and collated into a list of support that included youth mental health services, young men’s wellbeing workshops, young women’s wellbeing workshops, advocacy and help accessing existing services, youth hub, more opportunities for cultural activities, more on-Country activities, more sporting activities and public transport. This list was systematically discussed with the parents and young people during the interviews. Participants were asked whether they





thought the suggested service was needed, how they felt it should be delivered and if they could think of any other support required. These topics were raised in a yarning style, with probing questions to generate more information. Qualitative responses were written verbatim, where possible; only verbatim responses are quoted. The interviews included additional topics that will be reported elsewhere. The young people and parents were provided with a \$50 grocery store voucher to thank them for their time completing the interviews.

Piloting support in the research

The Bigiswun Kid team worked with young people to identify the suggested support they could provide and pilot during the research. The team documented their experience, including comments and quotes from young people and senior community members, which were used to identify key learnings.

Data analysis

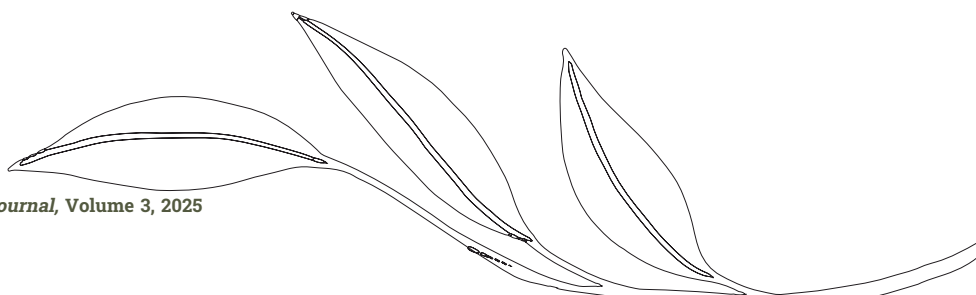
Frequencies were calculated for quantitative data to determine how many young people and parents requested each type of support. The qualitative data were analysed using codebook thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022). This approach enabled direct responses to specified questions to be collated: whether participants thought the support was needed, how they felt it should be delivered, and if they could think of any other support required; herein, these are termed topics (Ayre and McCaffery 2022). However, it also enabled the authors to use reflexive thematic analysis to identify themes that arose across the support and to identify the learnings from each piloted support. An experiential approach was used, where the young people and parents were seen as experts, and their views accurately represented their experiences and needs (Braun and Clarke 2022). Codebook and reflexive thematic analysis recognise that researcher bias is inevitable in qualitative analysis

and should be used as a tool (Ayre and McCaffery 2022; Braun and Clarke 2022). For these reasons, it was ensured that the team who interviewed the young people and worked with them to pilot the support conducted the qualitative analysis. It is believed that their experience working alongside young people through the project and lived experience of coming from or working in the region would inform their understanding and interpretation of the qualitative data. Therefore, the four interviewers (LR, NR, MB, EB) who conducted the most interviews extensively discussed the qualitative responses and piloted support to identify topics and learnings. During these discussions, the views of the Aboriginal researchers (MB and EB) were privileged. As the study was population-based, a large sample size (parents $n = 101$ and young people $n = 94$) was obtained for the qualitative responses, ensuring saturation. Given the large sample, common topics were easily identified as participants repeated them. A non-Indigenous researcher (LR) drafted the topics and learning summaries, which an Aboriginal researcher (EB) reviewed to ensure that they conveyed the meaning intended by the young people and their parents. Two Aboriginal chief investigators (EC and JD) reviewed the final summaries and provided additional context to the recommendations to ensure that the community voice was adequately represented.

Results

Participant demographics

In 2010–11, school records identified 134 children born in 2002–03 living in the Fitzroy Valley, of whom 127 participated in the Lililwan Project (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017). By 2020, 17 of the 134 young people had left the Kimberley, eight were living in the Kimberley but could not be located, three were too unwell to be approached and one had passed away. The Bigiswun team identified eight adolescents who were not living





in the region at the time of the Lililwan Project but were born within the target age range and were living in the Fitzroy Valley at the time of the Bigiswun Kid interviews. Therefore, 113 young people and their parents (or primary caregivers) were invited to participate in the study. Of these, 101 (89%) parents and 94 (83%) young people consented and completed the interviews. This included young people who reported being engaged in other services, as well as many young people who reported not being engaged with any service, and some young people who rarely left their communities or homes. Similarly, it is known from discussions either with the young person or their primary caregiver that there was a similar number of engaged and disengaged young people who did not participate. Of the 19 young people who did not complete the interview, seven were busy working or studying full-time and were considered engaged, and four were living in the Kimberley but were transient and unable to meet for the interview. The remaining eight were classified by their caregivers as disengaged from all services. Almost all parents (100 of 101) and all young people (94 of 94) were Aboriginal and belonged to one of the five language groups in the Fitzroy Valley. Primary caregivers (referred to as parents throughout the paper) were predominantly female ($n = 93$) and mothers ($n = 74$), but included fathers, grandparents and aunties. Of the young people, there were slightly more males ($n = 51$) than females ($n = 43$). Demographic information is outlined in [Table 1](#).

Types of support

During the interviews, parents and young people identified 12 needed supports, including nine identified through the consultation and three more determined through the interviews, when discussing other services required. [Table 2](#) outlines seven of these supports. The remaining five supports were incorporated into a social and emotional wellbeing service, which will be reported

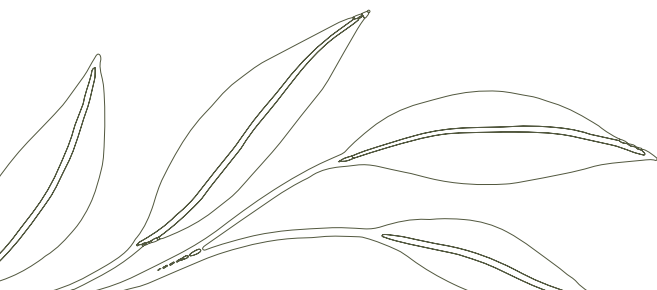
Demographic variables	Proportion/Mean (SD)
Frequency	Young people ($n = 94$); parents ($n = 101$)
Age – years	17.88 (0.73) range 16–19
Sex	46% female, 54% males
Primary caregiver	74% mothers, 6% fathers, 17% grandparents, 3% others
Aboriginal	100% young people, 99% parents
Diagnosed with FASD*	22%
Community location from Fitzroy Crossing town	
Less than one hour from town	50%
More than one hour from town	50%
School status	
Still at school at the time of the interview	17%
Completed year 10 or higher	62%
Discontinued before year 10	20%
Employed	17%
Completed tertiary training/education	24%

*Most of these diagnoses of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) were made in the Lililwan Project, a community-led prevalence study.

Table 1: Participant demographic information

elsewhere. These include a culturally appropriate mental health service for young people, support navigating existing services and community, and male and female wellbeing workshops.

