

2020 Churchill Fellowship
**To investigate community-led responses and
innovative approaches to the criminal justice
system – US, Canada**

Report by Carly Stanley, 2020 Churchill Fellow

Awarded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust



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THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

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Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carly Stanley', written in a cursive style.

Date 27/08/2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to acknowledge the support of my family and community and recognise my Elders and Ancestors. I stand on the shoulders of the women who came before me, to continue their work in raising strong, healthy, connected families and to fight for change for a better future for our jargums (children). As I undertake the Fellowship program and prepare my research report, I recognise the ongoing effects of colonisation, the deep trauma, systemic racism and disadvantage that has been and continues to be experienced by my community and the ongoing impacts that the imposed, colonial 'justice' system continues to have on my people.

I would like to acknowledge The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia for providing me with this amazing opportunity and the honour of being a Fellowship recipient. I am deeply grateful for this once in a lifetime opportunity to sit with justice-impacted communities across the United States and engage in a reciprocal exchange of sharing of experiences, knowledge and intentions for the future.

I would like to thank my staff at Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services for supporting me during the Fellowship program and ensuring we are able to continue to provide critical front line services to our community despite my distance. In particular, I would like to thank Lucie Zangger-Page, who at the time of the program was in the role of Office Coordinator and Executive Assistant. I'd also like to thank our Allies and Accomplices that support the work of Deadly Connections and help provide the resources needed to undertake the vital work and provide a platform to implement community led solutions for our mob.

I would like to thank the following people for their guidance and support throughout the Fellowship experience from the initial application: Thea Deakin-Greenwood (Churchill Fellow and Transforming Justice), Thalia Anthony (UTS), Steven Carauna (Churchill Fellow and Deadly Connections Advisory Board Member), Chloe Johnco (King & Wood Mallesons) and Vicky Kuo (King & Wood Mallesons).

To the many people and organisations I met with on my Fellowship program, I will thank you throughout the report, but I am grateful for each and everyone of you. I want to especially thank Pat Grace from SAVE who not only shared his work with me but also invited me with open arms into his community and family of East Harlem. Professor Stacy Mallicoat from California State University (Fullerton) for assisting me with planning and taking me for my first trip to In and Out Burger. Every single person I met on my Fellowship journey was either justice

involved or justice impacted, everyone was so kind to share their stories and experiences of the devastating impacts that criminal legal systems across the world have on kids, people, families and communities. I felt so welcomed and privileged to share a space with you all and provide a platform to amplify your stories and the vital work you all do in each of your own communities.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, and business partner, Keenan Mundine, my children, my oldest daughter - Leia for caring for my young boys, Khaius and Khyreese and everyone who came together to help my daughter Leia care for my young boys while I was overseas undertaking my Fellowship. It truly does take a village to raise children and it would not have been possible without everybody stepping up and stepping in when needed. Thank you all so much.

INTRODUCTION

As a proud Wiradjuri woman I have seen and experienced the impacts of the justice system on my people both through my own lived experience as a justice-impacted person, and through my academic and professional careers working both from within and outside of the system. I have witnessed the struggle and been a part of that struggle to have our community solutions acknowledged, respected, implemented and resourced. Together with Keenan Mundine as co-founder of Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services, we have established and implemented community-led solutions building on our combined experiences and those of our communities where our roots are embedded, who continue to guide our work and to whom we are accountable to.

Deadly Connections implements community driven, grassroots, innovative solutions to address trauma, systemic racism, disadvantage and the involvement of Aboriginal people, families and communities in the child protection and justice systems. I have heard the near disbelief in Keenan's voice when he asks supporters "*but why did you believe in us and what we were doing?*" Too often the perspectives and experiences of justice-involved and justice-impacted peoples are excluded from the design and implementation of responses intended to address rates of incarceration and the systemic drivers that put people at risk of system/s involvement. For too long, top down responses which focus on imposed colonial systems, control, incarceration, exclusion and re-traumatisation have failed to deliver meaningful change and more often compound trauma like ripples through our families and communities. My Fellowship and report reflects the phrase we refer to often: "*don't talk about us without us*".

At the time of submitting my Churchill Fellowship application the grounds were being prepared for a significant shift in the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Australian Government. The Coalition of Peaks (comprising the peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations), the Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers, and the President of the Australian Local Government Association signed the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap on July 27, 2020. It is the first time an intergovernmental National Agreement has been developed and negotiated between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Importantly, within the text of the National Agreement is the recognition of the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community-controlled organisations to be at the forefront of designing and implementing responses impacting on our people.

My Fellowship has been timely against this backdrop and momentum around community-led solutions. I have been following the work of other not for profits and movements in the social justice space across the lands now known as the United States of America and Canada for many years now. Many social justice and civil rights movements in Australia were extended to the land now known as Australia due to our shared experiences of racism, oppression and colonisation. My Fellowship draws on perspectives from my over 20 years working across the government and non-government sector supporting justice-involved people, families and communities. Both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degrees in Criminology in addition to my role as CEO and Co-founder of Deadly Connections. The primary aim of my Fellowship was to obtain a renewed toolkit of innovative, evidence-based and evaluated community-led approaches to the criminal justice system which put justice-impacted and justice-involved people at the centre of the solutions.

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KEYWORDS & GLOSSARY

Keywords

Incarceration, prison, post-release, community-led, rehabilitation, recidivism, First Nations, Aboriginal, credible messenger, community mediators.

Glossary

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	<p>This term, often abbreviated to “ACCO” has a defined meaning under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is widely reflected in legislation around the country. Under clause 44 of the National Agreement, and ACCO is described as follows:</p> <p><i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control is an act of self-determination. Under this Agreement, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation delivers services, including land and resource management, that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and is:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a. incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit</i> <i>b. controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people</i> <i>c. connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services</i> <i>d. governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body</i>
Deadly	Cool, amazing or awesome in Aboriginal English
Justice-impacted	Individuals, families and communities who are not directly involved in the justice system but are nonetheless impacted by the criminal legal system.
Justice-involved	To be directly involved in the justice system via police, arrest, charge, conviction, custodial sentence, community based order, court appearance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To investigate community-led responses and innovative approaches to the criminal justice system – US, Canada - Carly Stanley, 2020 Churchill Fellowship

This Churchill Report presents the findings of my six weeks of travel to the United States to gather knowledge from other community-led organisations working with justice involved and justice impacted peoples. The report provides an exploration of several examples of well-developed practice in innovative, community-led responses to the criminal justice system. The report also identifies key themes arising from these examples of well-developed practice drawing on my US experiences and supporting these findings with academic literature and knowledge of the Australian context through my work with Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services.

My Fellowship focus reflects the intersection of my personal and professional life, and importantly the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in this country. The high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal peoples across Australia has been extensively documented and reported over a significant period, including for 30 years following the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Aboriginal people are grossly overrepresented at all stages of the justice system. Any involvement of First Peoples in colonial systems within Australia, is harmful, destructive and disruptive. Community-led solutions do not require state interventions and therefore building strong community responses to the challenges that our communities face ultimately creates stronger and safer communities.

