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COMMUNITY JUSTICE GROUP STORIES OF SUCCESS:

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE GROUPS
2021-2023

by **MYUMA**

PREPARED FOR DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY-GENERAL

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THE EVALUATION OF QUEENSLAND'S COMMUNITY JUSTICE GROUPS

This document presents highlights from the 3-year evaluation of Community Justice Groups, conducted by Aboriginal social enterprise, Myuma Pty Ltd, for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. Myuma's detailed evaluation reports for the Department, plus an community report on good practices by Community Justice Groups, are available for download at the following link: www.courts.qld.gov.au/services/court-programs/community-justice-group-program

This document contains the executive summary from the final evaluation report, the final list of evaluation recommendations, and a compendium of stories of success collected by our evaluators during their visits to more than 25 Community Justice Groups between 2021 and 2023.

These examples highlight the factors key to a Community Justice Group's effectiveness within the community, as told by our interactions with participants during the evaluation. Their accounts speak to the unique position Community Justice Groups hold socially, culturally and emotionally with their clients and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They are testament to the cultural values, the resilience and the relationships that keep communities thriving and empowered.

Names and identities have been withheld at the discretion of those interviewed.



GOOD PRACTICE

GOOD PEOPLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE GROUPS

In 41 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland, dedicated staff, Elders and Respected Persons of Community Justice Groups (CJGs) are driving local, community-based responses to justice issues affecting Indigenous Queenslanders. With support from their communities, the Queensland Government, and many other government and non-government partners, these unique grassroots organisations make a vital contribution. A three-year evaluation has sought to document how CJGs support and empower members of their communities, helping them to avoid contact with the criminal justice system, or where they are already in the system, to navigate justice processes and avoid future contact. The evaluation has found that the work of CJGs is very highly valued by stakeholders within the justice system, those who deliver services to Indigenous communities, and the members of those communities themselves. The evaluation has found that the grassroots strengths of CJGs, and their creative and empathetic ways of working with their communities, make them uniquely able to positively impact on the lives of individual clients while improving the functioning of the justice system, and the wider service system, for Indigenous people.

While enhanced Queensland Government funding in recent years is enabling CJGs to build their capability, expand their activities, and broaden their impact, the evaluation has highlighted the significant opportunity to further strengthen CJGs and support their aspirations to drive an even greater impact for their communities. Recent gains can be accelerated in the next three years by providing further targeted support recommended by the evaluation to assist CJGs to build their organisations, pursue greater self-determination and build capacity through a peak body, and implement their innovative ideas for community-driven justice responses. The breadth of CJG activities necessitates a whole-of-government response and commitment to support and partner with CJGs. Stronger CJGs will be a key partner in meeting the Queensland Government's strategic imperative to address the over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system.

Background

The three-year evaluation of the Community Justice Group Program was commissioned by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG). The evaluation has been conducted by Myuma, a social enterprise owned and managed by the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people from the Camooweal region of north-west Queensland. From 2021 to 2023, Myuma's predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team of 12 evaluators has undertaken local

evaluations with 25 CJGs:

- spending 99 days in remote, regional and rural communities across Queensland,
- conducting 235 interviews and focus groups with CJGs and stakeholders,
- analysing 185 hours of recorded audio, and
- surveying 453 clients and community members (with the help of local community researchers).

At the program level, the evaluation held interviews and focus group with 70 government and non-government stakeholders and analysed responses from 655 respondents to annual surveys of program stakeholders.

The evaluation comes at an important time in the evolution of the CJG Program. CJGs were first established in Queensland in the 1990s as a community response to the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, as highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). While the Program has expanded to 52 locations across the State, including 11 Torres Strait Islands, concerns were frequently raised by a variety of stakeholders during the evaluation about the sustainability of CJGs, with their broad range of activities, high expectations from the community and other agencies, reliance on volunteer members, and limited operational funding.

In recent years, the Queensland Government has invested significant additional funding for CJGs, to create a more viable funding base and support sustainable CJG activities across a wider range of activity domains. From 2016-17, in response to the Not Now, Not Ever report (2015) (Recommendation 92), Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Enhancement funding enabled 18 discrete Indigenous communities to develop DFV services. From 2019-20, additional funding was made available for all CJGs. DJAG's CJG Program funding has had a focus on the court support functions of CJGs, a recommendation of the 2010 evaluation of the Program. However, following the funding expansion and subsequent consultation with CJGs in 2019 about a blueprint for the future of the CJG Program, the government has reconceptualised the Program, as reflected in the document, Framework for Stronger Community Justice Groups. The refocused CJG service model highlights the role of CJGs across the justice spectrum, from prevention and early intervention through to transition of people returning from custody to community.

The evaluation has presented an opportunity to review, and improve, the implementation of the expanded CJG Program model, and to assess the outcomes CJGs are achieving in their communities and the potential to

further enhance CJG impacts. With governments renewing their focus on reducing Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system, and emphasising community-driven responses, the evidence from the evaluation will contribute to these strategic priorities.

Evaluation of Program implementation

The evaluation has been conducted in three annual phases from 2021 to 2023, with an annual report at the end of each phase. The first two phases were focused on the implementation of the Program: Phase 1 was focused on the Program's inputs and Phase 2 on the Program's outputs. These phases provided a detailed analysis of what CJGs are delivering around the State and the adequacy of the resourcing, training, community involvement, agency support and other key inputs for CJGs. Consistent with the Framework for Stronger CJGs, this analysis confirmed that CJGs are involved in a very wide



array of activities in their communities, both within and beyond the formal justice system. The evaluation highlighted seven activity domains for CJGs, as indicated in the diagram below.

The evaluation team's activity mapping with CJGs confirmed that CJGs, to differing extents, are indeed involved across the entire justice spectrum. The recent funding enhancements have enabled many CJGs to expand their funded activities. The activity mapping also found that two further CJG activity domains are very important in practice – community support & advocacy, and assistance to agencies.

The review of the adequacy of CJG inputs in Phase 1 revealed, however, that in the recent period of expanded funding and activities, CJGs have unmet capacity development needs. Priority areas for assistance and training include:

- internal organisational matters such as governance, business systems, financial management, performance management and reporting; and
- external service-related topics such as Domestic and Family

Violence (DFV), peacekeeping/ mediation, court operations, mental health, trauma, and operations of partner agencies (e.g. corrections, child protection and youth justice).

The key recommendation arising from the implementation review in Phases 1 and 2 was for DJAG to develop a comprehensive, targeted Capacity Development Program for CJGs. The evaluation did not initially recommend a delivery model for this Capacity Development Program, but following further input from CJGs, now recommends that a new CJG peak body should be tasked with delivering this capacity development. This recommendation is consistent with one of the four priority reforms in the Queensland Government's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan: '2. Building the community-controlled sector'. In Phases 1 and 2, the evaluation also reviewed the six-year roll-out from 2017 of the DFV Enhancement program for CJGs in 18 discrete Indigenous communities. The evaluation noted that the literature on DFV in Indigenous communities identifies a range of possible responses, from:

- primary prevention (such as education, awareness and community-based programs to tackle a culture of violence), to
- early intervention (such as diversionary interventions to prevent deepening of contact with police and courts), to
- justice system responses (such as DFV orders, prosecution of breaches of orders and DFV-related offences, and working with victims and perpetrators of DFV).

The Queensland Government's DFV Prevention Strategy 2016-2026 positioned the enhanced funding to CJGs under the DFVE as a predominantly justice system response to DFV in Indigenous communities. Consequently, the focus of the new CJG DFV services has been to enhance the level of support provided to community members involved in the DFV justice system. This is an identified high area of need in Indigenous communities, where the number of applications for DFV orders and the number of DFV-related offences is high. In reviewing the DFVE, the evaluation expressed the opinion that CJGs are well placed to implement primary prevention and early intervention responses to DFV in their communities and that there is scope for the DFVE Program to strengthen support for CJGs in these areas. The evaluation noted that in practice, while the focus of DFVE is on justice system responses, DJAG's flexible co-design process has enabled several communities to incorporate innovative prevention-focused elements in their service models. In line with the literature emphasising the potential effectiveness of responses that seek to address DFV before the involvement of the justice system, and noting CJG aspirations for initiatives like men's 'cooling off places', the evaluation recommends that the DFVE Program continue to explore expanding the primary prevention and early intervention elements of CJGs' DFVE service models.

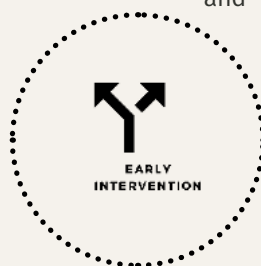
Evaluation of CJG outcomes

Phase 3 of the evaluation in 2023 had a specific focus on assessing the outcomes and impact from CJGs' activities, although the evaluation has also sought to capture data and stories about CJG success throughout Phases 1 and 2 of the evaluation. It is not feasible to evaluate the CJG Program by reference to a uniform set of quantitative outcome measures, given the diversity of CJGs' activities and the complexity of the issues targeted, which are influenced by many other factors. The evaluation has, however, systematically collected and analysed several sources of quantitative and qualitative evidence about the short- and medium-term outcomes of CJGs in each of the seven CJG activity domains identified in Phases 1 and 2. Despite the considerable challenges for the people that CJGs work with and the limitations in the support available, the evaluation has found compelling evidence of the positive outcomes achieved by CJGs across the justice spectrum and beyond.



In the area of prevention, awareness and education, the evaluation heard consistent feedback from stakeholders about how CJG initiatives are positively impacting community members in ways that prevent them from offending. Culture- and country-based interventions are seen by CJGs and stakeholders as especially impactful in reducing stress, connecting people, promoting healing of trauma and providing pro-social alternatives to anti-social behaviour. CJGs aspire to expand their primary prevention activities to 'keep people from coming into contact with the criminal justice system in the first place'. Initiatives that prevent people from entering the DFV legal system were highlighted as an urgent priority.

In the area of early intervention and diversion, the evaluation heard that CJGs are delivering positive outcomes through mediation conflict resolution, partnering with police to divert people from being charged, and assisting at-risk youth and adults to access support or take alternative pathways away from involvement in the justice system. Stakeholders believe these positive impacts are the result of CJGs' deep connections and relationships within the community, their ability to identify and respond to issues early, and the cultural authority, skills, knowledge and life experience of CJG staff and Elders. The success of CJGs' current early intervention and diversion activities underlines a case for additional support for the many CJGs who have said they want to expand their activities in this space.



Within the court process, where they currently dedicate the largest proportion of their time, CJGs are delivering a range of positive outcomes for judicial officers, court stakeholders, defendants, victims and members of the community. Strong-performing CJGs are having a profound impact on the way that many courts operate, not only through Murri Court but also in mainstream Magistrates Courts. Stakeholders perceive outcomes in courts being more culturally informed in their decision-making. Judicial officers highlighted the positive impacts of CJGs' input into court processes, and recounted personal stories of how CJGs had helped develop their cultural competency and understanding. In community surveys at 16 sites involving 453 people, 79% of respondents were 'very happy' or 'happy' with the support they received from the CJG in court and 76% felt they were treated more fairly by the court. Community members said the CJG helped them feel respected and heard in court, increasing their confidence in the justice system. It is widely acknowledged that CJGs help clients understand the process, make court a safer space, and empower them to make informed choices.



A very significant outcome evident from CJGs' work in the courts is how they impart the motivation, information and opportunity for people to address the underlying issues for their offending. Two-thirds of stakeholders said CJGs have a significant impact in helping defendants get access to services. The evaluation shows that CJGs are effective in creating the conditions for people to make positive changes in their lives, by helping them navigate the service system, by providing a hub for service providers, by enabling and empowering clients through trusting relationships, by taking a holistic approach and by supporting cultural identity. While quantitative evidence of behaviour change resulting from CJGs' work is difficult to measure, the evaluation has collected a compelling body of qualitative evidence about how CJGs contribute to positive changes in the lives of their clients, including reduced offending. This includes positive community and stakeholder feedback and 73 'stories of success' relayed by CJGs, stakeholders and clients themselves (see the evaluation's CJG Stories of Success compendium, published separately).

Many CJGs play a small, but important role in supporting community members who are in custody or under community supervision, primarily through watchhouse visits, prison and detention centre visits, facilitating communication with people in custody, and supervising community service.

A few CJGs are delivering strong outcomes with people released from custody in their transition to community. This is an emerging priority for many CJGs, who have innovative ideas for community initiatives to improve reintegration and break the cycle of offending (for example, through on-country diversionary healing centres and local teams of mentors to reintegrate offenders released from custody).



Members of Indigenous communities believe that CJGs are having an impact in reducing their contact with the justice system. Surveys in 16 communities found that two-thirds of CJG clients who had been to court (or the family or friends of these clients) believe that the assistance from CJGs helped them to stay out of trouble with the law in the future. Two-thirds of community members also said that CJGs are helping to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people out of the criminal justice system generally. Three quarters of community members surveyed said that CJGs are positively changing attitudes to DFV in their community.