The qualitative results for each type of support are provided below. The young people and parents provided extensive qualitative data for the first support, on-Country and cultural activities. Therefore, these data were separately reported for each responder (young person and parent) with specific topic summaries. The remaining support did not contain as much qualitative data, so common responses were summarised without specified topics. Depending on the variation between young people and parents, the results are described together or by responder type. The support that was piloted is described in [Tables 3 to 7](#), which also include the learnings from the implementation of these types of support.





Supports requested*	Proportion of young people (n = 94)	Proportion of parents (n = 101)	Supports piloted during the research
1. On-Country and cultural activities	100%	100%	Four on-Country camps (83 people)
2. Organised sport	100%	94%	Supported young men to establish a basketball team and compete in a regional tournament (18 young people)
3. Youth hub/safe place	98%	97%	–
4. Public transport	98%	99%	–
5. Child development workshops for young parents	74%	47%	Child development workshops in five remote Aboriginal communities (60 people)
6. Supported work programs*	–	–	Supported work program (15 young people)
7. Supported tertiary education*	–	–	Two supported training courses (45 young people)

*Data are unavailable for this type of support as it was not identified in the community consultation and systematically discussed with all interviewees. Instead, several young people and parents identified this support during the interviews.

Table 2: Supports requested by young people and their parents and piloted during the research

Opportunities to participate in on-Country and cultural activities

All 195 parents and young people identified ‘opportunities to participate in on-Country cultural activities’ as support needed and provided detailed information about how this should be delivered. The information provided by young people is described under three topics, and parents’ information is divided into five topics.

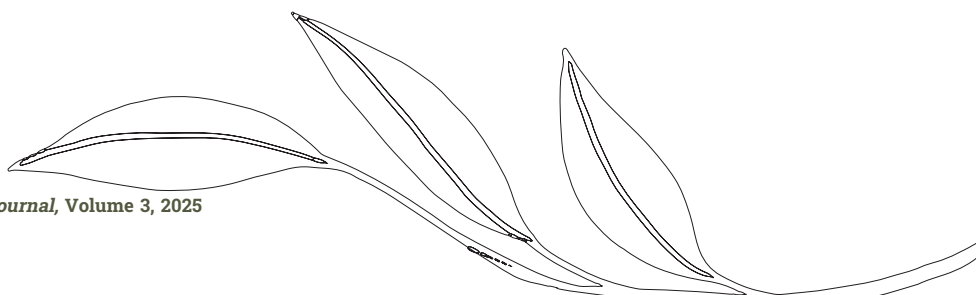
Young people. All young people wanted access to on-Country and cultural activities, such as camping, fishing, hunting, gathering bush fruit and vegetables and bush medicine, visiting waterholes and other cultural sites and learning about cultural traditions, including how to look after the land, cook bush food, make bush medicine, and participate in art, music and dance.

Topic 1. When? During school holidays and on weekends. The young people who attended boarding school outside the Fitzroy Valley felt that they missed out on cultural/on-Country activities during the school term, so they wanted opportunities to participate in these activities during the school holidays. The young people who schooled in the Fitzroy Valley also wanted more opportunities to learn about their culture and be on-Country during the school

holidays, after school and on weekends. These young people explained that going out bush was only available to those whose families had the resources and time to take them (e.g. four-wheel drive [4WD] car, fuel). Not having the resources meant that some young people had not been on-Country for many months or visited their own family’s Country for years.

Topic 2. Who? School, family, Elders and mentors. Although some young people felt that schools should take students on-Country, they also explained that having opportunities to spend time on-Country with family was essential, as only family can take them to their Country and teach their traditions. Some young people spoke about wanting to spend more time on-Country with Elders. Others, particularly young adults who had completed school, requested opportunities to spend time on-Country with peers and youth mentors. A few people suggested that training, workshops, meetings or community discussions should occur on-Country or include some activity that takes people on-Country.

Topic 3. How? Community-specific and gender-specific. In the Fitzroy Valley, people mainly live in communities according to their language and family groups. The young people suggested that





Support piloted	Learnings
<p>Based on suggestions provided by young people and their parents, the Bigiswun Kid team worked with young people and senior community members to run four on-Country camps, two of which are described below. On-Country activities were also piloted through the supported work program, and the social and emotional wellbeing support program, which will be reported separately.</p> <p>Most language groups in the Fitzroy Valley have a ranger program that employs and trains local Aboriginal people to protect and care for the land. At the request of some young men, a partnership was brokered with the Bunuba (a local language group) rangers to run a camp. The rangers chose locations and activities to increase young people's cultural knowledge. The rangers demonstrated their work to the young men to leverage their knowledge of culture and Country, and provided insights into potential career opportunities. Some young Gooniyandi (another local language group) men were invited to attend as visitors to Bunuba Country. In return, those young men identified a mentor from their community, Yiyili, who partnered with the Bigiswun Kid team to host another on-Country camp for young people from Yiyili and invited some of the Bunuba young men to attend. Both camps ran for three nights, including two to eight rangers/mentors and nine young people.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On-Country and cultural activities must be community-led. Senior community members, rangers and young people decided on all aspects of the camps. The camps were most successful when the Bigiswun Kid team trusted the community members and did not try to impose their ideas. 2. On-Country activities are empowering and allow young people to thrive. The young men actively planned the camps and exchanged cultural knowledge with their peers. Most of these young men spent their spare time fishing and hunting, so they had years of expertise they could demonstrate during the camps and utilise to teach skills to others, including non-Indigenous staff. This opportunity enabled the young men to thrive and excel, promoting a sense of mastery and competence that might have been lost in traditional Western school and employment settings: <i>These boys grew up fishing and hunting. They're good at it. They might not do good at school, but take them out bush, they know what to do – Aboriginal mentor.</i>

Table 3: On-Country support piloted

cultural activities/camps should be conducted with specific communities or clusters of communities to ensure that they include those with whom they feel most comfortable and spend time on their own Country. The young people noted that cultural and on-Country activities must be guided by Aboriginal people familiar with that Country, ideally people from each community/cluster who know where it is appropriate to go and how to interact with the land respectfully.

Many young people explained that when external services organise cultural or on-Country opportunities, the events or activities should be separate for males and females. Gender-specific activities are essential for cultural reasons and because some places (e.g. female-only springs) can only be visited by one gender.

Parents.

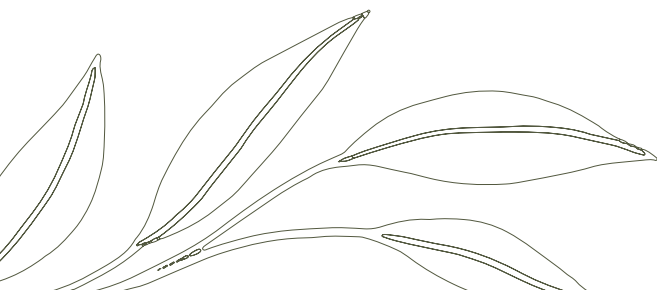
Topic 1. Resource support model. All parents wanted their children to have access to more cultural and on-Country activities. Over half (58%) of the parents spoke about previously available support through the

Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC). Grandparents, parents, aunties and uncles could apply for vouchers for fuel and food to take children on-Country during the weekends or school holidays and teach them about their culture. Some of the interviewed parents were young people when this funding was available and spoke highly of the opportunities it provided; they described these as some of the best times they had as children. These parents liked that it enabled them to get away from town and spend time on-Country learning about culture from their parents, grandparents and other extended family members. Several parents explained that having opportunities to take their children out bush is important for everyone's wellbeing and to help strengthen families and communities:

Being on-Country is the best thing for our kids, spiritual healing when you don't need words. Just being there makes you feel safe and happy inside – parent.