True lived experience, culture, healing, self-determination and a deep community connection must be the heart and soul of all work with Aboriginal communities. It is only in this way that there can be a paradigm shift away from the institutions that control the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Through self-determination and systemic changes, we can disrupt cycles of intergenerational trauma, oppression and poverty and thereby eliminate the numbers of our community in the child protection and justice systems.

Unlike North America, where there has been sustained investment and evaluation of community-led and innovative responses, Australia's development of best practice Aboriginal

community-led responses to the criminal justice system has been hindered by inconsistent and insufficient funding, imposed colonial practices, worldviews, policies and a lack of genuine commitment by mainstream organisations and governments. With the focus on community-led, place-based change under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, there is a significant opportunity to change the current numbers of those either impacted or involved with the criminal legal system and to change the trajectory for our future generations. My Fellowship program is intended to contribute to the growing evidence base drawn from a comparative jurisdiction, in particular looking at the implementation of community-led solutions and their impacts on the communities they have grown from.

Fellowship framework

The key reason that I decided to focus my Fellowship on the United States and Canada was due to the critical mass of community-led organisations working with justice involved and justice impacted peoples, the scope of support available, the level of evaluation and investment in these programs from government, donors and philanthropic support.

The aim of my Fellowship program was to:

- Analyse international, community-led responses to mass imprisonment including policy, practice and program-based justice reform.
- identify/observe evidence based and effective early intervention, prevention and diversion projects for justice involved people and communities
- Interview service users, providers and stakeholders involved in identified programs, services and local solutions
- Explore initiatives that incorporate restorative and community-based justice including sentencing options that provide cultural context and background during sentencing (eg Gladue Reports - Canada)
- Scope opportunities to adapt initiatives and scale.

Key findings and recommendations

To contribute to the practice of community-led responses in Australia, I have identified a number of core themes, findings and recommendations which emerged from the community-led responses and innovative approaches to the criminal justice system in the United States. A summary of the key findings and recommendations, described in more detail below, is as follows:

Key findings/recommendations
Early intervention, prevention & diversion
Credible Messenger Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caution should be used when hearing of the use of a credible messenger model given the US experience of this lacking clear definition and at times being divorced from the original basis for the model; • The credible messenger model must incorporate credibility connected to the street leadership structure to operate effectively and with authority; • Community embeddedness is essential to the implementation of the credible messenger model. This supports acting preventatively and on an early intervention basis, rather than being limited to reactive responses; • Further consideration should be given to the importance of a best-practice framework to guide the approach of credible messengers and establish support structures around those roles; • Further consideration should be given to building in transition options for next step options in the career and education pathways of people coming through the credible messenger roles. • Working with Children Checks in NSW are a significant barrier for those with criminal legal system experience, these checks are not required in the U.S.A
Community members as first responders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence base in the US supports the effectiveness of community organisations as first responders to community disputes and anti-social behaviours; • Further consideration should be given to whether a violence or dispute interrupter-type model would be an effective model for addressing community disputes in our communities; • Healing Justice First Responders - formalising processes that often occur informally and in a reactive way to state and police violence is likely to have value in providing initial crisis support to families and communities.

Measuring the community-level impact of initiatives

- Community-defined outcomes measuring the capacity building of communities and early changes in communities as a whole are important indicators of incremental change, which is likely to be more sustainable and widespread;
- Holistic, community-level outcomes are critical. There needs to be a genuine commitment from funders to measuring broader wellbeing and community-level outcomes, such as relationship building and cohesion, to track the effectiveness of community-led initiatives;
- Measurement of indicators going to the connection between the trust and confidence that community members have in the justice system and repeat justice interactions is a critical part of evaluating justice initiatives.

Transformative justice

Community as the centre of justice

- Community courts founded on a problem-solving model and community embeddedness offer a valuable option for transforming justice and the perception of justice for Aboriginal peoples;
- The integration of wrap-around holistic and community-based response to the underlying drivers of contact with the justice system must be considered as a core element of any court or justice service to reduce ongoing trauma and cycles of recidivism;
- Restorative justice and other First Nations-type dispute resolution models, including peacemaking programs can provide a community strengthening option for disputes and encourage two-way healing;
- Restorative justice models are effective in inner-city environments;
- There is a strong evidence base for First Nations models of dispute resolution operating across cultural groups.

Physical spaces as representative of power and justice

- Genuine engagement with the design and physical spaces of courts and justice institutions is necessary to break down power imbalances and inaccessibility;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are relatively straightforward opportunities to ensure court spaces are more accessible for parents with children through court care-style models of childcare.
Pre-release reintegration planning and preparation
Supporting political engagement and advocacy of people in custody
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting political engagement and advocacy of people in custody or formerly incarcerated builds capacity, education and power for justice-involved people that supports better futures beyond the custodial sentence. • Opportunities to create advocacy internships to train and engage a core group of young adults impacted by the justice system should be sought to grow a movement of visible leaders speaking to mass incarceration and promoting alternatives to incarceration.
Ability to engage people in custody prior to release
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of models in the US of corrective services facilitating deep access of community organisations to people in custody to support education, pre-release planning and program/cultural engagement. This must be progressed here in Australia to ensure a support transition from custody for Aboriginal peoples back to their communities.
Importance of connecting nationally and internationally on prison reform and abolition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for prison reform and ultimately abolition is an international concern and requires a co-ordinated, targeted approach to generate change. Our common struggles and the sharing of good practice in innovative community-led change is of mutual benefit and should be continued.
Holistic supported pathways beyond prison - post-release
Tertiary education pathways
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported Tertiary education pathways for justice-involved and justice-impacted peoples, with peer to peer mentors is an effective, evidence based strategy to break the cycle of incarceration. There is immediate scope to consider this type of model in Universities in Australia.

Holistic re-entry & reintegration support

- Holistic community-led reentry and reintegration services addressing broad areas of need including academic, life skills, work readiness, cultural connection , substance abuse, healing, support groups, group therapy, wellness therapy and economic pathways are critical to effective and sustained outcomes for people leaving custody.
- These spaces foster belonging, community and connection, which itself appears to contribute to sustained engagement and commitment from participants.

Targeted programs for women and girls

- Given the current and alarmingly rising numbers of Aboriginal women in custody, there is a need for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to develop and deliver support tailored to the unique needs of people identifying as women and girls.
- There is a significant need to address the systemic issues that contribute to the increasing numbers of justice involved women and girls
- There is a recognised inherent tension in being a community-led organisation with limited resources where there are significant and broad needs across the community. Further funding and resources are needed to better address the unique needs of Aboriginal peoples - particularly women and children.