The work of CJGs in community support and advocacy renders practical assistance on a daily basis so community members feel valued and supported and can access services and life opportunities. While this function is core to the sociocultural legitimacy and effectiveness of CJGs, the volume of work puts CJG sustainability at risk. Demands on CJGs often arise from service system gaps or the lack of cultural competency of service providers. This requires attention at a whole-of-government service system level.



CJGs' assistance to agencies and service providers delivers significant outcomes for the service systems in Indigenous communities, by helping agency staff connect with community members and building their cultural competency. About three quarters (73%) of stakeholders surveyed said that the contribution of CJGs is 'essential' or 'very valuable' to them achieving good outcomes. This work is rarely remunerated or supported with resources or training, which underlines the need for agreements or MoUs between CJGs and agencies.



Although measuring and attributing the precise impact of CJGs in reducing offending or contact with the justice system is difficult, the evidence of CJGs' work in addressing the underlying causes of offending, together with the qualitative stories of success, give high confidence that CJGs are contributing to this outcome. The evaluation has also documented several ways in which CJGs are assisting community members to avoid custody, such as assisting people to obtain bail and turn up for court, making sentencing submissions that may provide cultural information or alternative community-based options that lead to a person receiving a non-custodial sentence, or assisting clients to avoid offending or re-offending or breaching court orders, which might otherwise lead to custodial time.

Considering the costs of contact with the justice system, these contributions to keeping people out of custody makes CJGs a very cost-effective initiative. For example, the evaluation estimates that if a CJG was successful in preventing three months of custody for just 12 of its court clients each year (5% of an average CJG's annual clients), the custodial cost savings alone would offset its total annual core funding (currently \$280,000 per year). CJGs are even more cost-effective where they can successfully keep young people out of the justice system. It costs \$2232 per day to keep a youth in detention, so a CJG could offset its entire annual core funding by assisting just one young person to stay out of custody for 4.1 months.

A long-term outcome sought by the CJG Program is to contribute to the reduction of Indigenous people's contact with the justice system. There are numerous examples where government and non-government stakeholders have reported that CJG activities directly reduce Indigenous people's further or deepened contact with the justice system. An example is assistance to Probation and Parole authorities to contact people who have failed to report or comply with parole, which prevents parole breaches leading to return to custody. Another example is Murri Courts, where many stakeholders have a strong belief in the long-term outcomes of the process in reducing participants' level of offending, and similar outcomes were reported where CJGs work in mainstream courts. The many stories of success told to the evaluation attest to these long-term outcomes.

CJGs emphasised that their long-term impacts for people were not only about the justice system, but also helping people achieve happier and more empowered lives and fostering safer and more cohesive communities. While these outcomes are also difficult to measure quantitatively, some of the most significant reported qualitative impacts that CJGs have for their clients are increased empowerment, self-esteem, cultural pride and life opportunities. At the community level, stakeholders told the evaluation that CJGs provide cultural leadership, bring families together and contribute to community-wide empowerment and a sense of community efficacy.

Reducing over-representation

Despite the success that is evident from the work of CJGs at an individual level, the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming into contact with the court system continues to increase across Queensland, including in the locations where CJGs are located. Analysis of court data showed that in the four years to 30 June 2023, 34,720 different Indigenous people appeared before a court in the 52 locations where CJGs operate. The evaluation estimates that in these locations, CJGs are able to support only around a quarter of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attending court. About 40% of Queensland's Indigenous population lives in areas outside the areas serviced by courts where CJGs operate. So CJGs are only able to assist a minority of Indigenous Queenslanders who attend court.

The evaluation's analysis of courts data shows that Indigenous over-representation with courts has risen in recent years. Comparing the past two financial years (2021-2023) with the previous two financial years (2019-2021), the number of charges for Indigenous people at the court locations where CJGs operate has increased considerably (up 11%) at the same time that it has fallen for non-Indigenous people (down 10%). At these courts, 31% of all charges related to Indigenous persons, and for five of the 16 offence categories, over 40% of the charges were for Indigenous persons. Over a quarter of the charges were for Offences Against Justice Procedures, Government Security and Government Operations and the majority of these relate to breaches of bail or breaches of DV orders. These types of offences increased by 16% for Indigenous people at these courts in the past two years, while they increased by only 1% for non-Indigenous people.

DFV features prominently in increased Indigenous contact with courts. In 2021-23, there were 38% more DFV-flagged offences at the CJG locations compared to 2019-21, and about two-thirds of these were Offences Against Justice Procedures, Government Security and Government Operations. At the same time, the number of DV Orders has plateaued. Further analysis and monitoring of the disaggregated data is essential to ensure that policies and practices are tailored to specific needs. Each community needs access to their own data to enable planning, and measuring the effectiveness, of responses.

Stakeholders saw CJGs as having a significant role in helping to address some of the key underlying causes of Indigenous people's contact with the justice system, including alcohol and substance misuse, normalisation of crime and incarceration, accommodation issues, lack of understanding of the law, poor interactions with police and the justice system, lack of understanding of court orders, access to support services, family conflict, and loss of cultural identity and connection. Yet despite CJGs' assistance across these issues, CJG staff,

members and other stakeholders perceive critical shortfalls in the support available, which is highlighted in their calls for more funding for prevention, early intervention and reintegration responses.


In order to achieve sustained success in reducing over-representation, a major shift needs to occur towards investment in community-led, culturally suitable programs and services that respond to the underlying causes of Indigenous people's contact with the justice system, with a particular focus on young people and their families. The evaluation has documented numerous examples of excellent programs and initiatives of CJGs that are tailored to local needs and circumstances, have strong cultural foundations, and are effective in engaging community members. Many of these are summarised in the Community Report produced as a companion to the Phase 2 Evaluation Report. A few communities have reported that contact with the justice system has noticeably fallen and while there is no one solution, these examples provide a lesson in what can be achieved by investing in local responses led by the CJG staff, Elders and Respected Persons.

CJGs and stakeholders are also concerned about systemic issues that are driving continued Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system. Key areas of concern are a perception that recent changes in the way the justice system responds to DFV has disproportionately affected Indigenous people, and not in a way that is effectively dealing with the problem. For example, concerns were raised about the impact of legislation for longer DV Orders and increased use of conditions ousting DFV accused from homes. CJGs and stakeholders (including judicial officers) also expressed a view that problematic policing practices are exacerbating Indigenous people's contact with the justice system. These systemic issues require further investigation by the Queensland Government, a process in which CJGs should be fully involved, given their first-hand knowledge of the issues.

Opportunities for enhancing CJG outcomes

Investment in CJG capacity development remains the highest priority to enhance both outputs and outcomes from the CJG Program. The evaluation recommends that a new CJG peak body is the optimal vehicle for supporting CJG development, as well as providing advocacy around community justice interests.

The strong CJG outcomes reported in the court process could be enhanced by further building CJGs' organisational capability, considering expansion of CJG court support to more youth, investigating the adequacy of resourcing for those CJGs who are servicing the busiest court locations, and ensuring CJGs have the capacity to undertake more proactive case management of their clients' engagement with referral services.



Outside the courts, there are considerable opportunities to enhance CJGs' impact by expanding support for CJGs in primary prevention, early intervention and post-custody transition back to community. Many CJGs have already applied their additional funding to successful activities in these non-court domains, and others have flagged priorities and ideas for new initiatives, such as DFV primary prevention (e.g. education and awareness), men's shelters/hubs, on-country camps, mediation services, police diversion partnerships, youth early intervention programs, and prisoner reintegration projects. The evaluation recommends that DJAG seek additional funding to make available a grant pool for CJGs to apply for and deliver innovative community-driven projects for primary prevention, early intervention or reintegration.

The evaluation has confirmed the central value of CJGs as a cost-effective, place-based, community-driven response to the justice challenges in Indigenous communities. Recent funding enhancements have created a more sustainable foundation for CJGs' services. With targeted investment in their capacity development and further support for their innovative local ideas, there are strong prospects for CJGs to convert enhanced government support into even greater impact in the years to come.

EVALUATION

HIGHLIGHTS:

IN THEIR OWN

WORDS

This section provides a snapshot of the value of Community Justice Groups, in the words of people who have contributed to the evaluation.

Helping the justice system to be culturally responsive

Every time you go [to a court with a CJG], you learn something. And I think it's also about trust building, because you start to understand how important that is and how you can't just blunder your way in and expect people to listen to you and do as you tell them to do... You have to go slowly and you've got to sort of just let it happen at their pace... (Judicial officer)

I have definitely benefited personally and professionally from my relationship with [the CJG] and from especially the knowledge and the support of some of their Elders... I was always very, very grateful for the generosity of the Elders of the Justice Group to sit with me and explain what was going on and what the dynamics were of [my clients'] relationships and their cultural stuff, so that I could do my job. (Defence lawyer)

I found the interaction with the CJG to be of extraordinary value. The impact of their work on the wider community is significant and valuable. The outcomes of court processes appear to be more meaningful in many cases after progressing a matter through the Murri Court with the assistance of a CJG. The CJG I was working with had realistic expectations of outcomes and were highly dedicated and professional in their roles. (Judicial officer)

Engendering trust and cultural safety

[The CJG] has been supporting me since going through this case....[they] have been there for me. I am very happy that they help me. It helps your self-esteem. It makes me feel I can be successful with them. (Murri Court participant)

[The Elders] are invaluable for us because they help us to help [the detainee] understand what we just said... At least they know that we were transparent and we explained it. So they're more calm and a bit more relaxed at the time. And yeah, it just flows a bit better. (Police Officer in Charge)

You walk into [Murri] Court. Everybody's really positive. No shame. No fear. The total opposite. Just like really uplifting. And I feel like that's truly why people are coming, the service users [participants]... This service user, she had just had a baby... so she didn't have to come to court...But she came into court with her baby. And the only reason I can see is that that's her supportive place. Which doesn't make sense, because it's a court, you would think you would try to get out of it if you could. But she wanted to come there and I feel like that's just Murri Court. (Stakeholder)

Upholding community values and accountability

If you were to go just to [mainstream] court, the process isn't explained to you, so you don't understand the consequences, don't understand the damage, the impact, that you've had on someone. But all that is spoken about [in Murri Court], to be able to comprehend the full scale [of your actions]. Not just, 'you messed up, we need to fix you.' What about the person you stole from? What are we gonna do about that? So all that is definitely a lot more valuable than just going to the Magistrates Court. (CJG member)

I think to do a good job, your first job, you must make the offender totally 100% responsible for their actions... 'Look yourself in the mirror, you're blaming everyone else. Don't blame this or blame that' ... Because if we're going to guide them, they've got to realise what they've done to the community, and to their victims... (Murri Court Elder)

Keeping people out of custody

[Without the Elders], it would be far more difficult to get these young people to court... I think the young people, knowing that they've got Indigenous representation in that room makes it a safer place for them to enter. There would be more warrants going out for not attending. (Youth worker)

They [the CJG] helped myself and a lot of boys from doing time in the big house [prison]. (NPA community member)

[T]he assistance provided [by the CJG], it's significant. It has stopped people being returned to custody. It has stopped people from no doubt re-offending... (Probation and Parole staff member)

I just hate our mob going to prison for little things or stupid things. Like, half of it is, you know, they got this charge here, but they didn't rock up to court on this day, and now they are in trouble. That's rubbish, I hate that sort of stuff. (CJG staff)

Facilitating on country healing

[G]oing on country, I think it's a great thing. We did that in [community X]. [A CJG Elder's] grandson was working there, and so I was getting him to take the guys - the people on DV - fishing. Like to go have a yarn with them. And we've seen with that kind of intervention we were able to start changing their behaviours. So we had a year of like, you know, the guys that were always in jail, stay out of jail for the year for the first time in a long time. (Police officer, remote community)

Thursday is on-country healing ... We're getting people out of the situation they're in, could be overcrowded house, or a lot of problems. We're taking them to a peaceful place that's the father's or mother's land, and you see how they forget about all that stuff that can bring us down. They're having a chance to breathe again ... (CJG staff)

Guiding people to get help

The Community Justice Group is a fantastic initiative that puts people in touch with people that can help... So people don't feel like they don't know where to turn... The CJG people are familiar with the various [opportunities] and they can move and navigate on their behalf and just give them some guidance. And I think it's absolutely magnificent. (Murri Court Police Prosecutor)

I had a client in this morning, and I was helping her with [funeral] assistance. And when we finished all the paperwork, we're just waiting for approval, she goes 'Can I give you a hug?' I said 'Of course you can... but why?' And she says, 'Because, if you weren't here, who would help me?'