My dad used to do it (KALACC model) with big mob, go out camping with mums, dads, brothers and sisters.

We loved it – parent.





Support piloted	Learnings
<p>Some young men wanted to enter a team in the regional basketball tournament. The Bigiswun Kid team helped the young men assemble a team, complete the entry form, and apply for a small grant to cover fuel, accommodation and uniforms. The young men and the Bigiswun Kid team identified a few older men who joined the team as mentors/coaches, helped run weekly training sessions leading up to the tournament, and supported the team during the event. Initially aiming to engage six to eight young men, 18 ultimately attended the training sessions and the tournament. This was the first opportunity for most young men to participate in the regional event.</p>	<p>Based on discussions with young people and the mentors, the following factors played a role in the success of the basketball team:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Giving young people a sense of ownership over the basketball team. This meant that young people felt committed to attending regular training because the team was their idea, and they were involved in all decision-making (e.g. team members, team name, uniform design). 2. Having young (25 to 30 years) local people employed as mentors who could engage with the young people at their level ensured that they felt like equal partners. 3. Supporting and encouraging young people to commit by reminding them each week that practice was on later that day and transporting them until it became a habit.

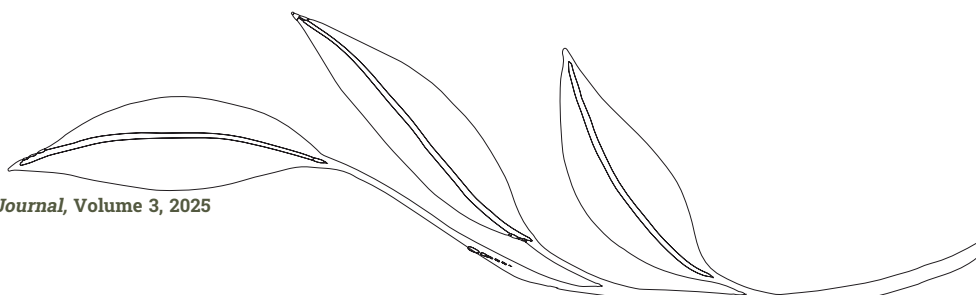
Table 4: Competitive organised sport piloted

Parents explained that when the KALACC funding was available, communities had autonomy and control over the funding and often owned cars that families could use. Since the removal of the Community Development Employment Projects program in 2007 (Gordon 2022), government support has focused more on the nuclear family than on empowering communities, so there is less access to shared resources, like community cars. The parents

who spoke about the KALACC funding model requested reinstating it so that families could take their children on-Country and practice their traditional cultural activities. Several people noted that access to a 4WD was crucial, and not having one was the primary challenge to spending time on-Country with family. A few people spoke about the cost of owning and maintaining a 4WD in a very remote region, such as higher car prices, shipping it

Support piloted	Learnings
<p>The authors partnered with senior community members, the local Early Childhood Centre and a facilitator to run child development workshops for young parents. Although not Aboriginal, the facilitator had lived in the Kimberley for over 30 years and spent extensive time in the Fitzroy Valley. The workshops included tangible strategies for supporting healthy child development during the early years. The content was developed with Aboriginal people, and the facilitator worked with EB and women from each community to modify it to suit local community needs and interests. The Bigiswun Kid team worked with senior members from five communities to decide when and where to hold the workshops. In addition to the Bigiswun Kid cohort, the senior community members identified others in their own and surrounding communities with young children. With the Bigiswun Kid team they visited each family to invite them to attend workshops – a strategy that proved much more effective than a flyer. A common remark from senior community members was that grandparents should also be invited to participate with young parents to offer support. This proved crucial for engaging some young people and meant that several of the children’s caregivers would simultaneously learn and discuss parenting strategies. This is important as grandparents play a big part in caring for young children and teaching young parents child development and parenting strategies. Training was run in the four remote communities and Fitzroy Crossing town. Sixty people attended the five workshops. Most workshops ran for one day, but one community requested a two-day workshop. Transport and food were provided.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The facilitator should be Aboriginal or work with Aboriginal staff to ensure that Aboriginal knowledge about child development and parenting is privileged. 2. Workshops must be run in communities and co-led by community members. 3. Young parents should be personally invited to attend by a senior community member and encouraged to invite others caring for the child, such as grandparents. 4. Attendees liked learning about child development, particularly brain development and connecting this knowledge to tangible strategies to support child development. The use of visual aids was also appreciated. 5. The two-day workshop was the most successful for engagement, as those who attended the first day brought along more people on the second day.

Table 5: Child development workshops piloted





Support piloted	Learnings
<p>Young people were helped to join the housing waitlist to address the first challenge.</p> <p>To address the second challenge and help support young people seeking employment, a supported work program was piloted, employing 15 young people at MWRC. Some were employed as gardeners, handypersons and community navigators; others supported the Bigiswun Kid team in running weekly on-Country activities for other young people. Young people were provided with scaffolded support during their employment. For some, this meant transport to and from work or identifying a supervisor they knew and trusted who could help them navigate the workplace. For others, this meant identifying someone to walk alongside them to role-model their daily tasks and support them to complete tasks until they developed the skills required to work independently. The supported work program ran for 18 months during the research data collection. Eight of the 15 young people found full-time employment after the research project, suggesting that the program improved work readiness.</p> <p>A gap in suitable permanent workplaces for individuals requiring additional support was identified. So, through the project, MWRC partnered with Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation (MWW), the local employment agency, to obtain funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to formally design a supported work program in consultation with local services.</p> <p>MWRC, Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre; CPD, Community Development Program.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young people varied in the type of housing they needed. Some wanted one-bedroom units or youth hostels to allow them to work in town, while others wanted stand-alone homes to start their own families. 2. Few people join the waitlist due to a lack of new builds, resulting in an underestimate of need. 3. Young people want meaningful paid employment rather than working in the CDP but face various challenges to accessing employment, which must be addressed. 4. Providing scaffolded support requires experienced managers and trained mentors, as it can take time to understand young people’s strengths and weaknesses and creatively identify jobs or tasks that foster their strengths. However, doing so pays off as it ensures that young people develop the capacity and confidence needed to enter and remain in the workforce. It also allows them to identify the jobs that suit them and the strategies/support they need to excel in these roles. 5. With funding and training to offer scaffolded support, supported work programs could be integrated into local Aboriginal and government services in remote communities. These employment opportunities should be paid to allow young people to feel valued, live independently and build confidence.