Strengths-based employment opportunities

- There is a developed practice in the US providing employment opportunities for justice-involved peoples based on their skills, strengths, expertise and instincts. This contributes significantly across personal and community domains, by supporting economic reintegration and pathways, contributing to better health and wellbeing, and expanding the community healing role that formerly incarcerated people are well-placed to undertake in a supportive environment.
- There are further opportunities here in Australia for the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector to lead the way in strengths-based employment pathways for our community.
- There is an urgent need to remove the systemic challenges that prevent those with justice involvement from engaging in community related work including criminal record checks and working with children checks. While full disclosure should always be encouraged to ensure that the safety of children is paramount, consideration

<p>should be given to the context of justice involvement and personal stories of potential applicants.</p>
<p>No us and them, just us: community leading post-release responses</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-led responses of themselves can improve community cohesion, safety and sense of empowerment. • Participants in community-led organisations experience a sense of safety, belonging and acceptance being surrounded by our community and this is a core ingredient to sustained engagement.
<p>Extending supports and programs to justice-impacted peoples</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a greater willingness in the US to extend supports and programs to justice-impacted peoples, which both addresses their own distinct experience of trauma and validates their voice as an essential perspective on the harm of carceral responses and the needs of communities. • The divide between justice-involved and justice-impacted peoples in Australia should be addressed to better support community-wide healing and responses to incarceration.
<p>Improved funding approaches for community-led initiatives</p>
<p>Funding for community-led programs</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States appears to be more advanced than Australia in the approach to significant, and often pooled, ongoing recurrent funding for community-led responses to community needs. The mechanisms for doing this are relevant to considerations here in Australia of a renewed governmental approach to funding in line with commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. • There is an opportunity for philanthropic donors to be leaders in fostering Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to create real change in our communities through community-led outcomes setting and measurement.
<p>Brokerage</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further consideration should be given to the opportunity to incorporate a standard percentage line item in funding applications for brokerage to better reflect the role that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations play.

1. ITINERARY

The continued presence of COVID-19 across North America throughout 2022 had a range of impacts on my Fellowship program and demanded some flexibility in approach to respect each organisation and communities wishes. My initial plans and a key component of this Fellowship was to undertake site visits to identified agencies and programs however COVID continued to disrupt my plans and often service management required an offsite meeting or meeting during a time where the office or program spaces were not at full occupancy or operational.

As part of my original itinerary I had planned to travel to Canada, in particular to speak with organisations on Gladue Reports, however the uncertainty around changing quarantine and travel requirements for entry meant that I had to reconsider this component of the trip. In consultation with the Trust I reconfigured my Fellowship program itinerary to dedicate further time in New York given the wealth of community-led projects and organisations operating there.

Dates	Location	Meetings/visits	Purpose & Who
25 - 26 May 2022	Los Angeles	Homeboy Industries	Meeting with Homeboy Industries program staff, participants and employees. Observe morning meeting, engage in a yarning circle, observe programs.
		Project Rebound, California State University Fullerton	Meeting with Project Rebound students, mentors and program staff. Visited residential home for justice involved people studying at CSFU.
		California State University Fullerton	Attend and present at Lectures x 2 for Honors Students and Criminal Justice students to discuss Fellowship and comparative Criminal Justice.
27 - 29 May 2022	New Orleans	Operation Restoration	Meeting with Operations manager at head office
		VOTE (Voice of the experienced)	Meeting with Will Harrell at VOTE office and Norris Henderson Observe programs
1 - 5 May 2022	Necker Island,	Becoming Courageous	Speak on the experiences of Aboriginal peoples with the justice

	British Virgin Islands	Leadership Gathering	<p>system and community responses.</p> <p>Met with Sir Richard Branson</p> <p>Met with Dr Michael McAfee from Policy Link</p> <p>Met with Graca Machel from Graca Machel Trust</p> <p>Met with Kerry Kennedy, President of Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Center</p> <p>Met with Dev Patnaik, Jump Associates</p> <p>Met with Ayman Mohyeldin, MSNBC host, anchor and correspondent</p>
6 - 9 May 2022	Miami	Ruben Saldana-Inspired ghetto kids	Planned meeting with Ruben Saldana unable to proceed. Moved to online meeting.
		YWCA kids in court babysitting service	Meeting with program staff, visiting facilities.
10 - 24 May 2022	New York	Red Hook Community Justice Center; Peacemaking centre for court innovation	Meeting with Viviana Gordon, Judge Alex Calabrese and team.
		Incarcerated Nations Network :	Meeting with Dr. Baz Dreisinger, Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York
		SAVE (Harlem); Getting Out and Staying Out: GOSO	Meeting with Pat Grace (Team Leader) and staff
		The Fortune Society CASES Osborne Association Public Defenders Deaths in Custody rally	<p>Meeting with program staff.</p> <p>Attending deaths in custody rally in response to the number of deaths at Rikers.</p>
		Midtown Community Justice Center (Center for Court Innovation)	Attending facility. Meeting with program staff.
		Center for NuLeadership on	Meeting with Marlon Pederson, Kyung-Ji Kate Rhee Co-Director and

		Urban Solutions, Inc.	staff from the Center for NuLeadership on Human Justice and Healing (CNHJH).
24 May - 1 June 2022	San Francisco	Impact Justice	Meeting with Alex Busansky and Michela Bowman
		Urban Alchemy	Meeting with program staff and attendees
		Ella Baker Human Rights Centre	In person meeting unable to proceed due to COVID response.
		Designing Justice, Designing Spaces	In person meeting unable to proceed due to COVID response and service capacity. Moved to online communication.
		Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto Legal Clinic	Jonathan Rudin (Canada) Program Director (online)
1 - 3 June 2022	California	Project Rebound	Incarceration Nation Screening; conducting yarning circle with attendees.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The Visit Methodology - Bringing ‘our ways of knowing, being, doing’

In preparation for the Fellowship program, I drew on networks, relationships and knowledge that I have built over many years of working in justice advocacy to identify priority organisations and locations across the United States. As the CEO of Deadly Connections, it is a key part of my role to understand and listen to my community but to also amplify the voices and experiences of my communities.

Our work in community with Aboriginal peoples is holistic, culturally safe, strengths based, person-centred work, grounded in culture and decolonisation. In all that we do, how we work is just as important as the work itself. It is the *how* that can either promote healing or it can compound trauma. It is in the *how* that we choose to replicate power imbalances or to deconstruct them. It was critically important that the Fellowship visit methodology held meaning and maintained integrity to our way of being, doing and knowing as Aboriginal people. Although I was on this Fellowship to learn, I was also there to teach and share my culture as

a First Nations woman. As I explained to the organisations we met with on the Fellowship visit, in our culture we have 'yarning circles' where there is no one knowledge holder. We sit together at the same level, in a circle, and share information and stories.

Aboriginal people have used the yarning circle methodology for centuries as a way of sharing stories and knowledge. The yarning circle is a space where everyone is equal and has a voice, and this egalitarian approach is vital for ensuring that all members of the community feel respected and valued. This creates a safe space for everyone to share their story without judgement or criticism. The yarning circle is also a space for listening and learning. By listening to the stories of others, we can gain a greater understanding of their experiences and perspectives. This can help to build empathy and break down barriers between people. The yarning circle is also a space where people can learn from each other, and this knowledge sharing is an essential part of Aboriginal culture.

