



# YARNING JUSTICE

Workshop and  
Forum Report





## The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) is very pleased to present the Yarning Justice workshop and forum report.

Although most Aboriginal young people are growing up in safe and culturally strong families and communities, there is still a large portion of Aboriginal young people facing a number of significant challenges. One of those challenges we all know is the high rates of contact and continued overrepresentation in the criminal justice system where Aboriginal young people are 12 times more likely to be on a youth justice order (either community based or custodial) than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

While we are seeing the overall trend of overrepresentation steadily declining over time (mainly through decreases in areas such as first time offenders and distinct offenders) there have been increases in the number of Aboriginal young people in youth justice centres un-sentenced along with higher rates of re-offending, and also breaches of orders.

More worryingly, it is evident that the risk factors often contributing to young people's contact with the justice system (including school disengagement, mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, unstable housing, and living with family violence) are still very much present across our communities, which highlights the need for much more to be done.

In order to make the necessary inroads to addressing the drivers of contact mentioned above, there is an overwhelming necessity for investment in targeted cross-government policy and program development which

focuses on prevention and early intervention. In other words—we need to get it right at the start before it's too late.

With the support of the Department of Justice and Regulation and in conjunction with the Aboriginal Justice Forum 43, the KYC hosted the Yarning Justice workshop and forum for Aboriginal young people to look at what should be done in our communities to ensure that young people are safe, strong in their culture, and exposed to the protective factors needed to avoid contact with the justice system.

The Yarning Justice workshop and forum reflects the KYC's commitment and belief that young people should have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives and their communities—and also importantly have the platform to do so.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of the Aboriginal young people who demonstrated the courage to attend and participated in some challenging conversations. We also thank the community workers who supported the young people to attend and participate.

We trust that we have adequately reflected the real concerns and solutions raised by the young people in this report. We hope that you will read the report and appreciate the work our young people put into developing their recommendations.

**Greg Kennedy**  
Manager, Koorie Youth Council





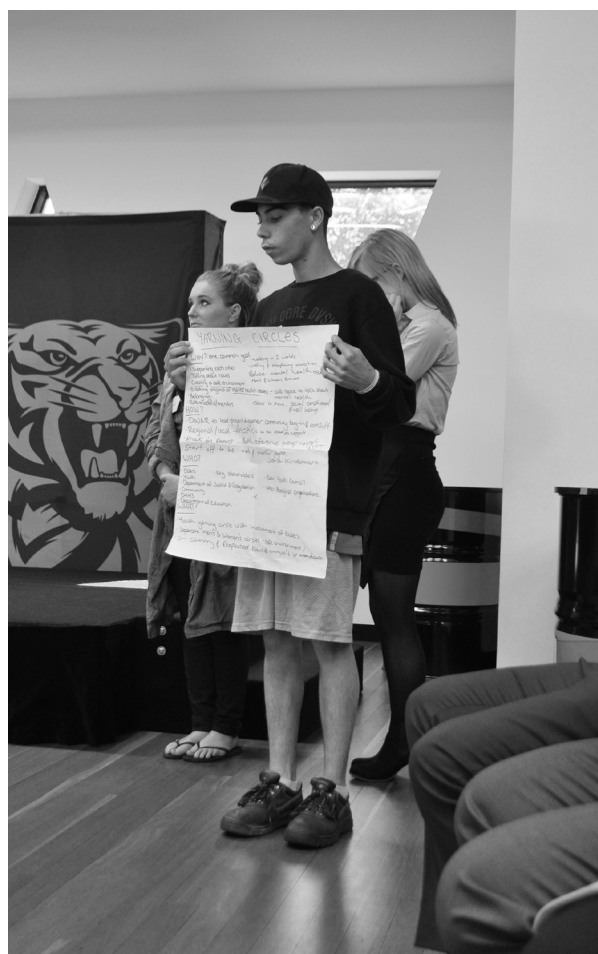


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Yarning Justice youth workshop was held at the Korin Gamadji Institute, Richmond on 29 October 2015, in conjunction with day one of Aboriginal Justice Forum 43.

Twenty-five participants travelled from all over Victoria to connect, share stories, discuss issues and ideas, work through problem solving activities, reflect, produce presentations and have fun. There has never been an opportunity before for young Koorie people to come directly to the table on justice issues and be heard. Yarning Justice provided an invaluable opportunity for representation, knowledge—sharing and self—determination within the young Koorie community in Victoria.