Table 6: Supported work program piloted

from a city, insurance premiums, fuel, and service and maintenance:

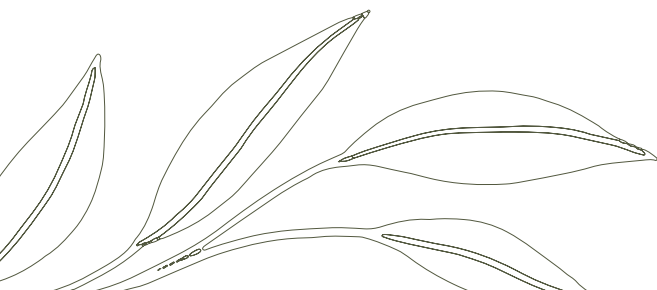
Need to come with vehicle (KALACC model), only accessible to people with cars. My partner and I want

to take kids out on-Country in holidays and teach them how to fish and hunt – parent.

Topic 2. Elders and senior community members.
 Parents also spoke about the importance of ensuring that young people had opportunities to be out in the

Support piloted	Learnings
<p>To help address some of these challenges, the male Aboriginal mentor and social worker supported 10 young men in completing a Certificate II in Construction through a local ACCO. This involved helping them overcome challenges to attending (e.g. providing transport, helping address challenges at home), providing lunch, translating the course material into Kimberley Kriol, and providing scaffolded support to complete the coursework. Some young women were interested in TAFE, so the local TAFE was partnered with to organise two-day beauty courses and advocated for these to be run both in Fitzroy Crossing town and in two remote communities. The idea was to give young women experience in accessing TAFE. In total, 35 young women attended the training, and some were interested in going to Broome (a larger town some 400 km from Fitzroy Crossing) to complete the full course. Despite best efforts, appropriate accommodation in Broome could not be found to allow them to do so.</p> <p>ACCO, Aboriginal community-controlled organisation; TAFE, Technical and Further Education.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young people want to complete tertiary education but are faced by many challenges. 2. Courses are most successful when run in communities and co-led by senior Aboriginal community members. 3. Consulting with young people is essential to identify courses that interest them and co-design how it is implemented to help overcome common challenges. 4. Having mentors available throughout the course is crucial to support young people in addressing individual challenges.

Table 7: Supported tertiary education piloted





bush with senior community members and Elders who could pass on knowledge and encourage them to learn the language. Some noted that organisation-run camps focusing on teaching culture (by local Aboriginal people) could help to ensure that all young people have the same opportunities. A few parents spoke about how Elders who maintain much of the language and cultural knowledge have the added responsibility of passing it down to all young people while maintaining their jobs, families and other responsibilities. It was suggested that formal paid roles be available to Elders and other senior community members to lead or help facilitate cultural activities and camps:

KALACC model good but having more organisations run events with Elders as not all families teach culture – parent.

Topic 3. Mentor-led camps for young people. Several parents who requested that the family-led KALACC model be reinstated also felt that a version should be available for young people rather than the whole family, where mentors take adolescents and young adults on-Country. This model would offer a different dynamic and experience for the young people, provide respite from the often-overcrowded living conditions and help make up for the lack of recreational activities available in remote regions:

Having mentors taking them (young people) out. Gets them away from trouble, teach them their history so they respect their Elders and culture – parent.

Topic 4. Organisation-led camps and scaffolded support. A few parents suggested that on-Country camps should be available through schools during the school term. One person suggested that all camps, regardless of who runs them, should be scaffolded, particularly for people who might need extra support, such as if they have FASD, to ensure that everyone can thrive. This parent noted that families would naturally

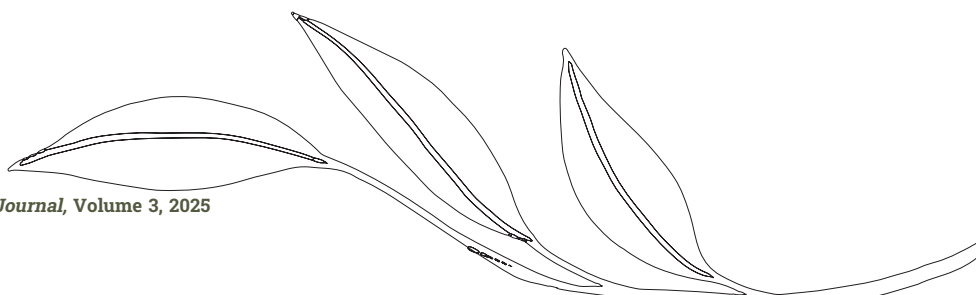
do this to ensure equal participation for people with additional needs, so services must also consider this. Other suggestions included camps for disengaged young people and camps for future leaders. However, parents noted that local people must lead all. Some parents explained that school-led camps should not be run during school holidays, while young adult or community/family-led camps should be run instead because weekends and school holidays are important times for families. A few parents suggested that ranger groups could lead youth camps and include cultural activities and opportunities to develop skills, such as using GPS systems, mapping, working together, and building trust and support amongst peers.

Topic 5. Cultural activities. My husband heals from music; it lifts him up and calms him – parent.

Parents spoke of the need for art and music rooms in remote communities so that people of all ages, particularly young people, could have somewhere to practice their art and music. It was suggested that these rooms should be community-led, with older people employed to run the rooms. Some parents felt that a shared space would allow young people to learn about traditional art and music from their older community members. Parents explained that art and music are ways that young people (and adults) can express themselves and process their feelings and emotions.

Competitive organised sports

Young people. All young people and most (94%) parents wanted young people to have more access to organised sports, meaning sports with a structured competition governed by an organised body. The most common response from young people was that this should be made available in every community. At the time of the interviews, the only organised competitive sport in the Fitzroy Valley was football (Australian Football League) for people aged 16 years and older.





The types of sports suggested by young people were basketball, netball, dancing, football for children under 16 years, hockey and water polo. A few young people mentioned that organised sports were important for giving them constructive ways to use their energy.

Parents. The most common response from parents was that the Fitzroy Valley needed more sports carnivals, which are positive events that bring different communities and families together. Another common response was the need for organised sports options for children aged under 15 years. The types of competitive sports suggested by parents were basketball, cricket, netball, dancing, volleyball, boxing, swimming and soccer.

Youth hub/safe place

There needs to be a safe place for youth to go at night and on weekends – young person.
Youth hostel, a place for young people to go at night. In the 1980s, old school site had a big hostel for school-aged people – parent.

Most young people (98%) and parents (97%) wanted youth hubs. The most common feedback was that these should be located in remote communities rather than just in Fitzroy Crossing town. The second most common response was that in addition to a place for young people to participate in activities during the day, there should be a safe place in communities for young people to sleep at night when there is overcrowding at home. Many people thought there should also be a youth hostel attached to the Fitzroy Valley District High School for young people wanting to attend school but unable to do so due to overcrowding at home, making it difficult for young people to get adequate sleep at night. Others wanted a youth hostel for people living in remote communities who would like to move to town to

obtain employment but are unable to due to the severe housing shortage:

There was a woman who would let us lililwans (little ones) sleep at her place and feed us. It was safe – young person.