In all of the Fellowship service visits we adopted a yarning circle methodology. Often this was intentional on my part and required some explanation and facilitation. Other times it happened organically. In the more organic settings we took the opportunity to share at the conclusion of the circle how this methodology reflected our culture and approach to learning alongside each other rather than having a single knowledge-holder. In every circumstance across the US, the response from those in the circle was extremely positive. This created an environment where everyone felt comfortable enough to speak up, offer their opinion and experiences - all while maintaining mutual respect. Just one example of this two-way learning was from **Red Hook Community Justice Center**, where we shared about the Hand Up program in Sydney, Australia. After discussing challenges and tenant arrears or property maintenance issues taking up a significant proportion of court time, I was able to provide an idea of how to provide much needed support to tenants in need and address rental arrears simultaneously. Hand Up is an arrears management program that allows residents facing eviction for high levels of unpaid rent to pay off their rental debt by doing approved activities that address some of the underlying contributors to rent arrears. This includes undertaking financial counselling and other approved activities such as study, volunteering and intervention/ treatment programs. This exchange of experiences and viewpoints from across the globe was such a special part of my Fellowship program and helped in building strong connections between organisations working towards similar outcomes.

It was particularly interesting to hear how this yarning circle methodology related to ways of working in the organisations we were visiting. In the **Red Hook Community Justice Center** participants reflected on the similarities between the yarning circle methodology and their peacemaking program. One of the key similarities identified was the focus on building

relationships, with the process beginning with building trust and rapport. This is vital in order to create an environment in which open and honest communication can take place. It was a unique opportunity to bring our culture and ways of working and to share in that experience and find common ground. The peacemaking program acknowledged the foundation of their program had been built from First Nations knowledge and practices. They attributed the success of these programs to the unique style of conflict resolution and accountability from First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing.

3. FELLOWSHIP CONTEXT: AUSTRALIA & THE UNITED STATES

My Fellowship is deeply personal and connected to my family and community. Aboriginal peoples continue to be overrepresented at all levels of the 'justice' system, from police interactions to imprisonment. This is the result of a complex range of factors related to intergenerational experiences of entrenched grief, loss, trauma and disadvantage for Aboriginal families and communities. Here in New South Wales, Australia, despite being around 4% of the population, Aboriginal peoples:¹

- Represent 28% of the adult custody population, being approximately 13 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal people;
- Aboriginal young people are up to 16 times as likely as non-Aboriginal young people to be under justice supervision;
- Are more likely to be refused bail, with 30% of adults refused bail being Aboriginal;
- Are sentenced to custody at a disproportionate rate, with 42% of custodial sentences handed down by the courts are to Aboriginal defendants;
- 17 times more likely to be in both child protection and youth justice supervision than non-Aboriginal people;
- Nearly one in three Aboriginal people are living below the poverty line.

These disturbing statistics are more than 'numbers' for our community. The ripple effects and trauma is pervasive throughout our family and kinship lines. It highlights the urgency and ongoing crisis in the justice and social response and the failure of years of measures 'addressing' the disparity.

¹ BOCSAR, March 2022 Aboriginal over-representation. [online] [www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Aboriginal-over-representation.aspx). Available at: https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Aboriginal-over-representation.aspx.

The United States has, over a long period of time, been a useful analogue to further consider community-led responses to justice challenges, particularly that experienced by people of colour and First Nations populations. The United State is often referred to as the world leader in its use of incarceration, with more than 1.2 million people held in prisons across the country.² There continues to be a pronounced disparity amongst Black and Latinx people imprisoned in the United States given their representation in the overall population. The data suggests that Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly 5 times the rate of white Americans, with 12 states having more than half of the prison population being Black and seven states maintaining a disparity of more than 9:1. Latinx peoples are incarcerated at a rate that is 1.3 times the incarceration rate of white people.³

My Fellowship program was built around identified areas of active community-led justice responses and the intention to draw experiences from a wide geographic area across the United States. The US environment provides a useful comparator.

4. KEY FINDINGS

A. EARLY INTERVENTION, PREVENTION AND DIVERSION: Community as the agent of transformative change

Across the organisations that I met with I saw a deep commitment to early intervention, prevention and diversion focussed on community itself leading change addressing the drivers of criminal justice system involvement. This came through different program models including:

- Credible Messenger models; and
- Community members as first responders in disputes or requests for support.

Not only have each of these models been in operation for a number of years, but there is significant evaluation and data available to support the effectiveness. These approaches are helpful given similarities with existing approaches in Australia, and further for identifying where

² Carson, E. A. (2021). Prisoners in 2019. Bureau of Justice Statistics

³ Nellis, A. (2021). THE COLOR OF JUSTICE: RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITY IN STATE PRISONS. [online] The Sentencing Project. Available at: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>.

these approaches can be enhanced or further developed for our communities, taking into account our unique cultural and social structures.

A(i). CREDIBLE MESSENGER MODEL

“The serum is made from the venom. Credible messengers are effective in their name. They aren’t doing something out of a book. They get the community and what it’s like to go through something and overcome it. It is extremely important for someone who feels like they are going through something alone. Credible messengers are extremely valuable because they are the actual image of survival.” – Study Participant⁴

In my work with Deadly Connections I have often come across a name and a movement for a framework, methodology or approach that we have already been intuitively practising in our work with people who have been justice-involved. The most striking example of this has been the Credible Messenger movement in the United States which I became aware of some years ago through research and evaluation reports. This concept of supporting justice-involved and justice-impacted people from the community to work with the community to break the cycle of justice system interactions and trauma has been a foundational part of our work at Deadly Connections and what we represent. Through my Fellowship program I had the opportunity to visit a number of organisations which have implemented a credible messenger approach over a long period of time to learn more from their systems and structures and how the impact of the model is evaluated and sustained.

To provide more context, the Credible Messenger movement, often attributed to former Black Panther Eddie Ellis, is typically described in the United States as ‘credible messengers’ being people with lived experience, typically in the criminal justice system, who have transformed their lives to become changemakers in their communities. Credible Messengers mentor and empower people who are at risk of justice-system contact and provide the support, tools, and resources they need to build community connections and thrive. It represents a people-up perspective, where communities use their resources and strengths to build trust and create sustainable change from within. Credible messengers use their experiences and perspectives to help others in their community to transform their own lives. Being from a similar background and having similar experiences, credible messengers can often quickly form powerful personal relationships with disengaged or at-risk people in their communities. This entry provides the opportunity for equipping that individual with strategies and resources to change their trajectory and address their traumas. The below infographic reflects a current United States-

⁴ Urban Institute, 2022, New York City’s Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers. Online <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Slides-Wounded-Healers.pdf>

based assessment of the core elements of the credible messenger model, according to the **Urban Institute** (Washington, D.C.):



Urban Institute 2022 <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Slides-Wounded-Healers.pdf>

[Infographic describing the key elements of the credible messenger model being lived experience, transformation, community credibility and other important skills, experience and commitment.]

As with all community-led change, this is not a cookie cutter approach that can be implemented across all communities and locations. At **Gloves Up, Guns Down** (operating in Florida) I spoke with Ruben Saldana, who had been formerly incarcerated for a period of 19 years from age 16, a former leader of the International Posse gang and who is now a leader of the Credible Messengers of Florida. Gloves Up, Guns Down operates MMA training programs in communities with high youth justice involvement as a way to bring the young people together around a structured sports activity, and engaging with credible messengers as trainers who become positive role models for the young people. The program is said to have a 100% success rate with no arrests on their watch. As well as teaching the young people life skills the program exposes them to life in the street by having conversations with gang members on choices and consequences. Ruben spoke of needing to have a relationship with the gangs to continue to go into areas of high crime. This *credibility* aspect of credible messengers, in the sense of credibility with the street leadership structures, was a key theme of our meeting.