This evaluation is based on observations, knowledge sharing and outcome presentations made throughout the Yarning Justice youth workshop and the community forum component of the Aboriginal Justice Forum. It was designed to collect the conversations and recommendations arising throughout the youth workshop and community forum rather than to evaluate the efficacy of the sessions. Recommendations from these discussions have been made for the consideration of the Victorian Government and the Victorian Koori community.







## RECOMMENDATIONS

### YOUTH GROUPS

Culturally safe youth spaces for young Koorie people to gather, share knowledge, learn about culture, connect with services, participate in outings and celebrate being Aboriginal.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Greater relationship-building opportunities between young people and senior community members, with a stronger emphasis on cultural awareness training that includes members of the Koorie community and supports cultural understanding.

### YARNING CIRCLES

Regular and ongoing yarning circles designed to create a safe environment for young people, focusing on empowerment, mentoring and the strengthening of identity.

### CULTURAL CAMPS

Cultural camps designed to include education on different topics; as well as foster healing, the sharing of traditional knowledge and encourage community engagement.



## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

### Forum

Refers to Aboriginal Justice Forum 43.

### Koori/Koorie

The Koorie Youth Council acknowledges that Victoria is home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from many different and diverse traditional areas and language groups. We use the term 'Koorie' as inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in Victoria.

### Workshop

Refers to the Yarning Justice youth workshop.

### Young/youth

This report uses 'young' and 'youth' to refer to people aged between 12 and 25 years of age.







## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) is the representative body for Koorie young people in Victoria. Established as the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council in 2003, the KYC provides a voice to government and the wider community of the views, concerns, ideas and aspirations of Koorie young people in Victoria.

The Yarning Justice youth workshop was a one day event coordinated by the KYC in partnership with the Department of Justice and Regulation and held in conjunction with Aboriginal Justice Forum 43 (AJF43). The Yarning Justice youth workshop provided an opportunity for Aboriginal youth from across Victoria to discuss important issues impacting young people in relation to the justice system.

The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) is a formal agreement between the Victorian Government and Koori community with a goal of working together to improve justice outcomes for the Koori community. The AJA has evolved since it was reached in 2000 and is now in its third phase—AJA3. The Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) brings together senior representatives of the Koori community and Justice, Education, Health and Human Services government portfolios a minimum of three times per year to oversee the AJA. There have been 42 previous AJFs and for the first time since its inauguration, AJF43 focused solely on

young Koorie people and the justice issues affecting their lives. This provided the Koorie Youth Council in partnership with the Department of Justice and Regulation with the opportunity to organise and execute the Yarning Justice youth workshop. The Yarning Justice workshop positioned young Koorie people's voices as equally important to those of the senior representatives in attendance at AJF43. This is in part due to our belief that young people should have the opportunity to influence government and community decisions and have an opportunity to express themselves, but also due to sheer weight of numbers: 55% of the Victorian Koorie population are under 25 years old, and more than one in three Koorie Victorians are under 15 years of age. As the living representatives of tens of thousands of years of culture and history, young Koorie people are the children of their ancestors. Through the Workshop and Forum, Koorie young people were provided with an important opportunity for self-determination: to give voice to their concerns, thoughts, ideas and solutions to justice issues that affect them directly.

An important part of each Aboriginal Justice Forum is the community forum, which provides Koori community members and government representatives the opportunity to sit and talk. The community forum component of AJF43 saw the young Koorie participants in attendance at the Workshop present their outcomes and feedback from the workshop to the senior representatives in attendance and the wider Koori community. There was also an opportunity for the participants to ask questions and join in conversation with members of the AJF.





## Participant profile

The Yarning Justice workshop was youth-led and youth facilitated. Participants came from all over Victoria, represented a variety of identities and were aged between 15 and 25. Some participants were supported by parents and support workers from different organisations on the day.

Participants worked with and were supported by five youth facilitators on the day.

- Benson Saulo, Lead Facilitator
- Nada Aldobasic, KYC member
- Douglas Briggs, KYC member
- Indi Clarke, KYC member
- Cienan Muir, KYC member

## The Program

The Yarning Justice workshop was developed around overarching key thematic areas with a focus on prevention and early intervention. These thematic areas are listed below and were used as guiding themes for discussion throughout the Yarning Justice Workshop:

- Community Engagement and Cultural Learning
- Mental Health Education and Breaking the Stigma
- Creating a Safe Environment for Young People
- Creating a Sense of Belonging and Resilience

These thematic areas were developed out of information around key drivers of contact with the justice system taken from AJA3, as well as knowledge that the Koorie Youth Council has from its work with young Koorie people.