The young people thought that these hubs and safe places should be staffed by local Aboriginal people who could act as mentors for young people seeking support. Several parents thought that the staff should be trained in supporting and discussing issues relevant to young people and taught how to help them de-escalate when they feel heightened:

Staff need training so they know how to support kids in the Valley. It needs to have structured activities. The hub needs clear rules. Kids like boundaries and rules. The youth programs (now) offer little guidance, and the kids aren't rewarded for good behaviour. Rewarding good behaviour is better than punishing bad behaviour – parent.

Concerning daytime youth hubs (after school, weekends and school holidays), one parent suggested that the hub should be a place where young people could attend as a 'reward' to encourage respect. Another parent spoke about the importance of clear boundaries/rules at the hub so that young people know what is expected of them. Most wanted local Aboriginal people employed to run the youth hubs. The types of activities people suggested were a TV for movie nights, access to the internet, musical instruments, a pool table or table tennis, Xbox, and nurture activities for girls. One young person who had accessed a youth hub in a different town felt there should be male and female-specific hubs, ideally divided by age, with a separate one for young people aged over 16 years:





There should be separate male and female spaces in a youth hub. It should be split by age groups and more things for people aged 16 to 18 years... If you are older, your parents will make you watch your little siblings at the youth hub, so you don't want to go because you feel like you're babysitting – young person.

Public transport

Most (97%) young people and parents (95%) wanted public transport in the Fitzroy Valley as no such service is available in the region, with one or two taxi companies for the whole Fitzroy Valley (400 km diameter). The young people did not provide feedback on the design of this service. Parents had mixed opinions about whether public transport should be available for young people to get into town from remote communities. Although most parents agreed that public transport would be helpful to access services, some preferred having mentors who picked the young people up to ensure that they were supported when in town. Some thought that whatever public transport was developed should be community-led so it would be respected and provide community autonomy.

Child development workshops

Most (74%) young people (64% female and 34% male) and half of the parents (47%) wanted access to child development workshops for young parents, now or in the future. Based on interview responses, 11 of 94 young people had a child, all within the past 12 months. The Bigiswun Kid team kept a note when someone from the cohort had a child after their interview. When writing this report in 2024, an additional 13 members of the Bigiswun Kid cohort who had a child were known of. When young people and parents were asked how they would like this service run, the overwhelming response was that they would only attend if local Aboriginal people ran

or co-ran the program. This would ensure that the information provided privileges and complements Aboriginal knowledge about child development and parenting. They noted that programs must be gender-specific; the men would prefer a man to run the program, and the women favoured a woman-led program. People wanted the programs to run in Fitzroy Crossing town and the more remote communities.

Other support or services

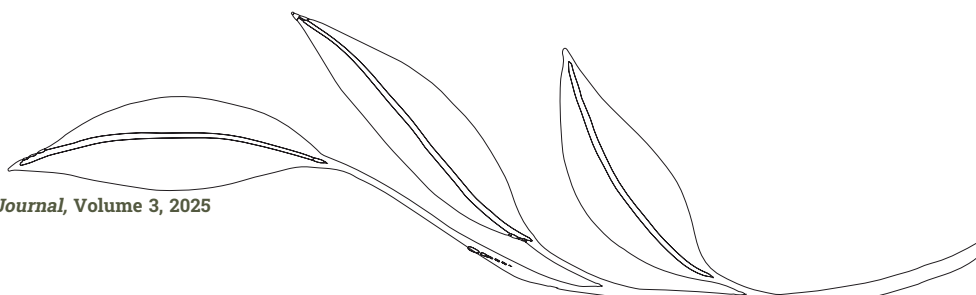
Most young people and parents felt that the services discussed in the interviews covered the primary support that young people need. Additional suggestions from young people included work experience opportunities. One said:

I only wanted to be a teacher or doctor because it's all I saw and knew of. Wish I could trial more things to find what I'm interested in. I want a job that interests me – young person.

Other suggestions included a bike track or better pathways so that young people could travel into town, access to better food (ideally ready-made meals), sporting facilities in communities and woodwork programs.

Suggestions from parents included more work experience opportunities, support for young people disengaged from school, a sobering-up shelter, a bike park and better internet.

Although employment was not identified as required support during the Bigiswun Kid Project consultation, it proved to be a common support that young people requested during the interviews. This might be because most young people were of school age during the consultation, but some had graduated or left school by the time of the interviews. Regardless, there





was a strong desire for meaningful paid employment. Most young people consider the Community Development Program (CDP) a degrading employment option they prefer to avoid. The CDP is the Australian Government's remote employment and community development service. People who cannot find employment may apply for government payments if they participate in community programs. It is considered a 'working for the dole' program that does not help people in remote regions to obtain secure employment. The most common challenges to employment identified by young people and the Bigiswun Kid team were a lack of housing in town, where most jobs are located, and few employment opportunities for young people without prior work experience or who needed additional support. Young people requiring extra support might include those who are shy, have English as a second or third language, are unsure about whitefella ways – meaning they do not feel confident working in a service designed by Western people due to significant cultural differences, have limited foundational skills (e.g. numeracy and literacy) or experience a mental illness or disability, such as FASD.

Young people were interested in participating in tertiary education. The most common challenge was the lack of face-to-face tertiary education courses in the Fitzroy Valley. Short Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses are provided, but all other tertiary education must be completed remotely, or people must leave the Fitzroy Valley. Young people explained that they did not like being away from family and Country, especially if they had lived away for high school. Other common challenges to tertiary education were similar to challenges in seeking employment described above.

Key themes that arose across the support

Using reflexive thematic analysis, two broad themes regarding how young people would like support to be delivered were identified. These themes emerged from discussions with parents and young people about the support they needed. They are listed below and described in more detail in relation to the existing literature in the discussion.

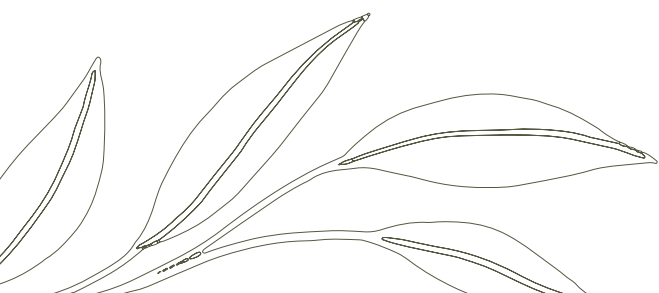
Theme 1. Support must be designed, led and staffed by, or in collaboration with, individual Aboriginal communities or clusters of communities.

Theme 2. Organisations and services delivering support to young Aboriginal people must recognise the importance of relationships, family and kinship systems in the design of their support.

Recommendations arising from the youth and parent interviews and pilots of support are described in [Table 8](#).