And she nearly made me cry, because it's like you don't think about it. You're just in the zone, you're doing it. (CJG worker, Far North Queensland)

Providing wisdom and mentorship

I just appreciate them being still here. Where would us younger generation be? The knowledge, the cultural knowledge, the guidance, the stories, they hold so much information. I just appreciate them being present. (Indigenous worker at NGO)

We know what it's like. We've all dealt with those things within our own families. So, we know how to be tough, but we also know how to be kind and loving. (Murri Court Elder)

I wanted to grow up being like these fellas. They made me realise don't be shame of who you are, you're unique, you're an individual, you got something special that not many other people have. (CJG member)

I think the success out of this Community Justice Group is that community draws on the knowledge of it, and the wisdom of our Elders. (NGO stakeholder)

Supporting the service system

I think [the CJG's] a good organisation, it's very well-run and, yeah, we'd be lost without them... There's a lot of other organisations that rely on their service. (Agency representative)

[The CJG] have absolutely been totally about increasing cultural capability as opposed to, you know, pointing out someone's cultural incapability or something like that. So it's always very supportive. I've experienced significant development in my cultural capability. (QCS officer)

[The Regional Office] basically said that in our current work, without the CJG, we just couldn't get out [in the community], we just couldn't operate. (Agency representative)

I feel like we're constantly joining dots for [service providers]. We hear that a lot. (CJG manager)

I have gained so much, personally and as a service worker through my interactions with my local CJG and this has allowed me to work in a more positive and supportive way with the community. (Service provider)

Empowering people to change their lives

I'm a smoker and I go out on the street and have a smoke. I've actually had Murri Court clients come up and hug me and say 'thank you for helping me change my life'. And I'm like 'Dude, you did that, you put in the hard yards, I was just here to point you in the right direction.' But yeah, it's always good when someone comes up and says that to you. (CJG coordinator)

We know our families and if we can support anybody, you know, to help change their lives, then that's what I'm about. I want to see change and sometimes you know, it's that ripple out effect. That if you make one change, then other people see it, then other people will want to make that [change too]. (CJG Elder)

I certainly do believe that we are keeping many people out of custody throughout the period during which they're engaging with Murri Court because they're motivated to stay out of custody. They seem to be, or many of them seem to be, engaging, going to the appointments, going to the counselling, and because by the time we deal with them [at sentencing] they've been out of trouble – some of them – for 12 months. (Judicial officer, Murri Court)

Oh, ... clients ... it's amazing, because when they first come into the Murri Court process, they don't look well, you know, they don't smile, they don't brush their hair, or whatever. When they get to the end of the Murri Court process, they're wearing beautiful clothes, their hair's brushed, they're smiling. They actually make eye contact with the Elders, Respected Person and the judge. So, you can see the difference that that process is making to them, you know what I mean? It's just amazing, the turnaround. A lot of them are working, a lot of them get off the drugs and alcohol and you know, they got their health under control now because part of their bail with us is a 715 health check. (CJG Elder)

I was in court the day she came to court. I didn't know her, she looked so lovely, clean. And she said 'Aunty, I don't live in the park no more, I've got a roof over my head.' She was so happy... And she couldn't stop thanking us enough. (CJG Elder)

I love seeing people complete Murri Court, [and face] whatever punishment they get. But they have rehabilitated themselves and the look on their face, when they open their eyes, is that they are really very proud of themselves... (ATSILS support worker)

Turning up for the community

We saw some of the CJG up in Thursday Island, you know, and people just coming out of their homes to turn up to do that, to do the right thing by the people. And if it wasn't working well, if people didn't see any hope in it, they wouldn't come. But these people are coming in. You know, it should be recognised that the work that they're doing is just so important and so vital. Because they see a value and they want to help. (Government stakeholder)

RECOMMENDATIONS

CJG capacity development

Recommendation 1. That DJAG resource a CJG Capacity Development Program to meet the ongoing training and capacity-building needs of CJGs, including for the current growth phase of the CJG Program and beyond. Considerations in developing this Program are:

- (a) training needs related to governance, program management, court services and DFV; and
- (b) broader training needs in the CJG Training Needs Surveys and the feedback to the evaluation (e.g. mediation/peacemaking, conflict resolution, mental health, trauma, Indigenous healing and self-care)

Recommendation 2. That DJAG, in consultation with CJGs, support the establishment and funding of a peak body for CJGs, developed by CJGs, which may include functions such as:

- (a) leading the Capacity Development Program for CJGs;
- (b) promoting and raising awareness of the broad work of CJGs;
- (c) reflecting the voice of CJGs in providing insights to government on laws, policy and strategy;
- (d) facilitating consultations within the CJG sector in relation to government initiatives; and
- (e) developing and sharing good practice frameworks for service delivery and governance.

The need for further capacity development support for CJGs was a consistent theme throughout the three-year evaluation. This remains the most pressing priority for the CJG Program, as it will help maximise the impact of the recent funding enhancements to CJGs. The scope of CJGs' needs and aspirations to develop their capability was outlined in detail in the Phases 1 and 2 Evaluation Reports. In Phase 1, the evaluation recommended that DJAG consult with CJGs about the form of a Capacity Development Program, including the option of a peak body. Since that time, CJGs have indicated their preference for a peak body and groundwork is under way. To ensure greater CJG involvement in the governance of the CJG Program can occur while a peak body is being established, DJAG may need to implement an interim CJG advisory mechanism.

Program administration

Recommendation 3. That DJAG revise and update the current CJG Program

Guidelines and template service agreement to better reflect the seven potential output areas for a CJG identified in the evaluation, comprising:

- (a) the five output areas in the refocused CJG model under the Framework for Stronger CJGs (primary prevention, early intervention, court support, support in custody and under supervision, and support on transition to community following custody); and
- (b) acknowledgment of the additional output areas relating to community support and advocacy, and assistance to government agencies and service providers.

This recommendation reflects the findings of Phases 1 and 2 of the evaluation that CJGs in practice may play a significant role across a wide range of activities in their communities, both within the criminal justice system and in the broader social services sector. Phase 3 has confirmed that the Program delivers valuable, but under-recognised, outcomes in areas beyond the formal court process. The precise mix of activities differs for each CJG and is negotiated in service agreements, but CJGs consistently raised the concern that the Program Guidelines and their service agreements did not reflect what they do in practice. The current Program Guidelines and service agreement template reflects a narrower conception of the CJG Program that pre-dates the funding enhancements and the refocusing of the Program under the Framework for Stronger CJGs (2020). This creates uncertainty and concerns for CJGs and stakeholders about the legitimate scope of CJG activities, and does not reflect the Department's actual practice of negotiating service agreements that are flexible, place-based, and seek to accommodate CJGs' choices and priorities to tackle local justice issues.

Recommendation 4. That DJAG consider:

- (a) establishing IJO positions in regional centres closer to CJGs being serviced, and accordingly, consider an increase in the total number of IJO positions;
- (b) reviewing the classification of IJO positions to ensure it adequately reflects the complexity and skill requirements of the role; and
- (c) reviewing whether the current division of responsibilities, level of specialisation and classification level of IJP teams, team leaders and unit manager positions adequately meets the needs of the CJG Program's expanded scope and complexity.

DJAG's Indigenous Justice Officers (IJOs) perform a crucial role in supporting the operations and development of CJGs, yet the evaluation has highlighted that the IJO network is stretched in its ability to meet the expanding needs of

CJGs during the current growth phase and there is a need for additional IJO positions in locations closer to some CJGs.

Program governance

Recommendation 5. That DJAG include representatives of CJGs in the Program's governance arrangements, to give CJGs a voice in important decisions about the CJG Program.

Involving community participants in program governance is best practice from a program development perspective as well as being consistent with the Queensland Government's Path to Treaty commitment to reframe the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, guided by principles such as locally led decision-making, self-determination, shared commitment, shared responsibility, shared accountability and empowerment.

Information-sharing between CJGs

Recommendation 6. That DJAG continue to support a communications platform for CJGs, led by CJGs or the proposed CJG peak body, to collaborate and share good practice.

More opportunities for sharing good practice across the CJG network will contribute greatly to the ongoing development of CJGs' knowledge and capability. This was recommended by CJGs in the consultations in 2019 and has been a recurring theme throughout the evaluation.

CJG coverage across Queensland courts

Recommendation 7. That DJAG consider, in consultation with CJGs or the proposed CJG peak body, whether Murri Courts and other models can be extended to more locations across Queensland, to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to cultural support during court processes.

Not all Indigenous people who appear in court are able to access the support of a CJG. In some locations there is no CJG and in locations where there is a CJG, it may not be resourced to support people in specific courts, such as Childrens Court. The 2019 Murri Court evaluation recommended consideration of additional Murri Courts or alternatively, applying Murri Court principles to mainstream courts in smaller court locations (Recommendation 4).

DFV responses

Recommendation 8. That DJAG work with CJGs:

- (a) strengthen, in response to CJG proposals, community-led primary prevention, early intervention or post-release reintegration responses to DFV, while maintaining the capacity of CJGs to support court-based work; and
- (b) to refresh service models funded under the DFVE Program (currently for discrete community CJGs) where changes in the service environment may affect the efficacy of the DFV response.

Recommendation 9. That DJAG provide DFV funding to non-discrete CJGs and establish a dedicated DFV function with appropriate staffing within IJP to assess the demand for DFV initiatives, support increased CJG capacity re DFV, and facilitate the roll-out of DFV initiatives.

Feedback from CJGs and stakeholders indicate that DFV is the most significant driver of high contact of Indigenous people with the justice system. This is supported by the evaluation's analysis of courts data. Under the DFVE, CJGs in discrete communities are supporting people to navigate the DFV court process, but literature suggests even greater impacts on DFV may be achieved through primary prevention, early intervention and work to break the cycle of DFV at the reintegration stage. Many CJGs flagged innovative ideas for community-driven responses in these domains, which are worthy of support under the CJG Program.

CJGs beyond the 18 discrete communities eligible for DFVE funding expressed a desire to do more to respond to DFV in their communities. The evaluation recommends that the DFV-specific funding should be rolled out to these locations, where DFV is also driving increased contact with the justice system.

Recommendation 10. That the Queensland Government amend its Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026 to recognise the role of CJGs in the supporting outcomes areas beyond strengthening the justice system response, especially 'Supporting Outcome 2. Respectful relationships and non-violent behaviour are embedded in our community.'

The evaluation has shown that CJGs are responding effectively to DFV in their communities through initiatives that are not part of the formal justice system response, such as through primary prevention and early intervention space activities. Their important role in community-based responses to DFV, such as changing attitudes to DFV, needs to be recognised in the government's Strategy and supported with further resources.

Recommendation 11. That QPS, DJAG, QCS and QGSO collaborate on improving data recording and reporting systems to identify significant issues across court jurisdictions that impact on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The evaluation has noted several issues within the justice system that are impacting on the continued over-representation of Indigenous people. It is important for agencies to be able to track these trends, to formulate appropriate policy responses and measure the impact of interventions such as enhanced support for CJGs. For example, it is not currently possible to measure whether compliance with DFV orders is improving, which is an important goal of many CJGs' DFVE services working with DFV parties.

Recommendation 12. That the Queensland Government conduct a review, in consultation with CJGs and Indigenous communities, into the impact of changes to DFV legislation since 2015 on Indigenous people, focusing on:

- (a) whether the legislative changes, and the way they are being implemented, adequately take account of the unique needs and circumstances of Indigenous families and communities; and
- (b) any unintended consequences for Indigenous people, including unnecessarily increasing contact with the justice system.

The evaluation has repeatedly heard concerns from CJGs and stakeholders that recent changes in the way the justice system responds to DFV has disproportionately affected Indigenous people, and not in a way that is effectively dealing with the problem.

Innovative, community-driven responses in primary prevention, early intervention, and reintegration.

Recommendation 13. That DJAG seek additional funding to make available a grant pool for CJGs to implement innovative ideas for community-driven primary prevention, early intervention or reintegration initiatives.

The unique characteristics of CJGs that make them effective in the court process – such as their holistic and person-centred approach, their creativity in working across service boundaries, and the cultural knowledge, respect and influence of Elders – make them well placed to succeed in the primary prevention, early intervention and reintegration domains. The evidence of success of CJGs' current activities in these areas, and their aspirations and ideas for enhancing these activities, underpin a strong case for additional funding to support CJGs that have the interest and capability to implement

new projects. Given the high costs of the justice system, additional funding for 'justice reinvestment' type initiatives such as these are likely to be very cost-effective.

Ensuring sustainability of CJGs' assistance to other agencies

Recommendation 14. That the Queensland Government work with CJGs, ideally through the proposed peak body, to develop:

- (a) a protocol for government Departments requesting CJGs' engagement in delivery of services that are their responsibility, which ensures that CJGs are appropriately compensated and supported, including with capacity development;
- (b) remuneration mechanisms (e.g. agreements, grants, standard service agreements, standing offer arrangements) that CJGs and agencies could use to negotiate CJG assistance to agencies.

The activity mapping the evaluation has undertaken with CJGs has highlighted the extensive assistance that many CJGs provide to Government agencies and service providers, both within the justice system and in other areas of community services. CJGs have called for the negotiation of agreements or suitable arrangements with those agencies to ensure this support does not affect sustainability of CJGs, or lead to 'burnout' of staff.

CJGs filling gaps in service provision

Recommendation 15. That each Queensland Government agency delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people conduct an independent review and report results to the CJGs and DJAG about the extent to which CJGs are delivering services that are the responsibility of the agency, and consider strategies and measures to manage this load on CJGs (for example, improving service access at CJG locations or specifically resourcing CJGs as agents or referral points for certain services).

The evaluation has highlighted that some CJGs help community members to access services and support in circumstances where this should be the responsibility of a service provider agency. This affects CJGs' sustainability and their ability to deliver their focal services.