## Methodology

The participants were split up into two groups based on their preference of thematic area. These thematic areas became the focus for each group throughout the day. Within their groups, participants brainstormed and discussed key issues. The facilitators led their groups through a co-design process of active discussion, focussing on why they felt these issues existed, delving deeper to identify the underlying factors that contribute to key drivers of contact with the justice system. Young people were drawing on their own experience as a way to assist in reframing issues and challenges to focus on solutions. These solutions were then further brainstormed into how they could be implemented using the 'who, how, where, what and why' questioning strategy. After the workshop the outcomes from this process were presented to the AJF43 community forum.



A lot of people  
don't have a true  
understanding of  
mental health  
issues.

They think  
people will  
judge them!

Because they think  
people will judge  
them and treat  
them differently.

because they feel they have  
nobody to talk to or even if  
they did, whoever thinks it's silly  
or doesn't listen.

When people  
minimise your  
issue and what  
you might be  
dealing with.

I feel worried  
and scared about  
what my family  
might think about  
me.

Disconnection  
with  
Family

Family  
Violence!

Being around  
~~Vice~~ Violence  
and drugs n  
~~alcohol~~ alcohol

- Drugs + alcohol
- Disconnection  
from family  
& culture
- Stress from  
work, money  
etc.

Young people  
feel helpless  
when involved  
in FV!  
No one to turn  
to for help.

- Family Violence
- Bullying
- Drug exposure
- Unstable  
housing.

An unsafe  
environment for  
youth is when  
a young person  
is associated  
around drug &  
alcohol, ~~which~~  
~~young people feel~~

- Judgement.
- Not wanting to  
appear "weak"
- Treated differently
- Embarrassed.
- Denial





## KEY LEARNINGS

### Group 1 • Community engagement and cultural learning; Creating a sense of belonging and resilience

The young people participating in this group felt that the key issues affecting cultural learning and community participation stemmed from lack of genuine connections with community, being disconnected from culture and having a lack of resources or facilities that enabled them to stay out of trouble. This group also discussed a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding from wider society as a contributing issue affecting young Koorie people's ability to create a sense of belonging and foster resilience.

The participants felt that these issues existed because young people often feel as if they do not fit in, are too scared or ashamed to ask for help or support—or are unsure of who to turn to in order to ask. The participants also identified racism, stereotyping, lack of available information and limited opportunities such as cultural awareness training as reasons for these issues existing.





## Recommendation 1

### YOUTH GROUPS

The first recommendation arising from this group's discussion centred on a need for youth groups that could provide a culturally safe 'youth space' where young Koorie people could gather. This would provide the opportunity for information sharing, connection with different agencies, opportunities to learn about culture, participate in outings and celebrate being Aboriginal.

The idea of a mobile phone app that could link communities through information sharing was also discussed, highlighting that such an app could advertise programs and events that otherwise may not be advertised widely as well as foster connection to cultural information.

## Recommendation 2

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

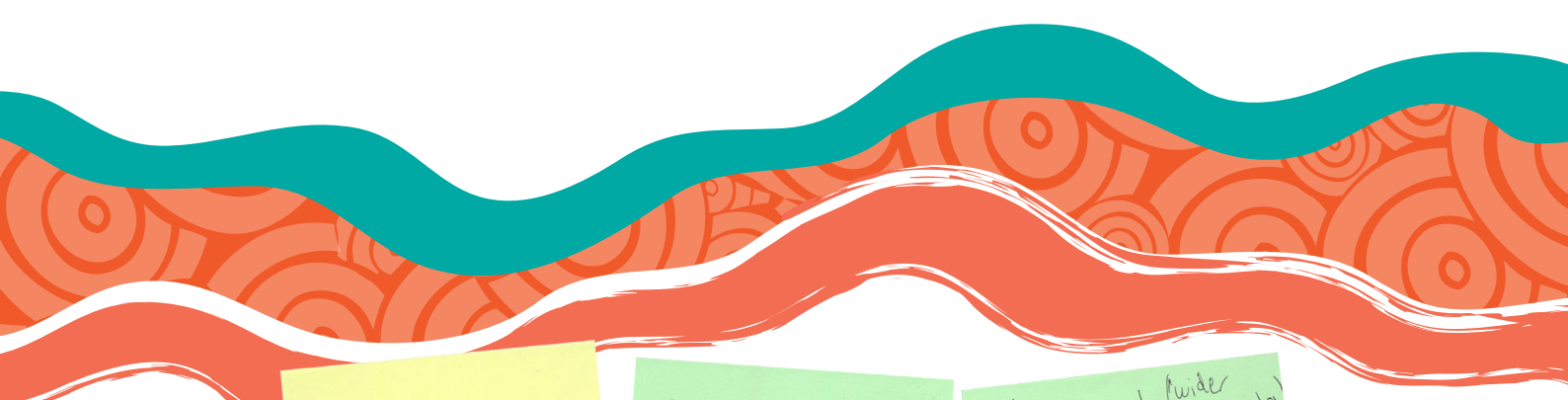
The second recommendation proposed from this group was related to addressing issues arising from gaps in cross-cultural and intergenerational understanding. The participants saw the need for support in understanding culture and feeling understood by non-Aboriginal people. The participants also felt that there needs to be support for young people to attend key events like the Murray River Marathon, which was presented as an example of ways in which new and lasting relationships can be developed between young people and senior community people (e.g. police or community leaders).