It was clear from our meeting with Ruben Saldana at Gloves Up, Guns Down that he felt that even the term 'credible messenger' has been co-opted and now used as a more generic label that moves away from the true origins and foundations of the approach. Those comments were about much more than rigid adherence to a model. Ruben explained that I should be

mindful of what organisations were calling a credible messenger, that you have some people that walk the walk and talk the talk and you've got the people that just talk the talk. From this I took that there is a perception that the credible messenger model often used now in the United States does not always have the street authority or leadership connection that it is intended to form around. There is a perception that any person who has had any justice-involvement can call themselves a credible messenger and be engaged to do community work. In Ruben's approach, the credible messenger must have that connection back to a community or street leadership structure to effectively and safely operate. He referred to two types of people involved in the credible messenger model represented by the phrase "Seats versus Streets". This is a division between people who can sit down and talk about the credible messenger model and be advocates for it on the one hand, and then there are people in the streets that are doing the work that have the credibility.

This street credibility focus was again present in my meetings with **Stand Against Violence East Harlem (SAVE)** in East Harlem, a preventative gun violence program under **Getting Out Staying Out (GOSO)**. SAVE operates in a relatively defined area in and around Thomas Jefferson, James W. Johnson, and Robert F. Wagner NYCHA Housing Developments in East Harlem. Their work is guided by the principles of 'Cure Violence', an approach which employs members of the community to do outreach, including people who have been directly affected by gun violence and "violence interrupters," young people who have previously engaged in high-risk activities who act as credible messengers. The credible messengers I met with at SAVE spoke of experiences of being in custody, some had just been from the 'hood' and grown up there, involved in drugs and gang activity. SAVE embeds its name within the community including through hosting pop up events in the housing developments to build familiarity and recognition around their staff, mission and approach. In particular, they build familiarity with respected people within those communities, so that when people see them operating, they know who they are. When they're out on the street, they always have to be in their uniform (a SAVE logo black hoodie and hat) so that police and community can identify them. During my Fellowship visit I attended a pop up event and walked with the SAVE crew through three different parts of Harlem - they were known to everyone, just as we would be in our community.

My key reflection on SAVE's work during my Fellowship program visit was that the real strength of their service model is that they target high risk individuals who are most likely to be involved in violence, in particular gun violence, and that this is only able to happen because of the knowledge, credibility and reputation of SAVE workers within that community. They know who to target because they know who is who in their community. I saw that they are

aware of who has older brothers who are either in jail for gun violence, or are a part of the gangs, or are instigators of issues. That is where the credible messengers model comes in, that is the real strength. They are not waiting on referrals, they target who they know needs that support and intervention. It means that SAVE can act preventatively and on an early intervention basis, they are not limited to reactive responses.

The importance of that embeddedness in the community was very clear in SAVE's soft entry and familiarity strategy. I attended a pop up event with SAVE in East Harlem where they partnered with other community organisations, such as food providers and legal services. The purpose of that pop up event was that they wanted to extend into that project (Housing estate) and so were intentionally building their presence early on. In between a music DJ, staff from SAVE were speaking to their work and getting engagement from the young people in community. Hearing young people calling out the name SAVE and them associating it with people who have credibility in East Harlem and are representative of their community was both intentional and a genuine building of relationships.



SAVE pop up event with SAVE staff in East Harlem, May 2022

[Carly seated at a table in the open green space outside one of the Projects in East Harlem, together with two males wearing SAVE shirts. A black banner in front of the table has the name SAVE East Harlem on it and there are pamphlets on the table (left); Map on a green wall of the catchment area of SAVE East Harlem, which includes a number of the Projects (right).]

The importance of community embeddedness and familiarity reflects very closely what we see as one of the key points of difference in Deadly Connections' approach, including in our use of staff considered to be 'credible messengers'. For me, this doesn't necessarily mean only justice involvement, it can mean an experience of a common struggle, for example drug and alcohol recovery, mental health recovery, homelessness. The credibility needs to be linked to the message you are delivered. It must come from your lived experience to reach that person. We and our staff are known in our community and we are accountable back to our community through our governance structure and cultural obligations. This is why Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are able to make the most impactful change in our own communities with the right resourcing and funding.

At **Impact Justice** in California, they use a best-practice framework to guide the service of credible messengers and have a dedicated training program with ongoing support for their work as reentry navigators and mentors. In my time with Impact Justice, I was introduced to their California Justice Leaders project, which is a collaboration between AmeriCorps and Impact Justice. Their mandate is to 'flip the script' and hire people because of their life experiences, including criminal justice experience, not in spite of them. It is the commonality of lived experience that support Justice Leaders in their work as credible messengers for younger peers as they provide reentry coaching and mentorship to justice-involved youth and young adults who are facing many of the same challenges they experienced. The program sees more than 35 California Justice Leaders each year undertake the training and work to support re-entry after release from prison, supporting them to find safe housing, paid work, healthy relationships and education opportunities. Another interesting part of their program at Impact Justice is the intentional 'launch pad' mindset to the Justice Leaders themselves, where their role is seen as a growth opportunity with transition options from placements, to permanent jobs, and advanced degrees. In this way, the project transforms not only the clients of Impact Justice but those mentors themselves. From my time with Impact Justice I take away two key findings, being (a) the importance of a best-practice framework to guide the approach of credible messengers and support structures around those roles, and (b) building in transition options for next step options in the career and education pathways of people coming through the credible messenger roles.



Alex Busanksy and Michela Bowman from Impact Justice, May 2022

[Carly with Keenan and two staff from Impact Justice standing on the grass against a background of trees, flowers and a tall white building]

From my own experience with Deadly Connections and everything that I learned during my Fellowship, the following considerations will be an important starting point for a discussion with those Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations seeking to work with a credible messenger model here in Australia:

- Is it necessary to define our own framework for what a 'credible messenger' model looks like, including what do we mean by credibility?
- What form of training and/or accreditation could be considered?
- Is there more that can be done to support (in particular, smaller) ACCOs in hiring and retaining credible messengers, including support mechanisms?
- How do we best support meaningful employment and education pathways beyond credible messenger-type roles to continue building on the strengths and capabilities of people in our community with lived experience of the justice system?
- How do we better define and measure the impact of credible messengers in our community?

A(ii). COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS FIRST RESPONDERS

Many successful community-led projects that I had the opportunity to visit had developed a 'community members as first responders' program to address community disputes and escalation of violence. This removes the need for police, who are often not connected or respected within the community, as being the first responders and also reinforces sustainable

solutions led by community dynamics and leadership structures. The two models that I have seen during my Fellowship program are (a) Violence Interrupters, often working in the immediate crisis point to de-escalate gun violence and retaliation, and (b) Healing Justice First Responders, who generally come in following violence and trauma to support the experience of those impacted. These are both interesting models when reflecting on the need in our community to remove police as first responders and build community capability to lead on issues that most impact on us.