Whole-of-government positioning of the CJG Program

Recommendation 16. That DJAG consider opportunities to:

- (a) position the CJG Program within relevant whole-of-

government strategies, such as the Justice Strategy to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in line with the broader role of CJGs under the Framework for Stronger CJGs; and

(b) ensure CJGs, a peak body and DJAG are appropriately resourced to support whole-of-government strategies and initiatives.

Making progress towards the CJG Program's goal of reducing Indigenous people's contact with the justice system will require more focus on whole-of-government strategy and partnerships with other agencies with a role in primary prevention, early intervention and reintegration. With its expanded funding and focus, the CJG Program is transitioning from a predominantly 'justice system' response (as reflected in its location within the Magistrates Court Service) to a broader whole-of-government initiative supporting community-driven responses to a wide array of justice-related issues. The managers of the Program within DJAG will need to build their mandate for working with CJGs to influence policy and practice across the wider justice and social services system. For example, the Program will need to negotiate across government for more sustainable arrangements for CJGs, and address whole-of-government issues such as CJGs filling gaps left by other agencies and CJGs providing unremunerated assistance for other agencies to operate in Indigenous communities. Positioning the CJG Program within whole-of-government strategies such as the Justice Strategy to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will facilitate this. Whether the Magistrates Court Services is the most appropriate location to enable the CJG Program to have a whole-of-government impact should also be considered.

Empowering CJGs with data

Recommendation 17. That DJAG provide CJGs with data that will assist them in planning and evaluating their activities, including annually presenting QWIC data about Indigenous involvement in courts at CJG locations, and annually sharing QWIC data with each CJG about their court location, compared with averages for other similar locations.

There are untapped opportunities for CJGs to make better use of available data to improve their planning and evaluation of local responses to justice issues.

YOUR STORIES

Story 1

Speaker 1 Could you sum up one positive story or a good outcome from one of your programs; something from one of the Murri Court client's experiences?

Speaker 2 One Murri Court client's experience I've been working with is a young person, just aged 24. He's obviously had a little period in custody for a month due to selling drugs and using. But since his incarceration, he's been put on probation and parole. He's been working with us now for well on eight months and is remaining abstinent from all drug use; he's changed his life. And he's also been able, him and his partner, to regain their children's custody from DOCS during that period. Thanks to Murri Court support, along with my support and probation and parole, he's been able to access a psychologist for his grief and loss and trauma histories. He's had a very prejudicial childhood, as most of our cohort has.

It's remarkable what he's been able to achieve, putting his family back together and securing housing and part-time employment, which should lead to full-time employment for him. He's a regular attendee at the CJGs Men's Support Group and regularly links in with the Elders for support when he needs a little bit of extra support. I think he's a really good role model for the young people of his age group. He's done remarkably, keeping his family together.

And you know, without Murri Court support, he would have potentially been in custody for 3 to 5 years and wouldn't have got to see his son grow up at all.

Story 2

Speaker 1 One young bloke over there, he is a prominent Elder's son. This young fella nearly went to jail, and I was looking after him at the Men's Yarning Circle, donating my time. And that young fellow now is a lead dancer with a major dance troupe over there.

Now he's working and he's getting empowered.

Story 3

Speaker 1 We've got a working relationship with a training organisation and they host certificates; they do Certificate 3 in Community Services and Certificate 3 in Business Administration. I've had numerous clients over the years and I ask them "Is there anything that you'd like to study?", that kind of stuff? Usually I get "Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever" but I've had a couple of clients in the last couple of months [who] I've referred them onto [them] and they have taken that up.

One has just finished her Cert 3 in Community Services and the other one is doing Certificate 3 in Business Administration.

Speaker 2 And that's a big accomplishment! I know

the person they're referring to; that would have been a big accomplishment for her.

Interviewer What made that happen?

Speaker 1 Doing the entry report, I said "Is there anything you'd like to study?" And she said "Yes!" She's interested in community services and so forth. And so I give the spiel that we do have connections with a training organisation and if you'd like I can refer you onto them. And I refer them on and make all the phone calls, and she's been attending!

Interviewer And did you have to do a lot of groundwork to get to that point with that individual?

Speaker 1 Yeah, and so, I've done the referral and the initial stuff and she contacted me and yeah, she wanted to do it. So she's [been] attending and there hasn't been any need for any further contact in that regard. She's done really well!

Interviewer So she'll come back to court and you'll have a report that said that she's done really well?

Speaker 2 She was sentenced in February and she was just coming to the end of her certificates then.

Interviewer So you're able to report on her progress?

Story 10

Interviewer Is this your first time using the services of the justice group? How long have you been coming to the Mob here?

Client The justice group has been supporting me since going through this case.

This is another case that I am going through and they've been there for me. I am very happy that they help me. It helps your self-esteem. It makes me feel I can be successful with them.

Speaker 1 Thankfully because [the] Magistrate knew about that, [that] working in community services, you need a Blue Card. So, he chose not to record any convictions so that she could try to get employment.

Interviewer So that I guess proves the process can work, like the referrals. And when...you've got that rapport with that person, to be able to refer to.

Story 4

Interviewer And for you, a success story or a high point?

Speaker 2 In recent times there has been a couple. One client came to Murri Court on severe DV issues. He was working at the time when he committed these offences, he was on drugs - really heavy narcotics. But he was able to keep his job at the end of sentencing because we were able to communicate with his superannuation provider where he was able to tap into his super to then go into a private rehab.

Interviewer That's a good use of super.

Speaker 2 That was completely his decision. We weren't aware that was an option, so we were able to help him with that. He did rehab, he did it twice actually. His employer, who was a friend of his, also paid for him to do rehab, which was about \$30,000. But his employer kept him on after that, and he is

now a captain to a fishing trawler and he's out six months of a year.

Story 5

Speaker 1 Another man more recently has been in Murri Court, this is his second time. [He had] a bad, toxic relationship with a local woman and after going through couples counselling and whatnot, he has finally made the decision to break away from that toxic relationship, and now he's doing fantastically. He's going to have full time employment!

The Justice Group were able to assist him in job interviews, clothing, transport, all that kind of stuff. He is well aware that because he's a repeat traffic offender, he is at risk of losing his licence for the next 2 to 3 years. So he's doing everything he possibly can to try and keep his licence in order to keep his employment. The Magistrate is very supportive, she's doing everything that she can to assist.

Story 6

Speaker 1 We had a guy who had broken up with his partner and had little children. The partner equally had a problem with drugs and alcohol, so he and the children went to live with the grandmother. And then things went further south with the partner; he would go around and see her, and then he smashed the whole place up.

He was employed on a trawler and because [of this incident] he was locked up [remanded] because the Magistrate wanted the client to get off the alcohol. Two weeks later, I got him bail to Murri Court.

Murri Court helped him into a rehab centre, and then he successfully passed through that process. You see the importance of him doing that was because he was the father of children. So the children are beneficiaries of the Murri Court, as well as him. And he finished up going back onto the trawlers and renewed his life. And his mother while he's at sea, looks after the children.

That's the type of success we get, particularly in the area of domestic violence

Story 7

Speaker 1 ...We've got one client who I don't think is currently with Murri Court but has been a previous referral in the past. And I think he's dealing with lots of complexity and relationship dynamics in his life and significant mental health issues that go alongside that, and substance use.

I think that there have been some positive things that we've helped him do over the course of the time that he's been with us [including relapses]; I kind of see that as a positive too. He's shown he's come back and said "I want to reengage". Some of the work has been around intervention and it's mainly set in the case management sphere of work. But a couple of things were that he disclosed he was an artist and was producing these artworks kind of for himself, for his family. And I was quite keen to see some of his artwork! And so we have a magazine that we produce quarterly and it's usually made up of clients' artworks, poems, stories, writings, stuff like that. We were able to get some photographs of some of his art pieces and get it into a local magazine, which was nice. I think that was a positive thing for him.

He has come along and tried some of the groups, tried our mudmaps group, which is art and he grew. He kind of didn't think it was for him [at first] but he comes back.

Story 8

Speaker 1 He came to us for a space of four months.

Speaker 2 Yeah, he's got a good job [in community].

Speaker 3 And the other thing too, he had quite a long history of domestic violence, drinking in his school days - quite the extensive history. And then he agreed to come to Murri Court.

Speaker 2 He came for that length of time, he got sentenced and he was very happy coming here and you know, yarning, being open and sharing the way he was feeling and looking at strategies on what he could be doing now once he got sentenced and finishing. We were talking about options and he was joining in on the conversation what he would do [if he's socialising].

Because when you go along and you see your Mob there, of course you sit down and have a drink. So he would say, "Well, I could drink water, or say I don't have to drink". You know, he engaged in that conversation and then he said another thing is "I must know when to leave". He said because "Sometimes you sit there for that long and before you know it, you know you're yarning, everyone's having a good time."

Speaker 3 He [understands when he has to] leave. He says when they start to argue, he knows to walk away. It has to stop before you argue back. And he said now, after coming here, talking and seeing the ways that he has to be, what to do when temper [flares] up. By coming here and talking to us, he [knows] just walk away.

Speaker 2 And he had some good strategies himself, didn't he?

Speaker 3 Oh yeah, he is really mature.

Speaker 2 He'd go down to the water. And he said if he felt angry or didn't feel good on the day, he said he would go down the beach and look at the water. I said water is the best healing medicine and he said he got a lot out of that. And when he was in [community], because he was working round that area, there was a Men's Group. So he'd call in there.

Speaker 3 ...And on top of that, that's why he's much better at looking at things in a different way. This way, he was able to cope with this strategy he had. He told us he'd walk away or he'd sit down, he won't have to have beer.

Speaker 1 And so he went back to his family and it was working well now.

Speaker 3 [They're] in a more stable [place] now because he lives with his parents, him and his missus and three kids...even [his] parents were saying now he looks a different man. They're more supportive now. He's pretty happy with himself too.

Speaker 2 And supporting his kids to have them like every weekend when they couldn't be together...he would take the kids and they'd go fishing. He'd attend football games with them, and every weekend he'd have the kids and he'd come and tell us. [He was] always happy coming in, and telling us all of that. It's a good news story.

Story 9

Client I was homeless a couple of weeks back there and I had nowhere to go, no support, nothing, and they put me up in a motel. And that really helped me. I had two kids with me and everything. I would have been literally in jail, and just the support that they offer as well. They give me food vouchers every second week, a fifty-dollar food voucher and bus ticket. You know, so, I walk from my street to here.

Interviewer Yeah, that is a long way.

Client A long, long way and then I've got to be back in time for school runs and it's really helpful, the stuff they do.

Interviewer And have you had to go to court?

Client I've been there a couple of times. It's scary the first time because you don't know what to expect [with] all the Elders and everyone there. But it's actually pretty welcoming.

Interviewer And do you feel like you were able to be heard?

Client Yes, very much so.

Interviewer And that wouldn't happen without them there?

Client I probably wouldn't have been heard, not like that, in a normal courtroom.

Interviewer And then after that, you come here to get some ongoing support?

Client Yeah, I come here every Monday. I talk to the counsellor, so like anything that's on your mind. And yeah, we go through things that I might need support with, with Aunty and she gives me [help], telling me places I can go to get support.

Story 11

Speaker 1 It's a supportive, family environment where everybody [has] a genuine interest in how well everybody's doing. But I think that's one of the main things that I saw was the service. Users are coming here [the Community Justice Group offices] because they feel supported and they're getting positive reinforcement. They've got people that believe in them and they know that they can [and] believe that they can do or achieve their goals.

There was one service user in particular that when I first started, she had a lot of issues with alcohol and violence, and I was actually there when she had her sentencing and everybody was in tears, you know, because she had been through so much. She was an amputee and she had a lot of charges that were violent, and through her time with the Justice Group, she had stopped drinking. She was going to get her kids back; she was a changed person.

And even the Magistrate was just saying this is amazing to be involved in something like this...even he said it's amazing to see this process where the community is actually involved in trying to keep everybody uplifted and in-line.

And he was saying he would love to see more of that in the mainstream.

Story 12

Speaker 1 He was a prolific painter, his canvases were all rolled up in his cell. He didn't trust anybody with that. And when we came out [to visit the prison], he would bring his canvases to show us his latest ones and tell us stories of them. So as we grew to know where he's coming from, what he wants, we have formed a pathway for him for when he comes out. It's more than just selling his canvases.

He wasn't around when the mobile phone was invented. There were no traffic lights in his city when he went to prison. The population was small. Housing was affordable anywhere and this and that...so he's coming to an alien nation, and so he needs his people.

Story 13

Interviewer Were there any that have come out [of prison] that would even potentially form the Elders group here, or are they still quite young?

Speaker 1 There's five or six of them who would qualify as Elders. But with the police records thing, you can't do that until after five years.

Interviewer Yeah, well it's interesting because they would have a lot of the [knowledge] having been there, you know to mentor young ones that are doing the wrong thing.

Speaker 1 ...we still use them because they're related to [people within the community]. They don't have to be direct, immediate and close. Families are larger...families are more aware of each other and the steps that each one is taking through life and more prone to be able to help. [After leaving prison] each of them will come to see us. We sit down, have a cup of coffee at a shopping centre or they ring us, or whatever the need is, and we just continue the relationships, without trying to interfere with their way of life.