Discussion

This study aimed to identify the support that young Aboriginal people living in the Fitzroy Valley need to thrive in late adolescence and early adulthood and how these services should be delivered. Young people and their parents identified the following supports: access to cultural and on-Country activities, organised sports, youth hubs/safe places, public transport, child development workshops, supported work programs and supported tertiary education. Five additional supports that were suggested were incorporated into the design of a social and emotional wellbeing service, which will be described elsewhere. Access to cultural and on-Country activities was the most requested support. Studies across Australia have shown that participation in cultural activities strengthens cultural





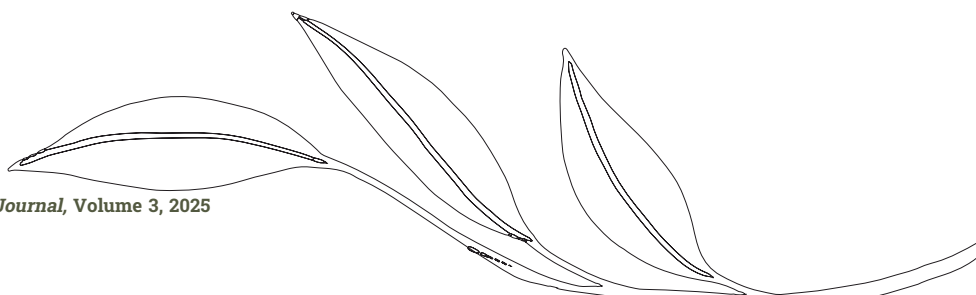
Support*	Recommendations
1. On-Country and cultural activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fund a program like that previously provided by KALACC that includes fuel and food vouchers and car access so that families can take their children on-Country, particularly during the school holidays. 2. Fund services, including schools and other youth programs, to provide cultural and on-Country activities. Local Aboriginal people must lead these activities; where possible, they should be co-designed by and for each community. 3. Elders should be funded to lead/attend cultural activities to ensure young people have equal exposure and access to people with strong cultural knowledge. 4. Fund communities to establish art and music rooms to allow young people to learn and practice cultural activities.
2. Organised sport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate more organised sports, particularly for people aged under 16 years. 2. Convene more sports carnivals to bring communities together. 3. Provide opportunities for young people to attend regional tournaments.
3. Youth hub/safe place	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop community-based youth hubs that provide an airconditioned place for young people to go during the day and participate in constructive activities. 2. Provide a safe place for young people to sleep at night when needed. 3. Staff the youth hub and safe places with local Aboriginal people trained to support young people.
4. Public transport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide public transport between communities and into Fitzroy Crossing town to help people access services.
5. Child development workshops for young parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide gender-specific child development workshops run in communities for young parents (aged 17 years or older) led by/with Aboriginal people from each community. 2. The community member co-leading the workshops should personally invite young parents to attend and encourage them to invite other people caring for the child, such as the child's grandparents.
6. Supported work programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide funding so that local services can develop supported work programs, employ mentors and receive training on how to offer scaffolded support. 2. Provide more work experience and readiness opportunities that provide hands-on workplace experience. 3. Increase housing capacity, such as units or youth hostels, to accommodate young people who want to live in town to obtain employment.
7. Supported tertiary education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More face-to-face tertiary education courses are needed in the Fitzroy Valley. 2. For short courses to succeed, they should be run in communities and co-facilitated with community members. 3. Organisations leading courses should be funded to employ local Aboriginal mentors to support people through the coursework.

KALACC, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre. *It was recommended that transport and food should be provided to help people attend all the support.

Table 8: Support recommendations identified by young people and their parents

identity and belonging, and promotes good health and wellbeing (Bryant et al. 2021; Macedo et al. 2019; Nagel et al. 2012; Yap and Yu 2016). Despite this, many young people reported being unable to spend time on-Country due to a lack of opportunities and resources. Through providing on-Country and cultural opportunities during the project, it was seen how these activities strengthen people's connections to culture, kinship and Country. This need aligns with CTG Target 15, which ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual and economic relationship with their

land and waters (Australian Government 2020). Parents and young people identified ways to increase young people's access to cultural and on-Country activities in the Fitzroy Valley. Challenges included access to a 4WD and fuel, and food costs for camping trips. Over half of the parents requested that a previous funding model (KALACC model) be reinstated, providing families with fuel and food vouchers to enable them to take young people on-Country during the school holidays. Other suggestions were establishing art and music rooms in communities, local organisations to partner with





communities to lead on-Country camps, schools to work with local Aboriginal staff to provide on-Country activities, more ranger-type on-Country employment opportunities and rangers leading on-Country camps for young people.

Two of the identified supports, the supported work program and supported tertiary education, align with CTG Targets 6 and 7, which relate to young people achieving their potential through further education (Target 6) and employment (Target 7) ([Australian Government 2020](#)). Securing meaningful employment has been shown to strengthen wellbeing, enhance resilience and advance aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([Doery et al. 2024](#)). Despite this, the Australian Census data show that while school attainment rates are slightly rising, employment rates are decreasing for people in very remote Aboriginal communities, including the Fitzroy Valley ([Guenther 2021](#); [Productivity Commission 2024](#)). Challenges to obtaining employment included severe housing shortages in Fitzroy Crossing town, where most employment opportunities are located; limited employment opportunities for young people with no previous experience or where English is a second or third language; no public transport to and from work; and supported workplaces for people with a mental illness or disability. The housing shortage was the primary challenge and is supported by a recent analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing data, showing that the Kimberley is one of the country's top five areas for youth homelessness ([Foyer Foundation 2025](#); [SBS News 2025](#)). In the Bigiswun Kid Project, the youth mentors who helped young people address challenges to work and provided holistic scaffolded support in the workplace were crucial to the success of this program. Holistic scaffolded support means adapting the level of support to the young people's

needs and addressing a broad range of challenges, from transport to supporting people to address mental health concerns.

The young people spoke about the problems with the existing CDP program and their desire to avoid it. Consistent with this, the Australian Government has recognised that the CDP is not working ([Australian Government 2019](#)). This program will be replaced by the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, trials of which have begun, and the Remote Employment Service, which will start in 2025. Recent trials of the RJED provided learnings like those of this research, for example: the RJED increased access to existing jobs by subsidising part of employee wages and oncosts. However, many employers remained reluctant to employ inexperienced people or people on CDP as they could not afford to provide the level of supervision, training and support needed. Instead, people who required additional support were offered employment by the CDP provider. However, only being able to work through a CDP provider risks holding people back in repetitive, unskilled and unfulfilling roles ([Australian Government 2024](#)). Based on these trials and experience, the authors believe that employers need to be given the funding and training required to offer scaffolded support to ensure that the RJED program is successful across various organisations and services.