Stand Against Violence East Harlem (SAVE) in East Harlem, use SAVE outreach workers and violence interrupters in community based mediation of conflicts. These workers are trained to mediate conflicts on the street and work to de-escalate disputes before crisis or violence escalates further. This model is consistent with Community-based violence intervention (CVI) programs, established as an effective solution to combating gun violence and curbing firearm-related deaths. The violence interruption model is based on meaningful engagements with a small number of people at the centre of gun violence. The trust that is built and personal relationships allow for the work of mediating conflict to occur. This model is connected with the credible messenger model because of this cross over of credibility as foundation to effectiveness.

Whilst the violence interruption model prioritises immediate responses that focus on relationship-based interventions to de-escalate conflict, these are also coupled with proactive steps to address poverty, trauma and exclusion from social networks. SAVE outreach workers connect those at-risk individuals to critical supportive social services in their networks that provide job training, employment opportunities, housing, mental health services and legal support. This is intended to lead to long term violence reduction in East Harlem. It was interesting to view the job description for SAVE Violence Interrupters including the following responsibilities⁵:

- Gaining information on potential conflicts affecting East Harlem neighbourhoods
- Formulating action plans to help resolve conflicts with the outreach team and gang mediation projects in the area
- Establishing safe spaces for mediation in hospitals, churches, community centers, etc.
- Responding to shootings, to prevent retaliation, when notified
- Attending forums and coalition meetings pertaining to anti gun and gang violence
- Meeting with high-risk individuals on a daily basis to discuss issues
- Helping in the efforts to prevent all potential retaliatory shootings

⁵ Getting Out Staying Out Job Opening: SAVE Violence Interrupter – GOSO. [online] Available at: <https://www.gosonyc.org/about/careers/save-violence-interrupter/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2022].

- Developing relationships with key leaders in the community
- Referring potential clients to outreach workers
- Documenting conflicts resolved on conflict mediation forms
- Keeping a daily log documenting all interruptions and mediations
- Participating in all Cure Violence and work related trainings
- Distributing public education materials to the targeted audience
- Attending community events as needed

The gun violence issue is, thankfully, not readily relatable to the Australian context, however violence issues and conflict are certainly present, especially where intergenerational trauma, social dislocation and racism continue to cause fractures within our communities. There is merit in our communities considering the type of model of violence interrupters as conflict and dispute mediators to build community cohesion, empowerment and to intervene early before police are involved.

At **Dignity & Power Now**, in Los Angeles, they operate a Healing Justice First Responders model which is founded on community as rapid responders to trauma and violence as part of an important practice of building communities' capacity to end a continuous experience of state violence. Building strong community networks that can respond to police violence, support impacted families, and building individual and collective resilience are all key components. The vision '*to ensure the dignity and power of Black and Brown communities is unquestionably resourced and sustained*' resonates with the demands of our own community here in Australia.

The Healing Justice First Responders model is supported by the Healing Justice Toolkit. This resource informs the conduct of rapid response, including what to do before arriving at the site, on arrival and post-arrival. It explains concepts of 'healing', 'Healing Justice', 'Trauma' and 'Resilience' in frameworks that centre of resilience as part of a skillset grounded in power to confront harmful systems and end the cycle of trauma. Seeing 'justice' as addressing the whole person is central to our purpose and model at Deadly Connections and common with other ACCOs here in Australia. The following quote from the Toolkit also resonates with the approach at Deadly Connections and through our work in community:

*Resilience is strategic. We support the healing of our communities not only because we deserve wellbeing, but also because the power required to win our people's wellbeing is the power required to win all other visionary demands for justice.*⁶

⁶ Dignity and Power Now (2019) Healing Justice Toolkit [online] http://dignityandpowernow.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Healing-Justice-Toolkit_PRINT_March-1.pdf



Images from the cover and inside of the Healing Justice Toolkit

[Cover of the Healing Justice Toolkit depicted a number of different groups of community members standing together in the night, with candles and notes or cards]

The Healing Justice First Responders program establishes a First Responders Core Team. I learnt that this team consists of:

- Listener/s: for example, a therapist or counsellor who is relatable to the community;
- Police de-escalators: people who are trained as a liaison to the police;
- Nurse, doctor or street medic: to address any physical injuries present and to determine the severity of the physical damage; and
- Other practitioners/alternative healers: epeople to take care of the community on a spiritual and physical level, including herbal medicines, food and water.

This is a helpful framework for considering an intentional model and training to meet these needs in our own community where we experience trauma. In my work with Deadly Connections, we have had to use ourselves and our program staff to respond to community crisis needs and without careful planning and resourcing, this can impact on the operation of our other programs and those who rely on us. It also means that there are more ad hoc safeguards and responses to our own trauma in that moment and it will be worth considering a better framework to address this proactively.

The Healing Justice First Responders program comes with many challenges of navigating trauma within your own community. It has been insightful to consider a dedicated program to support those early stages of responding to trauma and has provided a useful discussion point on the suitability of a similar approach here in Australia. Community members as first responders in crisis moments in preference to police is a necessary part of our role as an ACCO and I believe an area that we can develop further as a dedicated model of service.

From these experiences and reflections it will be beneficial to consider the following points in looking at the suitability of the model for our communities here in Australia, including:

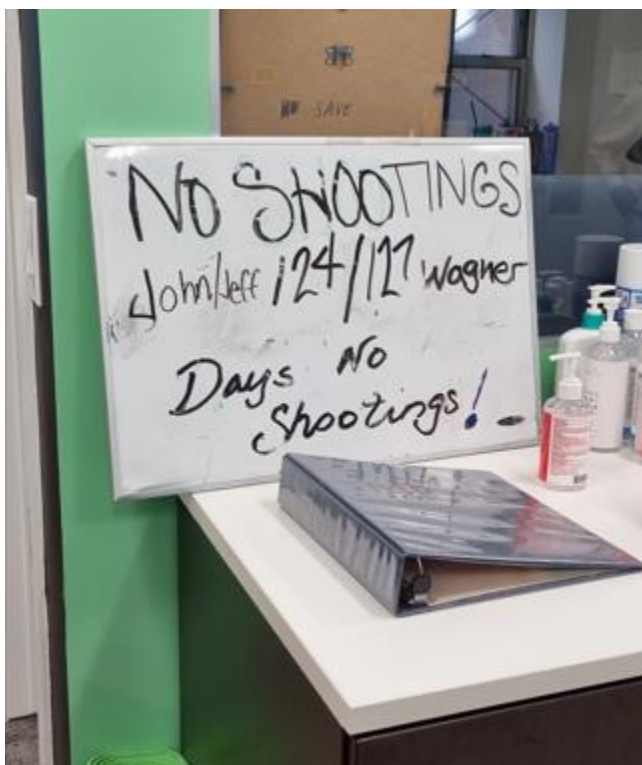
- Adequate funding for operational supports and wages for staff
- Consider professional development opportunities, including training and credentialing
- Dedicated funding for community-based safety initiatives
- Research and evaluation for the local context
- Further consider and discuss whether a violence or dispute interrupter-type model would be an effective model for addressing community disputes.