They're looking for a way to get back into a family or to go back to see their children, who they haven't seen for

12 years, 14 years, 16 years.

[With] the practical stuff, our artists are able to be plugged into half a dozen Aboriginal art and craft places in the city.

Story 14

Speaker 1 Another good news story; three months before that, we had an extremely difficult defendant with us for several months in Murri Court with the Elders. He had a mental problem, had tried to commit suicide. But between us and the mental health people, we brought him through. And then when he came to be sentenced after nearly six months with us, he spoke very clearly to everybody because in the Murri Court, everybody talks. It's not a silent court and the defendants are encouraged to have dialogue with the Magistrate. And he told all of us in court what his life really was like [from childhood].

And there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

And after the Magistrate's sentenced him, there was no jail or anything, it was probation. [The Magistrate] got down from his high position, puts his Magistrate's coat on the rack next to the chair, walked down, walked across to the young man, wrapped his arms around him and just hugged him and he said "Thank you, thank you."

He says, "Now I've seen the power of a Murri Court. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this privilege, because I've seen where you've come from and you've showed us that and now you've showed us where you're going to. And I know that nothing can touch you from here on. And I've been part of your life for a short time".

Very powerful.

Story 15

Speaker 1 [The client] said 'Years ago I was free; I was brought up by my Auntie, my father took me when I was a

Story 29

Interviewer What do you say to the younger generation that thinks about getting into trouble?

Speaker 1 That it's not worth it. It's just, you know, like in that life situation, life is pretty hectic. And yeah, as much as you want to be a criminal, just don't. You're basically wasting your life getting locked up, instead of learning about your history, your future, your culture, all that stuff. Instead you're wasting your time getting locked up, getting out on bail and just doing the same crime and shit over and over again.

You just get sick of it.

So yeah, just turn around or you'll get hurt.

baby.
He'd separated from his wife, my mother, and he took me because he didn't know what to do with me. And he flew me to Perth and he put me in my Auntie's arms and said "Here, look after him".

[The client continued] 'I [couldn't] do anything because he was on drugs and alcohol, and I had a wonderful childhood because my Auntie was precious. She had children who loved me even though I was very little baby to them. And I grew up in a wonderful home. I went to school and all the rest of it, so I know what a good life is. But I'm living with my drunken alcoholic father right now, and I've got nowhere to go. So I run away and I've got my mates on the street'.

So I [justice group member] said [to the client] "Well, son, we've prayed for you and only God can help you now".

So the Magistrate came and took his place in the court straight after that, and he's the hardest Magistrate in town. He just sends people to jail left, right and centre.

Story 41

Speaker 1 There's lots of men and women, mostly young men on the street. And he came up and said to me "I'm now working thanks to you and I've got a job and a steady relationship". And I said "It's really not up to me, it's you as well you know, you listened to what the Elders had to say to you about your life. Only you can change your life." And now I'm so proud of him now; he's got a job and he owns a car, he's got a relationship and he got his children back from child safety.

Speaker 2 Then we've got another young fellow that is working in the mines. He has to have time off from work to come and report for probation. But he came to us and obviously through the Men's Group, he's doing really well and he goes to court just to report.

And I looked at him and I thought "Oh, no, no, no, no". So, I whispered to him before we started and I said "The young fella, he's got an Auntie to go to whom he loves and grew up with as a baby and a child. Can you send him there?" And he gave me a big sigh and I thought, 'Oh, I've done something wrong here. You could have me for influencing decisions or whatever'. So I withdrew and stayed quiet, went through that, went through this sentencing. Then he [the Magistrate] said to the young fella, "Stand up".

He said, "Now, with all these charges that I've read out to you and you have pleaded guilty to every one of them, I'm told that you're the most prolific mischief maker in the town, if not in the whole State. What am I going to do with you?"

And they both looked at each other and [the] young fella had his head down and the Magistrate said "Look at me". The Magistrate [continued] "Look at me. I've been on the phone to your Auntie. And I am

sending you home to Perth. You ought to get on the 8:00pm plane tonight. And your Auntie's meeting you at the other end".

We just looked at him. We couldn't believe what we were hearing. We couldn't believe.

Interviewer And that's a miracle.

Speaker 1 That's a miracle that only God could do that. No man had anything to do with that. He just turned his heart, looked at him and that's the decision he made before he even came into the court. So he read our reports and he sat down on the day before and he made a few phone calls, got the whole story from the Aunt.

Interviewer And when you mentioned that he would have already-

Speaker 1 Already have made up his mind!

Interviewer Yeah, wow.

Speaker 1 But he [the Magistrate] was just grumpy with me [still]! That was who he was [laughs]. Yeah, but what he did was just amazing. And the boy, he said to the boy, "Go and hug everybody, everybody in this room. I want you to hug everybody!" And he came and hugged everybody. And I looked at him, I shook my head. And he just looked at me and he said "Thank you."

Story 16

Interviewer Thinking back on your time with [the justice group], can you tell me a good story about the work you all do here?

Speaker 1 Every week there is a good story.

I sometimes go to court and see how the Magistrate is really listening to the Elders giving the defendants a chance to speak up and seeing how empowered

they get when they know that someone is listening.

Story 17

Speaker 1 There are really a lot [of good stories]. But one I shall highlight the most [is] because in seeing her after the fact, after she had been sentenced, her journey has just blossomed. Honestly, she is just a new being. She's discovering so many new things about herself. She's become so strong in dealing with the antecedents that led to her being here in the first place.

And that's really powerful.

She's a young woman, she's 21-23. When she came to us, she was three months pregnant. She had no trust at all for any service provider. She did not want to be here. The first thing she said straight out when she sat down was "I've been to counselling before and nothing works". Right then I knew 'Okay, I have to approach this really, really gently; this is a different case'. So I said to her "I apologize for your negative experiences, I am so sorry. But if you could give us a chance to start again with you, I promise you something good might come out of it. Just give us a chance".

Interviewer And she did?

Speaker 1 She did.

Interviewer Too deadly.

Speaker 1 It took a while, though. We worked with her intensively. There are lots of times where she dropped out - I had to pull back, and just let her do that. Let her come when she felt like she wanted to come. And if she didn't, I didn't want to mandate her that she had to be here every Monday, because from the outset, she had already stated "I'm warning you, stay away".

Interviewer Yeah, don't put too much pressure.

Story 44

Interviewer Do you have any good news stories for us?

Speaker 2 I just had one come and see me this week notifying me that there's a young fella we had in court the other day. It's his first appearance and he doesn't have a history, and it was quite obvious that supervision is what this young gentleman needs. And it was suggested that he access a certain program with the assistance of the Justice Group.

He's attended every appointment and his behaviour is already starting to curtail because of the interaction with the Elders and the Justice Group in regards to being a member of the community.

Speaker 1 "Don't put no pressure on me or I won't comply with nothing you're asking me to do".

And so slowly, slowly, it took three months to finally get her back and win her trust. But when that happened, things changed. It took three months to win her trust, another three months to work with her in that trust. So she had to test us to see if we really cared, if we really mean what we're saying.

Can we really help her?

She was a traumatized child. She had a negative experience when she was younger. And from that experience, her response to anything that happened to her was one way, and that way was rage. That way was violence. And she would attack, and she would not remember a single thing; that was her coping mechanism.

To relieve herself of the guilt of the violence that she caused or the harm to another, she blacked out and it was all powerfully psychological and she slowly, slowly

unravelling and revealed all of that to us and got down to the essence. When you touch that essence in a person, they can touch it [too] and it was then [in] that last six months [she did].

Story 18

Interviewer ...you've got a good news story?

Speaker 1 Yeah, we do! There's a young girl, I don't know if she's hit 30 yet. Re-offending in the community, always smashing the police station. I work closely with the police, mental health counsellors, and we got her into rehab. Her willingness to want to go, she actually got up and went and we paid for her to go down and she stuck it out, did programmes.

We kept in touch with her and she did six or eight weeks and she's due to come back and so we're actually going to support her while she gets back on the ground to keep going and staying on that positive track. She wants employment, and she does artwork. So we're going to tap into other services [for her] as well.

Interviewer So when they get sent somewhere, you still keep in contact with them?

Speaker 1 Yeah, I did. And to my surprise, like she was texting "Thank you". She's doing fine and she was happy that she took that step herself.

Story 20

Interviewer Do you think it's working quite well? Again, you're going to them and you're getting a good response?

Speaker 1 [Police officer] Yeah, even last week, we did two mediations where the Justice Groups approached me. There were two girls, different families, feuding events, violence between them, and they couldn't get mediation between them, so they come to me and asked if I could help facilitate it.

So we went in the courthouse [where] I was an impartial

person, taking my police hat off. This wasn't a police matter; it was me helping facilitate, letting everyone talk and setting the ground rules and things like that, and just letting everyone have their say which was very effective. And that led to more information about another mediation that would have to [happen], which we did the next day, which was a lot longer.

And so the Justice Group did all the minutes, that it was their mediation, [I] was just facilitating for them, and that was the way that I approached it. My goal was to get it sorted out before the police would have to [get involved]...it was a good learning thing for me as well.

The rest of the family gets so involved in communities like this...they just hang on to the smallest little thing and they expect or if they don't get an apology, it's never gonna end. And for me...it's a quite a time-consuming thing like, everyone had their say, and not just being a bully fest against one particular [person] and that was another thing I learned, which the Justice Group was really good [at] helping me was having a support person for each side.

In this particular case, there was a large family group who were angry at one individual, and she didn't have anyone that wanted to turn up or help her so they were able to go and find other family members who didn't really have much to do with it but were able to come and at least sit with her.

They obviously know her a lot better than I could and just gave that kind of emotional side of it, and made sure that she wasn't feeling intimidated or bullied, otherwise we don't get any results out of that.

So the Justice Group is really good for that, and they were able to help me to control it. It does get quite heated at times, and I don't know everyone as [intimately] as they do so it's good for them to help me. One person speaks at a time and they were able to help run that side of it. They took the notes; I've got the report so it was really good, and I'll say to them this is my expectation of what I would like to see from the Justice Group is them try and do that themselves.

If they can't or it doesn't seem to be working, then yeah, I'll be more than happy...to come in and do that again and help facilitate but I think that community dealing with it itself with the Community Justice Group and the Elders I think is a good way to go.

Story 21

Speaker 1 A young girl, well, when I first met her, she looked scruffy, and very loud, and homeless, living in the park. We go to court and she came to Women's Group here and we were talking. She was living in the park where my sister's son was murdered, and when it was his birthday I asked her if she could go down to the plaque at that park and if she could tidy it up and clean it up for me? And she said "Yes Aunt, I will do that for you", and she had tears in her eyes.

And then I was in court the day she came to court, she looked so lovely, clean! And she said "Aunt, I don't live in the park no more. I've got a roof over my head". She was so happy, she came up and said "Aunt, I done what you asked".

She's been clean for three weeks, and just a whole different personality; doing voluntary work, giving food to the homeless people, she has turned her life around! She is the homeless expert [for an] organization; she knows where they hide and where they live. I think it was very healing for her to give back, to help people. And she couldn't stop thanking us enough, I was so amazed. She has been with us on and off since 2021 and dealing with the substance abuse and being on the streets...she has got support here and has been giving counselling here with stakeholders and seeing psychiatrists.

We also took her to housing to apply, and got some temporary housing at some stage. It was a very slow process, she kept saying "I'm getting ready to get off the drugs and get off the street". We can give them so much, but it was up to her. But she said a lot of her motivation was because she found people who believe in her.

She said "All you guys believe in me".

Story 22

Speaker 1 There was a guy that I was involved in with the Murri Court a little while ago now, and his offending was fairly complicated. He has an acquired brain injury, quite a severe one, but it's not evident when you talk to him. And I actually went along to court in this case, and I gave evidence on his behalf and the Magistrate was teetering on whether to actually jail him and it would have been for a fairly long period.

So when I went along and I explained the impact of this particular acquired brain injury, and how it manifests in this person's behaviour and then what he needed, going to jail wasn't going to help him. You know, he would still have the problem after he came out. My suggestion was that he really needed a neuro-psychosis, psychiatry possibly and NDIS support, and that means support in the community. And they can address some of those issues because it's related to his disability.

So my evidence actually saved him from going to jail, the Magistrate actually said that.

Which is a major impact when you think about it, because the consequences of that person going to jail would be that - and it was not for a short time you know - the Magistrate was looking at about five years; that's pretty major. And you know, that person going to jail would not have addressed those health concerns at all. [He would have] come out the same person as when he went in. None of his criminogenic needs would have been met. Instead, we've gone down another pathway for him and putting this in his applications and getting community support workers to work alongside him. At the moment, that person actually has a job and he's doing quite well.

So instead of putting him in jail, which really for the community has no value whatsoever in addressing his needs, he's actually working, paying cheques and

doing the right thing.

Story 23

Interviewer What's a positive story that you could talk about with the Justice Group and a client?