As was found in the workplace, young people require scaffolded and intensive support from mentors to engage and succeed in higher education. Similar findings were reported from a study conducted in rural New South Wales, which found that Aboriginal community members valued education programs that allowed people to learn at their own pace with individualised assistance, had a flexible and relaxed atmosphere and culturally secure learning





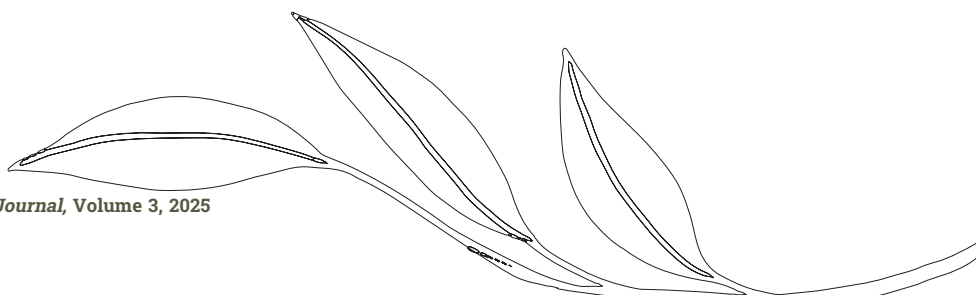
environment, provided food, supplied transportation, and employed staff who belonged to the same community (Tracey et al. 2016).

When discussing how the seven supports should be delivered, the most common response was that support should be designed, led and staffed by or with individual or clusters of communities. This is consistent with research conducted in other Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley (Dudgeon et al. 2012) and three communities in Central Australia (Flouris et al. 2016). In the latter study, Aboriginal community members spoke of the need for services to be designed by communities rather than adapting mainstream services for Aboriginal communities (Flouris et al. 2016). Although the need for Aboriginal community-led support and services is well known, this remains inconsistent with how most government support and services are delivered in the Fitzroy Valley. Young people and parents also requested that support be provided in communities/clusters of communities because young people feel most comfortable participating in activities and services located in their communities.

Another theme that emerged across all support was the need to recognise the importance of relationships, family and the kinship system in support design. When discussing the design of on-Country and cultural activities, young people and parents spoke about the importance of some of these opportunities being led by families because only families can take their young people on their Country and teach them their traditions. Similarly, when discussing the design and trialling of child development workshops, the authors learned that these were most effective when attended by young parents, grandparents or other key people caring for the child. This ensures that the

grandparents/other caregivers can support the parents in implementing parenting strategies and that the children receive consistent support from all caregivers. This focus on considering kinship systems when designing support aligns with findings from another recent study conducted in the Fitzroy Valley. In this study, senior Aboriginal people explained that Aboriginal kinship systems are a community strength and can provide support for people with disability but are poorly understood and considered by mainstream health and disability services (Stubbs et al. 2024). These findings reflect the central importance of family and kinship in Aboriginal culture and are consistent with the relational view of health and wellbeing (Dudgeon and Bray 2019; Yap and Yu 2016). Research has consistently shown that centralising relationships and self-determination are vital to the success of prevention and early intervention programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Stringfellow et al. 2022). All services in the region must ensure that they work with Aboriginal people, understand the importance and nature of families and kinship systems, and incorporate ways to strengthen these systems through service delivery.

Consistent with the young people's and parents' feedback, the authors' experience piloting support was that having community members lead or co-lead the support in communities resulted in the most reach and engagement, including reaching young people who were highly disengaged from other services. These findings highlight the benefit of re-empowering Aboriginal communities to lead place-based support. The findings also highlight the need for place-based designs to be region-specific (e.g. Fitzroy Valley) and further adapted for individual communities or clusters of communities in the Fitzroy Valley. A place-based design allows services to build





on a community's strengths and address individual challenges. Although this may be a more intensive and costly implementation strategy in the short term, building community capacity to deliver services increases service success and sustainability in the long term (Butterworth et al. 2024; Edwards-Vandenhoeck 2018). Service funders should consider investing in strategies to promote individual community-led programs and support.

Strengths and limitations

A strength of this study was that the APAR approach enabled support to be incorporated into the research while data collection was ongoing. Piloting support identified by young people ensured that they felt heard because they could see their interview responses immediately implemented. It also allowed the team to co-design and tailor support to the young people. However, small pilots that were not formally evaluated could only be offered. Once this support is implemented in local services, formal evaluations will be required to determine the efficacy in improving health and wellbeing, cultural responsiveness and sustainability. Another strength was that this was a population-based study with a high participation rate (89% parents, 83% young people), meaning that all young people from a specified age range were invited to participate, and the cohort included both engaged and highly disengaged young people, ensuring a representative cohort. A representative sample ensures that the data adequately informs place-based policy and service design. However, a limitation of place-based research is that not all findings can be generalised to other regions.

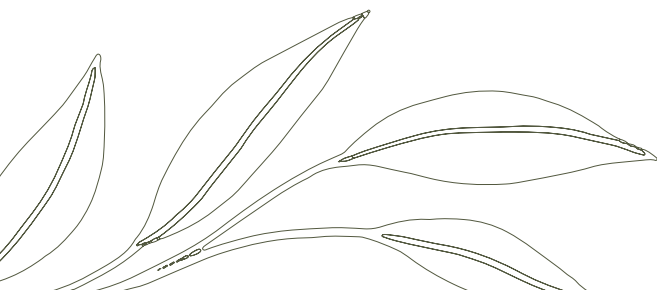
Conclusions

It is believed that this is the first study to systematically consult a population-based cohort of

young people living in very remote Aboriginal communities in Australia about youth support needs and pilot some of the identified support. The data captured in this study align with the CTG targets and provide a foundation for ACCO and government services in the Fitzroy Valley to inform the implementation of community-led, place-based support that will enable young people to thrive as they transition into adulthood. Since collecting these data, some of this support has been formally implemented. For example, MWRC secured funding to design a supported work program with the local employment agency, MWW. They are also in the process of developing community-led child development workshops for parents. MWW has established free public transport for the Fitzroy Valley, which offers buses from remote communities into town and a Night Safe Place that provides young people with meals and a safe place to be at night. Overall, this study demonstrates the knowledge translational (short and long-term) benefits of investing the necessary resources and time in conducting Aboriginal-led, place-based research in remote communities.

Author contributions

Conceptualisation: E. Carter, J. Davies, E. Elliott; Methodology: E. Carter, J. Davies, E. Bear, M. Bedford, L. Rice, E. Elliott; Formal analysis: L. Rice, E. Bear, M. Bedford, N. Rice; Investigation: E. Carter, E. Bear, M. Bedford, C. Carter, J. Davies, N. Rice, L. Rice; Resources: S. Thomas; Data curation: N. Rice and L. Rice; Writing – original draft preparation: L. Rice; Writing – review and editing: E. Elliott, E. Bear, E. Carter, J. Davies; Supervision: E. Carter, E. Elliott, L. Rice, S. Thomas; Project administration: L. Rice; Funding acquisition: E. Carter, L. Rice, E. Elliott, S. Thomas. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.





Data sharing

MWRC, on behalf of the Fitzroy Valley Community, is the custodian of the data collected and the knowledge generated. The data are stored at The University of Sydney for security and confidentiality reasons. The information collected in the community may be used in future research with the approval of MWRC.

Requests to access the data can be made via Dr Lauren Rice (lauren.rice@sydney.edu.au) or Prof Elizabeth Elliott (elizabeth.elliott@health.nsw.gov.au).