A(iii). MEASURING THE COMMUNITY-LEVEL IMPACT OF INITIATIVES

“Systems measure recidivism. It is more meaningful to measure relationship building, community healing, and secondary Credible Messengers Look for societal transformation through effective organization with individual and community transformation.” – Study Participant⁷

Measuring ‘impact’ and ‘outcomes’ of community-led work is both a necessary part of our process in constantly evolving our programs to meet community needs and reflective of the funding environment we must operate in. Too often, however, the outcomes and impact is defined by funders and government without consultation with community and ACCOs. During my Fellowship program I encountered a similar experience at a number of community-led organisations and was interested in their framing of outcomes and measurement methods.

⁷ Urban Institute, 2022, New York City’s Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers. [Online] <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Slides-Wounded-Healers.pdf>



Whiteboard recording the number of days at each project since the last shooting. SAVE, May 2022
[Whiteboard leaning on the desk of SAVE and showing no shooting in the Johnston and Jefferson Projects for 124 days, and 127 days for the Wagner Project.]

At **Stand Against Violence East Harlem (SAVE)** in East Harlem the primary measurement is the days since the last shooting in each of the projects, however there are broader outcomes going to sustained community safety and behaviours that are included in ongoing evaluation of work that were of particular interest. This includes (a) *Public education messaging* - measuring the community recognition of public messages from the organisation and how visible they are in the community, (b) *Staff outreach efforts* - measuring recognition of staff members and extent of contact with staff and (c) *Social norms* - measuring individual expressions of violence-endorsing norms over time in hypothetical scenarios involving both petty and serious disputes.⁸ This type of measurements over and above the typical and common outcomes frameworks acknowledges the change in communities that aren't linked to predetermined outcomes but are about recognising capacity building of communities which in turn creates safer and well resourced communities.

At the **Credible Messenger Justice Center**, there is a broader, community-level approach to measuring the outcomes of the work of credible messengers across different organisations.

⁸ York, B., Sheyla, A., Delgado, C., John, J., College, L., Alsabahi, C., College, K., Wolff, C., College, N., Marie, A., Cuny, J., College, P., Cobar, C. and College (n.d.). CUNY Academic Works CUNY Academic Works The Effects of Cure Violence in The South Bronx and East New The Effects of Cure Violence in The South Bronx and East New. [online] Available at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1436&context=ij_pubs

This approach strongly resonated because it drives at the heart of community-led change and the impetus to change not just the circumstances of the individual but of all our people. In addition to measuring reduction in participants' re-arrests, violations, anti-social behaviours and compliance with court mandates, there is a clear commitment to measuring broader wellbeing and community-level outcomes, including:

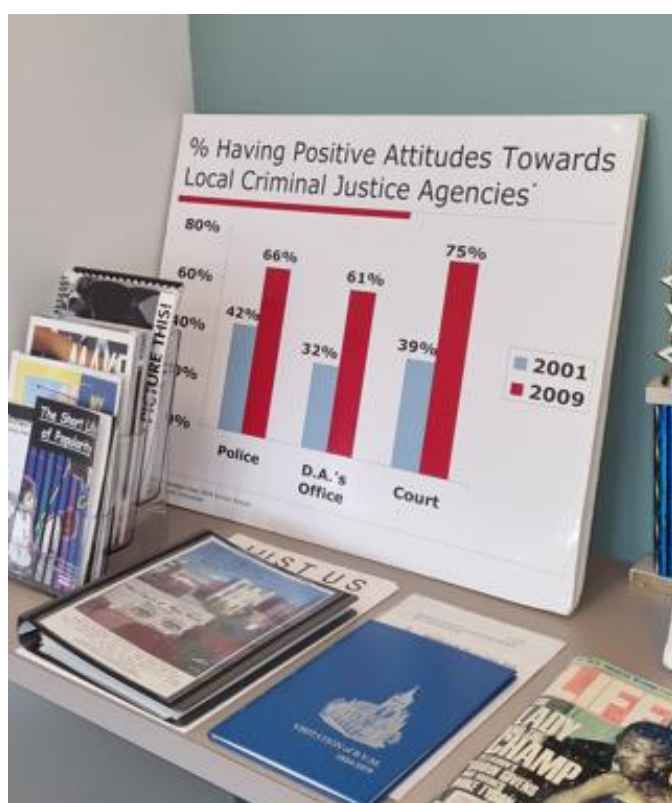
- Relationship building
- Community healing
- Increased engagement with programs and services
- Improved relationships between system stakeholders and community members; and
- More community capacity to support system-involved young people.

The broader outcomes measurement focusing on facilitating individual and community healing, empowerment, and capacity building is very much aligned to what should be a more expansive practice here in Australia. We have examples available from the **Urban Institute** in Washington, D.C. of evaluations undertaken using participatory action research and other collaborative research approaches to measure these community-level outcomes. These results support the credible messenger model as delivering on outcomes such as creating connections between communities, systems, and policymakers, reshaping ideas of public safety whereby communities are empowered to take care of each other without reliance on police and carceral institutions, and building understanding of the structural and systemic root causes of criminalisation and imprisonment.

The attitudinal change between communities and the system and its institutions is also measured by the **Red Hook Community Justice Center**, part of the **Center for Court Innovation** (in New York). There we spoke about the Center measuring outcomes such as the percentage of people having a positive attitude towards the local criminal justice agencies. This was particularly interesting as the staff spoke at length about the 'practice of procedural justice' being both those interactions at an individual level with judicial representatives as well as broad efforts to increase the perception of legitimacy of legal institutions and the laws they administer. This is said to represent a highly effective criminal justice policy.⁹ Through Deadly

⁹ Lee, C.G., F. Cheesman, D. Rottman, R. Swaner, S. Lambson, M. Rempel & R. Curtis (2013). A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Williamsburg VA: National Center for State Courts [online]
<https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/RH%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Connections I have written¹⁰ on building the trust and confidence of First Nations peoples within the legal system through leadership in the design and operation of specialist courts and court lists. This emphasis at Red Hook Community Justice Center on the practice of procedural justice and routinely measuring the attitude of people on the local justice agencies as one of the indicators is a worthwhile consideration to include here in Australia. At Red Hook this is done through the regular administration of the Operation Data survey (done as a door-to-door survey). It is designed to give the community a voice in court policies and initiatives. A similar approach here in Australia could support a closer focus on the connection between the trust and confidence that community members have in the justice system and repeat justice interactions. It could also better measure community responses to specialist First Nations courts.



Red Hook Community Justice Center, May 2022

[Vertical bar graph in red and blue with the text % having positive attitudes towards local criminal justice agencies from 2001 to 2009. The red bar graph for 2009 is higher than the blue line for 2001 across police, D.A.s office and Court.]