Speaker 1 Through Murri Court, this client has a long history. I think when he was young, he got into fights and...was put in jail for a long time, nearly ten years or something. Anyway, he came out [as a] big drinker, homeless, sleeping rough, couch surfing.

So [something we] do is we run two barbecues [to encourage] our clients to come to us. It's hard [with] a lot of them homeless, couch surfing...[they] find it hard for them to keep appointments and stuff. So we thought "Bugger it!" What we're going to do, we're going to go and bring our service to them! So that's why we have two barbecues, on a Monday at 9:00am and 3:00pm. We thought, "Well they're not coming to us, they're finding it hard to come to us and everyone else with the homeless, so we will come to them!"

We had that for just over a year and it's great. That's where [this client] started hooking in with us, because every Monday morning we're there. Anyway, now he's had a baby. He's met a girl that is in rehab, they've just had a baby. I wish I could show the photos, like he's doing so well. You know, it's been his journey to get clean...and now he's sober. He's definitely struggled six months ago, was struggling a bit, but he only drank once or twice. His whole outlook on life has just changed...even hearing him talk, "I've got a purpose in life", becoming the man that he always knew he could be.

Story 59

Interviewer What did you enjoy about the role?

Speaker 1 Well yeah, it's about working in community, and working with and trying to make that difference. Seeing a client when they want to come back or that they've learnt something, you can see it in them when they're interacting with people or the Elders and other communities.

That's rewarding.

Like, there's some people that are still struggling out there with drugs and alcohol, also with crime...but they're still getting these little wins in life. And that's the stuff that they remember. And that's one like I'm so glad that we don't have to have this certain amount of work with people because often it takes time, and even [with] those little wins, they remember that and we celebrate with them.

And that's the stuff that they remember.

Story 24

Speaker 1 We had one of our young fellows come through...very traumatised.

This young boy is very traumatised, hasn't had a lot of family connection around him. And it's thanks to the Elders Group that he's actually been connected. [My colleague] rings me or I ring her and say, "Hi, sis. What can we do? Can you come and talk to such and such, you know?" She rings them when they're in youth detention, you know, so our relationship is very open. And that young boy he was in a bad way. But because the group is here, because our Elders are here, he's seems different. I see him all the time, I see him every week just about, and I've noticed a change in him.

He's just connected.

Story 19

Speaker 1 We helped a lady that was coming into the shelter pretty much every weekend. We've gotten her help, she was an outsider [but] now we've gotten her help to get her back home.

And we've been keeping in contact with the other shelters down in the city for her to see if she's been doing okay. But when we had her here, she was engaging with other services and stuff.

And I felt very proud of her for doing that.

And it's really nice to see, because this little boy went through a lot of stuff. But you know, because [the Justice Group] were there. And I just remember I said, "Oh sis, let me give him a call, let me yarn", or they ring [the justice group coordinator] and it's really good.

It's good to see that everybody is slowly working together because before, we were all disconnected.

Story 25

Speaker 1 I profiled the Elders a couple of times, I generally do good news stories about them anyway because they're always doing good things. Yeah, I would say that they are a positive, contributing, culturally appropriate service that is here in [our town to] everybody in the community. When you're talking about the time that Auntie [the CJG Coordinator, puts in], and where she's being pulled from pillar to post, it's because people respect her and they know about her and they know what she does.

So I think there are so many good stories to be told.

The statistics speak for themselves; when the government look at [the] statistics they know that something's being done right, cultural ways, it's embedded here. And it's at the forefront of what we do as a community.

Story 26

Speaker 1 [Murri Court participant] That's what I keep telling them, all my mates, all them young ones, just like, keep out of trouble and just keep doing, like if you got orders from the courts. Just do your orders and smash it, smash the time in and get it done and so they don't have to go back there and that's just the only good [choice], if that's the choice they want.

Interviewer It beats running around, looking behind your back all the time.

Speaker 1 Yeah nah, stuff that. Enough is enough and it gets old.

Speaker 2 [Elder] Congratulations on being this mature person that we never thought would surface, but you're there. You're one of the good luck stories. Some of your counterparts are still inside and look where you are, turning your life around and that's good, that shows being positive now to the future.

Well, I'm very proud of you.

Story 27

Speaker 1 Yeah, I want to turn my life around instead of being a badass, little gang fan or gangster.

Interviewer Can I ask you a question? If you'd never had the Elders and even like your Justice Group member helping you, where do you think you'd be? If you never had the support of all these people and kept on getting into trouble, where do you think you'd be?

Speaker 1 Probably in jail.

Interviewer And who would that benefit? Who would you hurt?

Speaker 1 Probably most of the people that trust me to be good, that trust me not to let them down basically.

Story 28

Interviewer So what did you have to do to get there?

Speaker 1 I just stuck to myself and didn't want to get in trouble no more, just wanted to stay good and continue.

My life has been good.

Story 30

Speaker 1 Yeah, the habit was like the community and the people that own items and stuff that criminals like to take it, which is I used to be one, but yeah, I did my sorry business. Now I want to just

help them and help the community, give back to the community.

Interviewer So what you're saying is that some of the criminal activities you've done, you went back to the people that you took stuff from and you apologised?

Speaker 1 Yeah, I said sorry to them.

Interviewer And now you're involved in community work and that's part of going back?

Speaker 1 And just getting that in my head, basically don't do it no more.

Story 31

Speaker 1 [Elder] You know, you're one of our good luck stories? Say to yourself, long after we're gone, I'd like to see you sitting there and doing what we're doing.

You show a lot of wisdom coming from a young age.

Speaker 2 Spins me out like, my age, things that I've done and learned. I've been told and I listened and learned; it's been good.

Story 32

Speaker 1 [Murri Court Participant] Every black kid needs their freedom but the same time, whatever their situation is, whatever they're going through, sometimes they can't help themselves. Then, the police be knocking at your door and you know, you're under arrest - you're taken.

Interviewer Why do you think our young people are doing it?

Speaker 1 Probably for joy, laughter; it's that adrenaline rush.

Story 33

Speaker 1 Nah, well, my mates, I've told them, "Keep on stealing cars, you're going to keep on ending up in jail!" Every time when I talk to my mates [I ask] "What are you doing?" and they'll say "Nah, I'm waiting to get out so I can like try and get a job, try to do my resume". Like yeah, that's good, I haven't heard like, you don't talk about crime no more, [he] wants to get his life on track and yeah that's the way.

They're all adults now; being drug dealers gets you nowhere in life.

Interviewer Do they say that, you know, they want to get a job and that because they're sick of going in?

Speaker 1 They're sick of going in and yeah, just don't want to be bad role models to like their, nephews and nieces.

Interviewer What else could the Elders do for you, this community, not just for you, but for the community? Is there something that's missing that they could do?

Speaker 1 From my past year, they have helped me out a while, but it is up to them, it's up to the like the young ones. If they want to go see the Elder, just like it was my choice to go see them because I wanted to.

And not only that, it was about respect.

And they didn't judge me.

Story 34

Speaker 1 [Elder] And just listening to you talk now, you have a lot of confidence compared to a couple of years ago. I remember going into court in and the Magistrate and the prosecutors wrote him off, they wanted to lock him up. Look at you today!

Speaker 2 [Former Murri Court Participant] And they can't lock me up now.

Speaker 3 They won't be able to lock you up because you're on the straight and narrow.

Speaker 2 Yeah, I was hooked on drugs.

Story 36

Speaker 1 Following a call to update the CJG on an NDIS meeting outcomes, we discussed two young people who had been involved with the CJ system. They have ceased offending and are working. One is also taking his sister under his wing to encourage her to give up her offending ways, the other is trained and employed as a barista.

Story 37

Interviewer So how many years have you been involved with the client, getting [him] up to where he is today?

Speaker 1 [Elder] Three, three and a half - four years.

Interviewer So you're proud of where he is when he comes in here now?

Speaker 1 Oh yeah, it's not the same. I mean, he was constantly in and out of court.

Interviewer And how does that make you feel as an Elder of this community, especially a male?

Speaker 1 I feel good because I know the client is doing a great job. The CJG has more contact with them than I do. I come in on the days they need interviews or courts and all that. But yeah he's come a long way, it just makes you feel proud you're part of the system that's helping him.

Because I'm a street kid, you know? When I grew up, we didn't have that support in our days, but the support we got now, it's amazing.

Story 38

Speaker 1 [Magistrate] I think the work that's being done in [this town] at the moment by the Justice Group there is pretty good. I did ultimately receive a report at the end. It was written about a child I sentenced in Youth Murri Court last Friday, and it did provide a bit more information about their family situation, how they were connected with some of the Elders in the Justice Group and to [their home community]. It did really help, I have to say, when it came to determining the sentence for that young boy.

But I think more importantly, the work the Justice Group had done with that boy, had made some really amazing changes. They were only connected with them for about eight weeks. And this boy showed such amazing respect. He stood up at the end and he thanked them, he hugged them all. I think he made some really good connections with family that he felt he would be ashamed to meet with, but ultimately they made it a really great experience for him.

And we're hoping that that sort of continues on with two more girls due to be sentenced soon with. They've managed to get them back at school. One of them has got a job, so it's kind of some really good behind the scenes stuff that they're doing there.

Story 39

Speaker 1 This woman was supposed to serve 12 months - this was many, many years ago. What she found from the Women's Group was how the ladies were listening to her - I think that's a very big gap out in the community. You're in family homes where no one listens to anyone. You know, you take that time you sit down and listen, real hard. You don't give them the answers, but you sort of encourage them to tell us what will change their way of thinking and their lifestyle. They're the ones that have to come up with answers for themselves.

So this woman went here. She was close to one of the Elders and complied with everything the Magistrate asked her to do, and was sent to Holiday Care. It's not prison - it's Holiday Care. So they get sent away for Holiday Care and after eight months they're released back into community. She came back to the news that

the Elder she was attached to had passed. And I was expecting this client to, you know, just go off or just break down or what not, but she held herself. It made me proud of her.

She held herself up, tears were coming out but she was talking, saying things like she should have written a letter to say how much she appreciated that Elder helping and guiding her along. And I think that's what motivated her to stay on the right path. She never once stopped or got side-tracked.

She now runs a Women's Group in her own community.

Story 40

Speaker 1 We had a client in his 20s who was dealing with drugs. We had a good talk with him and sent him to our Men's Group and he never missed a session. It was hard for him; he had a rocky relationship with a partner, two children and his friends [drank] alcohol. I said "I can talk to you...and I want you to meet me halfway. You got to make me understand and meet me halfway about [your drug use] what it does to you, and the craving you get when you can't get it", and he really opened up and talked to me. He said "Yeah, you know, I can get it from friends," and I said "You know, that's where you need to make up your mind. You know, with your life. What are you gonna do? You've gotta stop taking drugs because you got two children".

And his wife, you know, she never drank or anything, she was always home. It was always him that went out and partied and went back, then of course the wife sees the husband drunk. She's gonna get upset, you know? What about the children asleep? They've got to go to school [in the morning].

I can give you advice alright? But it's up to you. Eventually, he got sentenced and after that, when we went in there and the Magistrate said "What's your opinion?" and I said "Well, you know, he's come through this from when I first met him", and I just spoke about what we [the client and I] talked about. And he [the client] said "Yeah, I remember what we talked about" and I said "You've listened, which I never thought would happen [laughs]!"

Story 35

Interviewer I mean, the relationship is a unique relationship. And it's because that holistic approach of solution you're able to achieve the good results, because of the other referral services, like the medical service.

Like your client would have used a health service, and cause he came through the Murri Court system he had that support. You were able to then help him reach his goals. The medical centre supported that process, his journey.

Speaker 2 And he's not the only one.

I said to the Magistrate "I never thought that would happen", but our client, he listened to an Elder and that was really good. Couple of months later, he came up to me and said "I want to thank you. I understood what you did, for helping me through court". He said he's got a job now, he's working. I said "You helped yourself. You just listened to an Elder". That's what I would like all our young men and women to do when they come into court, you know?

He's so happy now and that really touched me to see something like that happening, he changed his life. That makes it all worthwhile.

Story 42

Interviewer What is a good news story you'd like to share with us in regards to your partnership with the Justice Group?

Speaker 2 I forgot to mention but there was a very good outcome with AODS of supporting a client. This female client decided to go to [a nearby town] for rehabilitation. At the time, she had alcohol concerns as well as concerns for her children. I was case managing and they were self-placing and in a vulnerable, very high-risk environment and also walking the streets at night.

Prior to her return, I requested some support around her two children who were facing homelessness and if the girls could reunite with their mother which they have, and the mother has placed self-protecting rules in the home and that's around drug and alcohol use.

And now the kids' school attendance has jumped from 30% to 98%, and the client's drug and alcohol use has completely diminished.

Story 43

Interviewer Do you have any good news stories?

Speaker 2 Oh, there's so many over the years! And, you know, certainly with clients I've worked with some of them from when they were teenagers to now they're adults and have their own children.

It's pleasing to see that there's been several of our Mob who when I first came on with the Justice Group all those many years ago were chronic alcoholics who had nothing. But it's pleasing to see them work closely with us and see the of input of changing their lives. There's some who've completely given up alcohol, they've got their own places to fondly call home.