The young people in this group believed that cultural awareness training that already occurs in government departments and other sectors needs to be further embedded into the core training of these departments and held to higher accountability. This group felt that incorporating traditional custodians to run the training in local areas would be a positive way to break down barriers and stigma between young people and senior members and highlights the importance of connection to country.









Racism

Because  
people use  
stereotypes  
when they  
see me

other people (wider community)  
Question  
identity

Feel shame.

don't know  
many people

NOT feeling  
like I belong

NOT MUCH  
ACCEPTANCE  
IN OWN  
COMMUNITY  
"NOT REALLY A  
BLACK FELLA"

LOSS OF  
IDENTITY

Because they  
might be distant  
from their culture

Parents grew up not  
knowing

Some don't  
know much  
about their  
identity or  
the indigenous  
background.

Little or ~~know~~  
cultural connection

LACK OF  
INFORMATION  
PROVIDED

LACK OF  
OPPORTUNITY  
TO CONNECT





## KEY LEARNINGS

### Group 2 • Mental health education and breaking the stigma; Creating a safe environment for young people

The young people participating in this group felt that the key barriers to breaking stigma around mental health issues and creating safe environments for young people stem from identity issues and mental health education.

The participants felt that these issues existed due to problems with drug and alcohol misuse, problems relating to family violence, discrimination, ignorance from wider society and inter-generational trauma. The existing government structures that are in place to support young people in a safe environment, such as the children protection and youth justice areas, were also identified as an area of concern.





## Recommendation 3

### YARNING CIRCLES

A key recommendation that came out of this group's discussion focused around the need for yarning circles that could empower young people, providing positive role models and mentors while providing a sense of belonging and opening up conversation in order to break down stigma around mental health. Yarning circles also have the potential to strengthen identity and create a safe environment.

The young people involved in this group felt that these yarning circles could be initiated through a youth reference group that could work with the Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR) to run yarning circles with local mobs. Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJACs) could be used as support and community Elders could share knowledge on a voluntary basis. The idea was discussed that these yarning circles could be conducted on country and separated by gender in order to provide cultural safety.

## Recommendation 4

### CULTURAL CAMPS

Another key recommendation that came out of this group's discussion was that of cultural camps to provide a way for young people to re-engage with their community, strengthen and connect identity, provide healing, kinship, education and the fostering of positive social and emotional wellbeing outcomes. Cultural camps would also provide a way for traditional knowledge to be shared between generations, for young people to learn about knowledge that has been lost and to foster conversation about the concept of 'living in two worlds' and the challenges that this brings for Koorie young people.

The young people in this group felt that this could be coordinated in much the same way as yarning circles, through a youth reference group that could work with DJR, with RAJACs providing support and involvement from Elders.



The logo for the Koorie Youth Council is a vibrant, stylized illustration. At the top, a large, dark grey sun with a thick black outline dominates the upper half. Inside the sun, there are five vertical, brush-stroke-like bands of color in shades of orange and red. Below the sun, a thick, wavy teal band stretches across the middle. Underneath the teal band, a white, wavy line separates it from a black silhouette of a city skyline at the bottom. The background is a mix of orange and red, with faint, circular patterns visible in the lower left and right areas.

# KOORIE YOUTH COUNCIL





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