Declaration of interests

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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We acknowledge the Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Wangkatjunka, Walmajarri and Nykina people of the Fitzroy Valley and pay our respects to their past, present and emerging Elders. We thank the Fitzroy Valley's young people, their families, and the many community members who supported the project. This work was only possible with their involvement and guidance.

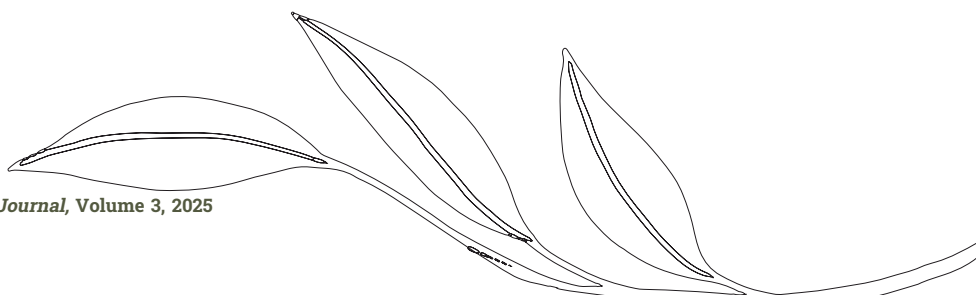
Partnership

The roles and expectations of partners (MWRC and The University of Sydney) were outlined in a description of how we work together, which has evolved since the partnership began in 2008, and a Values and Ethics Statement. A formal research agreement was also established to outline how funds would be shared between the two partners. A risk matrix was developed at the start of the project to identify potential project risks and strategies for minimising risk, which was reviewed throughout the project.

Author biographies

Lauren Rice is a non-Indigenous research fellow with six years of experience working collaboratively with Indigenous communities. She is passionate about improving services for people with a disability and people living in remote regions. Lauren is a Bigiswun Kid Project leadership team member and spent three years living and working in Fitzroy Crossing (Bunuba Country) for the Bigiswun Kid Project before moving to Broome (Yawuru Country). She coordinated all aspects of the research.

Emily Carter is a Gooniyandi and Kija woman from Fitzroy Crossing in remote Western Australia and the CEO of Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (MWRC). Emily is passionate about creating equity and opportunity for everyone. She strongly advocates for government services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to work together toward the systemic change needed to ensure that Aboriginal people have the quality of life they deserve. Emily has been conducting Aboriginal community-led research since 2008. She led the Bigiswun Kid Project leadership team and oversaw all aspects of the research, focusing on the work conducted in the





Fitzroy Valley (consultation, design, data collection, advocacy and support provided during the study).

Emma Bear is a Gooniyandi and Ngarinyin woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. She was a co-researcher, community navigator and youth mentor on the Bigiswun Kid team and is the author of a children's book. Emma was responsible for consulting with senior community members, designing project activities and materials to ensure that they were culturally appropriate and place-based, conducting interviews with parents and young people, providing support to young people during the research, and guiding and mentoring the non-Indigenous research staff working in the Fitzroy Valley.

Mudge Bedford is a Bunuba man born and raised in the Fitzroy Valley. He was a co-researcher, community navigator and youth mentor on the Bigiswun Kid team. He is passionate about helping shape the next generation of young men and increasing access to disability support in his community. Mudge was responsible for consulting with senior community members, designing project activities and materials to ensure that they were culturally appropriate and place-based, conducting interviews with parents and young people, providing support to young people during the research, and guiding and mentoring the non-Indigenous research staff working in the Fitzroy Valley.

Cheyenne Carter is a Gooniyandi, Kija, Butchella and Jagera woman. As a young Aboriginal woman from the Fitzroy Valley, she provided valuable insight and direction to the research design. She was also responsible for conducting interviews and supporting young people.

Jadnah Davies is a Gooniyandi, Kija and Waanyi woman. She is the Marulu Manager at Marninwarntikura

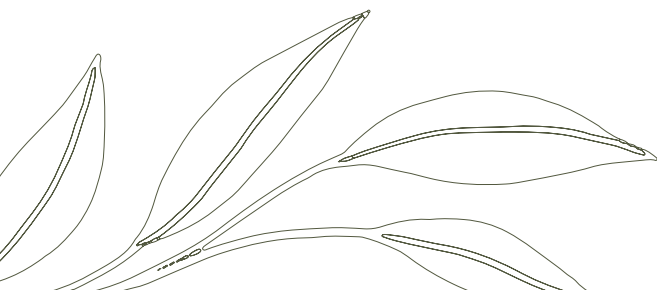
Women's Resource Centre and was a researcher on the original Lililwan Project and all subsequent research projects. She is one of the women who identified the need for the Bigiswun Kid Project to follow up with the Lililwan Project cohort to determine whether they received the support needed in childhood and adolescence. She helped inform the project design and guided and mentored the non-Indigenous staff.

Nikkita Rice is a non-Indigenous project coordinator who moved to Bunuba Country in the Fitzroy Valley for the project and has lived there since. She spent two years as part of the Bigiswun Kid team, coordinating the day-to-day research activities and conducting interviews with the young women. She is now supporting an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation in implementing the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the region.

Sue Thomas is a non-Indigenous educator and the strategic priority lead at Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre. She is a member of the Bigiswun Kid Project leadership team and oversaw all aspects of the research, focusing on supporting staff on the ground, helping build connections with stakeholders and guiding the team.

Fergus Wells is a non-Indigenous social worker who moved to Bunuba Country in the Fitzroy Valley for the project. He spent one year working on the Bigiswun Kid Project, conducting interviews and supporting the young men. Following the project's completion, he remained in the community as a social worker on the Bigiswun Kid Social and Emotional Wellbeing Service.

Elizabeth Elliott is a non-Indigenous Professor of paediatrics, with 15 years of experience working collaboratively with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations from the Fitzroy Valley. Elizabeth led the

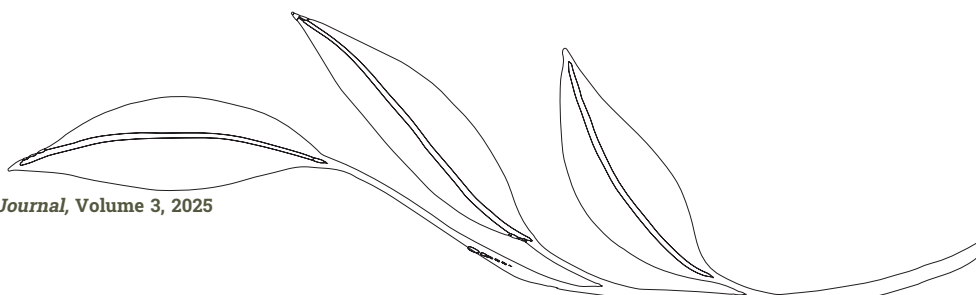




original Lililwan Project and, with Jadnah Davies and Marmingee Hand, conceived the Bigiswun Kid Project. She is a leadership team member and oversees all aspects of the research.

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