So I'd like to think that we had some importance in making those changes to better their lives.

Story 45

Speaker 1 Two weeks ago, a guy came into court. He hadn't done his 100 hours community service requirements. The prosecutor was quite negative, so I talked him [the client] through the process of his new charges and the consequences, and our Justice Group member actually stood up on his behalf and said we'd help him with his resumé and were going to get this young man to turn around.

We saw the guy straight after court, had a chat with him and did him a resumé straight away. We had a contact in Port Douglas and I made a phone call promoting this

young man and [the] young guy left and an hour later they called me back and told me he can start tomorrow.

So that was really positive, really good. He's been working the last two weeks and continuing. That to me, that was really great.

Story 46

Speaker 1 [Police Officer] I suppose we have a few people in [this town] with mental health issues, and there's certainly one gentleman who is now on medication. We put him in contact with the Justice Group and came to an agreement over his charges. I can't remember whether we dropped them or we lowered them into something that reflected the fact he didn't quite understand his [mental] condition – it was affecting his mood and everything. Later, we informed the victim and they were happy to have the charges changed.

So that was one matter where we work with the client and the victim and go into consultation over charges. Obviously, we always inform the victim and explain why the charges have been changed, and especially in that case, the victim was quite happy for the charges to be changed.

Story 47

Speaker 1 One client came into the group, he had grievous bodily harm and a DV order. So when he came into the group, it was pretty hard because of his background but after we talked about things, he ended up realising he had to move out of town because of his charges, so I referred him to [the counselling service provider].

So he actually went there, and he came out of his comfort zone. Then when he came back, some of the things we tried change too, to normalise for him within community. Stuff like how to look after each other in relationships, such as doing chores because he came from background where men don't do housework.

He's noticing it in [the men's group] too, like seeing our big blokes too, they're doing the washing up, doing other [household] duties. And he does something different like every week now and he's happy to. The client even told me he's smiling surprisingly, carrying the [laundry] basket. We see this in some of the group's stories, that some of our men come from communities or different backgrounds where when young women get pregnant it's normalised in the community that the father doesn't know how to parent a child yet, because he's just left school.

Some of them you almost train them how to be a father because they don't know, like you've just come out of school, you're still a kid yourself!

Story 48

Speaker 1 I can remember one special young man [back when I was a teacher]. I taught him when he was in grade three or four.

One day he turned up to court, and some people don't know what to do when they come to court for the first time. So you might go out and say "Have you spoken to a solicitor? Do you have a solicitor?" And you just direct them to whoever and this young fella, he would have been when I taught him about 9 or 10, now he's 18-19-years-old going to court.

I knew what he was there for, but I asked him "Are you going to court today?"

He goes, "Yeah".

I said, "Have you spoken to the solicitor yet?"

He said "No".

Okay, so I go and see the Legal Aid Mob and ask "Can you do this? Do you have so-and-so today?" Sometimes they'll tell you what lawyer is representing them. And continued on with the young man asking, "Well, okay, what are you going to court for?" He's talking to me about it and I said to this young fella "After court,

come and see me". Because at that time, I wasn't the coordinator. I was just working as an admin officer. He came back and said, "I got a fine and I'm on good behavior".

I said, "Well, that's good. Now the next step is a program because it's domestic violence, we've got to look for services".

And that's the other thing that we do, we direct them to a service that they can be a part of while they're being punished. It's not a punishment per se, but it is just to help them out.

So I said "Well, there's a domestic violence program down at the rehab that runs for six weeks. And an anger management program. Go down and talk with whose down there. And if you want to be a part of it, come back and see me and we'll work out support for you. Whether you need transport or whether they want you to be there".

Interviewer And how did he respond to that?

Speaker 1 He went and signed up and he came back. And I said, "Well, how long? How many days is that a week? Are you able to make that?" He said "Yes". I told him, "Well if you do get stuck or if you ask, they got transport, they got everything. You need to keep that communication with them [and] if you can't make it, arrange for another day".

And he was hesitant at first, didn't turn up his first day but eventually did turn up. And I made it my business to go and follow up how he was going. There was something else that he needed, so then I had to then direct him to another service. You know, we can advise it but we can't make them do it. But we can say if you do this program, it'll put you in a better position.

Interviewer So this guy turned it around?

Speaker 1 Yeah, when I see him he tells me "I went today and it was good!" And that's the thing about this community; they will see you down the road. Even if you're not working, they'll have that conversation

with you, on the weekends, in your time.

Story 49

Speaker 1 One of our [CJG] staff at the moment shared a story where he had run into a participant that was going in and out of custody, had run into him down at a shopping centre and [the participant] said that because of the support that was provided around getting his mental health sorted, his drug and alcohol sorted, he was able to then identify clearly where his next steps were and to be able to get a job.

And then from that step they got his job, and he got his driver's licence and that was then able to break that poverty cycle, therefore not needing to do shoplifting.

So that was a good example of letting our staff know what they did, and how they connected those dots which for that participant played a key role in them breaking the cycle.

Story 50

Speaker 1 There have been times when the process has worked really well. It was one of our big successes when we were doing referrals, we had to get information sharing. There was a young fella referred, I think he was 17 or 16, when we first started getting referrals way back. We didn't see anything for ages the way DV referrals work - they are sort of automatic. They send one to [a counselling service provider] and they send one to us.

So we got a referral from Murri Court for this young individual. He had multiple breaches so we tried to engage but the client shut the door on us and didn't answer the phone, but I knew that individual and their community, so I said, "Look, I know this individual has worked with [the provider] over there. Let's reach out so that they are included in our information sharing".

So we did that and had a really good outcome.

The client and their partner actually separated, but it meant that his partner got to keep their baby. If they had stayed together, if they hadn't come to that realisation separation was necessary, their child would have been taken. So it worked out positive for them and we didn't have anything for him for 12 months when he had 8 referrals in the year prior.

But it was that information sharing and being able to leverage off the court's relationship and having a little bit of a stick helped us get that young man through the door.

Story 51

Speaker 1 We've had one client that I have sat in on a couple of sessions with. He's pretty good with artwork so the Elders have said to him, "[Are you] interested in doing stuff for yourself in the art world?"

I have another client he's also an artist, and at the moment he's doing artwork at one of the motels around here. You know, it gives them a chance to show their work as well and it keeps them engaged and it keeps them busy. And, you know, and it makes them think? He also said to me he paints cups or hats or anything and he gives them to people who have helped in his journey, which is I think a really good way of thanking them.

Story 52

Interviewer Can you share an example of where something has worked really well and you've come away from a situation thinking that was really important that we had the Murri Court, or the Elders or Community Justice Group members involved in this particular situation?

Speaker 1 [Defence Lawyer] Well, I had a client who was very close to going to jail.

He was actually in the watchhouse and when I reached out to Aunty, who was the previous coordinator, she knew the client quite well and was

willing to come to court for the bail application process and she said “I’ll support him if he’s released on bail, I’ll make sure [things] gets to his mail address and I’ll check in on him all the time and he can rely on me to support him for things as far as he goes through the Murri Court process”.

The coordinator being there from day one, being able to say they’ll be on board with helping him to comply with his bail conditions and then beyond that was important, as well as the follow through. He was referred to...drug and alcohol counselling. He was able to get some support in relation to his housing and getting his partner off the lease as they couldn’t live in the same house anymore.

He was able to go through the Murri Court process which was about a six month process for him, possibly longer. But in the course of that, we linked him in with legal representation for his Child Protection matters so that he could get access to his children again, which was a huge thing that was preoccupying his concerns.

The coordinator of the Justice Group was involved in that referral process as well. It’s a really good outcome for him because in the end, he ended up in a much more stable place out of the relationship that had become very toxic and also back seeing his kids, hopefully on the road to reunification and not in the correctional centre.

Story 53

Speaker 1 Our CJG has developed a good relationship with the representing solicitors and have familiarised ourselves with the Magistrate.

Attending interviews with clients at court or with the solicitors to help them understand the court language has allowed our people to become more informed of charges, and thus reducing sentencing, the dismissal of charges, and [proven] a model of working together.

Story 54

Speaker 1 Our Elders visit people in custody to provide

moral, cultural and practical support.

The Elders attend special events such as NAIDOC and also provide those in custody support with Sorry Business. An Elder made a connection with a prisoner who was due to be released soon. The Elder was able to link the client with a Men’s Group and counselling when he returned to community.

The client has not reoffended and attends Men’s Group weekly.

Story 55

Interviewer Can you think of an example where the Community Justice Group has had a really big impact on a person going to Murri Court?

Speaker 1 Many! From people with a substance abuse problem to finally owning up and going to rehab. Like how are we going to make that happen?

Again, it comes down to respect and sitting down with people that actually care.

Story 56

Speaker 1 Time and time again, and each case is different. But one that sticks out to me is a young woman – she was always in trouble. Her family had written her off, even though she has children who were at risk of being removed. So we take her through the court process – the Aunties and the Justice Group fought for her and something clicked inside her that they were the first people to fight for her. It changed her.

It was like, “Well, this is my behaviour that’s doing this. I’m not just ‘poor me down on my luck’ I’m making this happen myself”. So going through the program, I think she was in there for two sittings, so she now had two months worth of ‘This is what you have to do every week. And if you fail that, you’re not coming back to Murri Court.’ And then, we got her counselling both financial and emotional, drug and alcohol, and also another agency to help her get her children back. In

partnering with other organizations, she saw so many people helping her, which was good but also helped her see ‘I have a problem, and I’m the problem and blaming everyone else but myself’.

But those other agencies were able let her know, no one is here to give you a hard time.

Story 57

Speaker 1 Certainly you experience a beautiful ending with a client whose coming into sessions amazingly. We go through it with them, we’re able to get the right amount of time to take counsel, to have a yarn. I remember once a client saying to me “I’m done. I finished [completed their orders]” and I said “Well done and I’ll see you when I see you”. Even that little exchange was almost emotional, but I had to be strong even though I’m weak [laughs]! With tears in my eyes, I said, “Hey, it’s whatever. You have to make your life happen now, and remember we’re always open. You can come back” and he has.

Speaker 2 I can say that through all the different family members that touch base to say what’s happened, the real stories that we hear come later about how somebody landed on their feet or they just went forward. And you know, in the Murri Community, we can never be too far apart from each other. Otherwise, that was one of the strongest ones I think we’ve come across since. That person came right to the end of it all, did what they had to do, and took the initiative to go on and move and to make the right choices and tell us regardless “I’m not very good at saying thank you but thank you”.

It was wonderful.

Story 58

Speaker 1 [Murri Court Counsellor] In one of the first initial assessments I’d done with this particular client... there were lots of the notes on their life.

And I said, “I’ve read bits about you, but I want to hear

from you". That's when we did talk about him coming from lockup, and doing silly things around drinking. When we really unpacked it though, it was grief. His actions came back to loss, the loss of a very big support group, of people that had died. To unpack that, it took months and even say [learning] the terminologies, we're going to look at CBT to work with changing thoughts. Changing thoughts can result in new actions and that really took a lot of time.

We would use what a person was really into - walking down by the river was what this person was into. Then I said, "I'm going to go through with that with you, even though I'm not a walker!" Anyway, it was extraordinary because the client realized that it was better to be outside doing this than in lockup.

The routine became very simple, almost automatic; they'd come to see me, then to see another member and that would be their day. I remember saying to the client "We don't have to have it where you live in fear or you live with anxiousness so you don't sleep... And I know you've had to go back home and you're back with the crew, whoever that may be. There's no judgment on me from here if you've gone back into something that you're familiar with".

And we spoke openly afterwards, and it felt like I'd known this person for 20 years because the conversation really started to evolve from all that walking. It's better for us to be doing this, than sticking them in different jails - that was a big realization.

Once, they did disappear on me....I thought, 'I'm not going to panic. I won't panic...I don't and I won't chase' or 'This doesn't need reporting'. But clients need to understand that if I don't see you at a session, then this can become red pen kinda stuff that affects funding.

But I want clients to understand that I want them to decide and not let it go too long because that's when the panic really *does* hit. Sometimes, you do get those disappearing moments. But when they come back, I ask "What can you do differently next time? You don't *have* to disappear".

They felt shame and guilt. It might've been they went back to their original crew who they used to run with and that group challenged them after hearing [how the client] is sobering up or healing themselves. The client asks if I'm going to get angry now but I tell them "This is your story. This is you. All we can do is guide you in the boundaries of what we're able to do". That experience was one of the big ones, [seeing the client] cherish the positive change of choosing to live instead of just choosing to exist.

Story 60

Speaker 1 The CJG were working with me before I got released, working with me in the prison, getting me ready and making plans for changes on the outside. Look to a positive future and that for me. They were a good support, checking on me, ringing me up and asking if I need any help?

Interviewer Had you ever thought about reaching out for help before or was this the first time?

Speaker 1 It was the first time. I was having a yarn on the inside and then they referred me to this program, the [Culturally Engaged Release for Indigenous Parolees] program.

Interviewer Do you feel comfortable now with them being here to help?

Speaker 1 Yeah, and they help me with everything, like even transport to work like I'm having trouble getting to work, so they took me out there.

Interviewer What were you doing before you went into jail?

Speaker 1 You know, I was trying to pick myself up. I was doing a little bit of positive stuff, but then I got snatched again to that negative side. You know like, I was trying to get on my feet and it just came back and everything just went downhill - arguments, drinking, domestic violence, crime. I was in and out of prison for a little while.

Story 61

Speaker 1 These Men's Groups are good; going along to listen and pick up some life skills and things you need to hear.

These are things you need to know - education, something you can use in the future.

Now I'm making making mature choices. I want to change, because I've been on the bad side.

Story 62

Speaker 1 [Court Stakeholder] I just want to share the good news story we had with the Justice Group's involvement some time ago, about 2021.

We had a young person in the High Risk Youth Court who was returning to court on a continual basis and through the involvement of an Aunty and the Justice Group, we were able to see a really good outcome for him, where Aunty was able to link him in with her sister, who was a foster carer down in the Burdekin, which has since seen a virtual turn around and offending has completely come to a halt.

To me, that really cements the importance of the Justice Group's involvement in the High Risk Youth Court space.

Story 63

Speaker 1 We go and do video link. We sit with them and yarn to them.

Story 64

Speaker 1 There's this young boy; [his community] didn't want him, neither did his mum want him.

He stole a vehicle here in town, and he's just 11 years old. We found a carer for him and today, we see that young boy doing so well. His attendance at school is 90%, and he also goes to church. That's more than you could ever ask for, that's better than anything. He has just improved out of sight; he's got the Deadly Choices, shirt, bag, books, everything.

And they also raised him up another level at the high school.

Mainly, when I ask them kids, "What do you want to be when you stop, you know, doing crimes? What do you want to do?"

They say, "Oh, we want to be footy players!"

Some say they want to work at mines or something, so I'll talk to them saying "Well, first thing you need to do is get education because education is the main thing that will get you anywhere". So we got really good progress from that, like three years ago when I was talking to this young fella - he was about 16 - and when I did my sitting last week, I got told that he's actually working at in the mines now.

So he did good, and I was really proud for that.

Story 65

Speaker 1 We had a young lady who came through Murri Court. She was very quiet, didn't speak much and always had her head down when she was in that courtroom. She also had alcohol problems.

When she first came in, she was hungover to the point where she had to go lay outside. We could see what

alcohol was doing to her, because that alcohol got her into court in the first place. I can't remember how long she was with us for - I think it might have been over six months? - anyway, she was attending Women's Group and was attending ATODS. It took a little while for her to really engage with those services and [the Aboriginal health service] as well as counselling.

It took her a little while, but we had to keep her going. She's a special one; some of our clients need that extra little push, to the point where you can't help but get personally involved. So you're like, "Come on, I'll come pick you up now, let's go!"

What we want to do is, we want our clients to be independent, being able to make their own appointments, get themselves there. But there are them special cases where we have to go that little extra mile with them. She come through Murri Court, attended Women's Group, and we had a camp at the junction for the women and she came along and she brought her niece. Her son was still out west living with her sister or grandmother at the time, and they wouldn't let her have anything to do with him, so she was also battling that. And I think that's what drove her to, in turn, the drinking and all that. She had a really, really good time at the camp, and I remember her at sentencing.

At that time, she stood up tall and Auntie said to her "Now you speak up there, lift your chin up". She stood up tall, and she was talking to the Magistrate at some point and she got a really, really good outcome. I think she got good behaviour or something like that. But she also got employment with the mines while she was in Murri Court as well.

And from what I know now, she's still doing great.

Story 66

Speaker 1 [Judicial Officer] I think it's like any rehabilitation court; you get some really good stories and some really bad stories, but if you can get a good outcome, then it's worth it.

One good outcome is from some years ago. I dealt

with two cousins who were charged with ram raid; they had used a car to ram into a shopping centre to the ATM machine. It was very serious and they were looking at probably 2-3 years in prison. They went through Murri Court and they had done exceptionally well, completely rehabilitated themselves, that [the outcome] was that they didn't get jail. They used that process, and the process changed them.

If you have that one change, it's worth it.

Story 67

Speaker 1 [Judicial Officer] Probably the best news story I've had was a young bloke who used to move between [regional areas]. He was only 12 or 13, just running absolutely wild. And he had a cousin about the same age, perhaps kinship cousins? And this young bloke was on a road to nowhere. There was a bail application and I said, "Where could I send him? He can't stay out of trouble". Auntie flagged with me that she had a foster carer in [a rural town] with a vacancy and offered for this kid to go down there.

Now he didn't want to go - he was blowing up. He was persuaded to give it a run for a couple of weeks or he wouldn't have got bail otherwise, so I gave him bail to go and live with the carer. Within 5 minutes, they had him enrolled in school, kitted [him] out in a new school uniform, enrolled in a footy club. They're even taking him to church on the weekends!

I didn't see him for weeks or months [at court]. The only drama was when they came up here for a free carnival once, and he caught up with his old crowd and did a runner for a week, got into a bit of trouble. We tracked him down. Eventually, I gave him another chance on bail, he went back to the carer.

I'm told at the end of last year he was getting awards at school for how well he's been doing with his schoolwork. That's nearly 12 months now! Now, that is just an amazing turnaround. Conversely, his kinship cousin, who is still left here with the

together

stronger

always

same dysfunctional environment, is still spinning around in circles. Now, that was directly through [the Elder's] involvement, referencing the foster carer.

I would not have believed it possible - that kid was in so much trouble before! And I think it's just an example of if we can get someone involved who's got time and interest and is motivated.

Now, he speaks up and want to advocate for himself. And I remember Auntie one day telling him that she was relying on him to be the first Indigenous Prime Minister. I've used that line with him when I've seen him. There's a lot of people here expecting a lot of you.

But he's on a pathway now that keeps going; he's going to turn his life around and it's just incredible.

Story 68

Speaker 1 [Judicial Officer] Another young bloke who again, was up to his armpits in trouble and he went to a kinship grandfather at [a rural town] who had a property outside of there where he was building some sort of camp there that schools would be able to have kids go and attend there.

But this kid went with him out there, and when he came back to see me a month or so later for sentencing, I would not have recognised him. He'd had a haircut, and they'd stopped [in town] and bought him a flash white shirt and a tie.

And they prepared a book of what he'd been doing over the month. And I had photos of him working on this property and interacting with the animals out there, going into town, to the movie festival that was rolling through.

And both his kinship grandparents had done the road trip from [where they were living] with him to bring him back to court for sentencing.

But again, another young bloke where his life has turned around so much that you wouldn't have recognise him.

We need people doing that sort of work.

Story 70

Speaker 1 There was one guy who was telling his story - he actually had an argument with his sister, it was a DV matter. He had depression and I asked him, "Have you ever wanted to commit suicide?"

And he goes, "Yeah, I have".

We immediately reached out to [a local service] and their counsellors I said "Look, we've got really good counsellors here that can help you through this". You know our Mob don't do counselling well, they think it's a 'Shame Job'. Anyway, he agreed to do it which is a good first step.

But will they keep it up?

When I started seeing him in court, I could see these changes to him, looking better, looking more confident. When we did the final interview - because that's really the time when we all sit down with them again, before they're sentenced - we said to him, "How's that counselling going?"

"So I'm still doing it," he said, "And my family said to me, 'What's happening to you? You're a changed person'". And he said, he agreed. He said, "But I never told them that I'm doing counselling". And I thought that was fabulous; he's allowed to keep that to himself, even though he made all these changes.

Now he's formed a relationship, he's having a baby, he moved out of town because it's more peaceful for him. He made some major changes in his life, all through Murri Court really.

We had another bloke that we did the same for, we said to him, "What about counselling?" And he agreed to it. And what he did was he told his whole family, he was like "I'm having counselling, you should have it too!" He reckons to his whole family, you know, "Look what they've done for me!" He was much more open in

Story 69

Speaker 1 I love seeing people complete Murri Court. They come out at the end of it, and whatever punishment they get, they rehabilitate themselves and the look on their face and in their eyes is that they are really very proud of themselves.

Some of them might reoffend a few months down the track, but they've got that first experience to fall back on because they know that they have done it, and okay, they stuffed up, but they can come back from this.

embracing it.

It's the type of program that you know, we don't want to set you up to fail. We want to make sure you get something out of this as well.

Story 71

Speaker 1 I know one client was 100% looking at jail time. He'd gone through the mainstream court - he had some really serious offences. Granted, they were all still in summary jurisdiction, but some definitely would have seen him do jail time and he had a really poor history of compliance with orders which didn't help him, and I was quite sceptical of him being referred across to the Murri Court.

At one point I think I did mentally write him off because of lack of contact and then he resurfaced some months later and somebody made the decision to send him back and fortunately for him we gave him that go.

He really changed his life around because of that engagement with the process.

He got straight in and engaged completely with [the counselling service] and he and the Justice Group developed a really close relationship and whenever there were any concerns, whether it be relapse or reoffending or housing issues or lack of food or anything that was kind of popping up along the way, we'd jump in. He was probably on term for a good 18 months, so way longer than normal, but he really made the most of that whole period. Everybody would kind of rally to address whatever crisis issue had appeared, and some of the times those were really serious!

Like he was subject to a home invasion at his house at one point, and there were real concerns that police would arrest him for being non-compliant with his bail, given his history of compliance with bail. He was intimidated physically on one occasion because someone was upset he wasn't purchasing drugs anymore; you know, *really* serious things were happening.

Now he's in stable accommodation, he's been clean now for some months. He is studying science at uni and finished his first semester before we sentenced him, so he did a bridging course. Prior to that, he hadn't completed high school so him completing his first uni semester is just a huge turnaround and his sentence reflected the significant contribution of his own rehabilitation.

He's probably one of the biggest success stories I've seen.

And to think I had absolutely no confidence at all that he would be successful at one point?

He is certainly a shining star now.

Story 72

Speaker 1 The autistic client was charged for aggression and appeared in Court.

The CJG with the help of client's carer was able to provide a submission in Court which resulted in the charges being dismissed.

Story 73

Speaker 1 [When new staff start at our CJG's auspicing organisation], I talk about Murri Court and I say "This is my main role. If you want to come and have a [look at Murri Court], please do".

And a lot of them have; they've come and they've had a look at it and one of them said that was too emotional for her and she was crying, you know?

We do have tears but we have a lot of laughter in our court too like the magistrate, you know, she'll have a bit of a giggle about things and yeah. I remember one client after he got sentenced and I did the sentencing survey with him, he said to me, he said, "Aunty, that's the first time a magistrate has ever smiled at me."

And he was 25. He'd been in the juvenile justice, in and out of juvie, his whole life.

Just that one little thing, hey? Just that one little thing can make a difference.

I haven't seen him re-offend since.



WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY JUSTICE GROUPS UNIQUE



LOCALLY LED 01

Grassroots efforts underscored by culturally informed approaches allows CJGs to address issues that contribute to offending in Indigenous communities and offer targeted and sensitive prevention responses as a result.

Over the three years, the evaluation team has heard many examples of how innovative local initiatives by CJGs have impacted positively on Indigenous community members.

CREATIVITY 02

CJGs have shown creativity in pursuing practical solutions to risk factors for offending.

This level of holistic understanding in tackling longstanding issues persisting in community enables CJGs to identify specific risk factors and confront them in a way that supports an offender without incurring negative contact with the justice system.

TRAUMA 03

Emphasised to the evaluation team is the continued lack of responses to and recognition of trauma, and it's unfortunate place within

Indigenous communities.

As it is poorly treated, trauma continues to be the underlying cause of offending behaviour for many Indigenous people, fuelled by a lack of approach focused on healing and cultural strengthening. Both are critically needed, not only to break the cycle of offending for people within the court system, but also to prevent people from offending in the first place.

04 EMPOWERMENT

Justice Groups see their role as more than just supporting people to understand and navigate the justice process. Elders and staff want to empower their clients to have more control and self-determination in their lives, so they can make better decisions and forge a better future for themselves and their families.

05 NAVIGATORS FOR A COMPLEX SYSTEM

The stories illustrate that CJGs play a very important role in helping their clients navigate the service system to get the help they need. CJGs take a 'person-centred' rather than a 'service-centred' approach, which means they can create

bridges across the often disjointed service system, where services often operate in silos. By helping their client access many services, CJGs can provide 'wraparound' support to meet their holistic needs.

06 RELATIONSHIPS

The critical element for Justice Groups' success with clients is relationships that the staff and Elders and respected persons develop with the clients they are supporting. These relationships are based on cultural connection, respect, trust and compassion, and are the key to unlocking possibilities for clients.

For example, trust means that clients can be persuaded to take up referrals where they would otherwise be reluctant. Cultural connection builds self-esteem and self-worth, which are the foundations for taking steps to self-help. Compassion and empathy leads to clients not feeling judged, while still feeling motivated by the knowledge that someone believes in them and cares whether they succeed or not.

The expectations of Elders can be a much more powerful motivator than the expectations of the staff within the predominantly non-Indigenous justice system.

2024



THANK
YOU

by MYUMA