The impetus to measure more than recidivism rates must be supported broadly by funders and/or governments who see value in a holistic way and measure community-level outcomes which we, as Aboriginal people, consider to be significant markers of broader wellbeing. It was

¹⁰ Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services (2021) Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission on the Review of Judicial Impartiality [online] <https://www.alrc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/35.-Deadly-Connections-Community-and-Justice-Services-Ltd.pdf>

apparent in my time in the United States that there is a strong evidence base emerging that can be used as support for a model of broad community outcome measurement. I know from being in and my many years of working with community that even incremental changes to targets such as those for imprisonment rates or recidivism can be slow to progress and require broad community social and emotional wellbeing improvements as precursors to substantive change. It has been invaluable to get a deeper insight into how that is done with community-led projects in the United States and this is a practice we have embedded in our most recent impact report.¹¹ We are engaging in ongoing work with social impact measurements to ensure these outcomes are embedded in our frameworks moving forward.

B. TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE: Contact with the justice system is a community first approach

It was important that my Fellowship had a tiered focus to capture innovative community-led initiatives at all levels of the justice response from the prevention, early intervention and diversion level right up to the tertiary responses including those people who are reintegrated back into community following periods of incarceration.

In Australia there have been justice initiatives focussed on redesigning the way that courts operate to better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways. This includes specialist courts such as **Marram-Ngala Ganbu** (meaning “we are one” in Woiwurrung language) which is a Koori Family Hearing day held every week at Broadmeadows Children’s Court in Victoria, Australia¹². The initiative was developed through a Koori-led process. Marram-Ngala Ganbu differs from other Children’s Court proceedings in that all participants, including the Magistrate, any legal representatives and the family, sit at an oval table together to discuss the matter. An acknowledgement of Country, with specific recognition of the intergenerational effects of the stolen generations is given by the Magistrate at the start of each hearing. The oval table has a possum-skin cloak at the centre. created by Koori children from the region. There is

¹¹ Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services 2019 - 2021 Impact Report [online] <https://deadlyconnections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Deadly-Connections-Impact-Report-2019-2021.pdf>

¹² Arabena, K., Bunston, W., Campbell, D., Eccles, K., Hume, D., & King, S. (2019), Evaluation of Marram-Ngala Ganbu, prepared for the Children’s Court of Victoria. [online] <https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/Evaluation%20of%20Marram-Ngala%20Ganbu.pdf>

Aboriginal artwork and gum leaves in the room. There is support from a Koori Services Coordinator and a Koori Family Support Officer to help families to navigate the court process.

There has also been sustained advocacy in New South Wales to support a specialist list in the Downing Centre local court to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people. The **Walama List**¹³ (a Dharug language word meaning ‘come back’ or return) is currently being piloted in 2022 to provide a therapeutic and holistic approach to sentencing for eligible Aboriginal peoples. The intention is to work with Elders and respected community members, government, and non-government services to address underlying needs and risk factors of those appearing before the Court..

I was interested during my Fellowship to investigate community court initiatives in the United States to better understand the key elements and challenges that they have faced given the longer operation of a number of the courts there. This is helpful in our advocacy going to how the court system in Australia can operate in a way that is more reflective of our culture and values and ultimately achieves greater community safety, individual and collective outcomes. The two key organisations that I focussed on during my Fellowship were **Red Hook Community Justice Center** and **Designing Justice + Designing Spaces**. Both of these were valuable experiences in considering both the community embedded operation of the court and also the redistribution of power dynamics present in a physical space.

B(i). COMMUNITY AS THE CENTRE OF JUSTICE

The importance of community as being the centre of justice responses was really demonstrated during my Fellowship visit to the **Red Hook Community Justice Center**, part of the **Center for Court Innovation** (in southwest Brooklyn, New York). This was a key visit to an innovative community court. The Red Hook Community Justice Center is significant as the United States’ first multi-jurisdictional community court. It is the recipient of multiple national awards for innovation. One of the most important tenets is that it follows the foundational premise behind the problem-solving court model being the idea that courts should look to prevent crime by directly addressing its underlying causes. This has been largely absent from the design of court services here in Australia, with the exception of the more recent Aboriginal-led initiatives described above.

¹³ Walama List FACTSHEET 1 WALAMA LIST OBJECTIVES n.d
https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/media/website_pages/our-agency/news/pilot-of-specialist-approach-for-sentencing-aboriginal-offenders/Walama-List-Fact-Sheet.pdf



Meeting Judge Alex Calabrese, presiding Judge at Red Hook Community Justice Center.
[Colourful painted mural backdrop with buildings styled in the letters of TRANSFORM. Carly and Judge Alex Calabrese standing next to each other in front of the mural]

I was fortunate to experience many aspects of the Red **Hook Community Justice Center** during my Fellowship program. The Center contains a courtroom with a single Judge to hear cases that would have otherwise gone through up to three separate courts, being Family, Civil and Criminal. Typically the court handles low-level criminal, housing, and juvenile low-level criminal cases. The focus is very much on alternatives to custody, including community restitution projects, psycho-educational groups and longer term treatments. In addition, the **Red Hook Justice Center** supports the community with a variety of onsite social services, housing resource centres, youth programs and community initiatives designed to improve both public safety and trust in the justice system. The perceived legitimacy of the justice system is a critical issue for our community here in Australia given the ongoing negative historical relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the imposed system of law and 'justice'. To see there being a strong focus on this aspect of the relationship between the system and the community was important and raised a number of possibilities for further advocacy in Australia.

What was particularly significant was the long term retention of the presiding Judge at the court, Judge Alex Calabrese, who has been there for around 20 years. I discussed the value for the community of having one Judge who had been there for so long, how important building those relationships within the community are and the impact that would have on the trust of the community and the Court. The commitment to procedural justice is apparent in the respectful two-way interaction between the judge and each party appearing before him. More broadly this is reinforced through the physical design of the facility, and the approach of all staff, who said that their objective is to become a visible and supportive community presence. This includes through the Judge attending social housing tenancies in the community which

are the subject of a repairs claim to progress landlord compliance with resolving repairs matters and preventing eviction. To be clear, the Judge leaves his bench and visits the public housing properties where there are unresolved or disputed tenancy repairs. This includes wrap-around support through tenancy services to seek to address the root causes of insecure and inappropriate housing. The co-location of so many varied social support services provides a wrap-around holistic and community-based response to the underlying drivers of contact with the justice system.

The impact of this approach is demonstrated in **Red Hook Community Justice Center's** evaluation, with three out of four defendants receiving social services instead of jail or fines, less than 1% of cases receiving jail at arraignment, a 20% drop in reoffending amongst juvenile defendants and 10% reduction in adult offending.¹⁴



Red Hook Community Justice Center, May 2022

[Carly standing on the pavement under a red and white sign reading Red Hook Community Justice Center (left); Red and white floor guide on a white wall]

In addition to the formal court hearings, the **Red Hook Community Justice Center** operates a peacemaking program, which was an interesting model of community-led dispute resolution.

¹⁴ Lee, C.G., F. Cheesman, D. Rottman, R. Swaner, S. Lambson, M. Rempel & R. Curtis (2013). A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Williamsburg VA: National Center for State Courts

During my Fellowship program, I spent time with staff from the program to understand more about the operation and approach. The peacemaking program operates as community mediation and regularly addresses matters such as neighbour disputes and issues between parents and young people. It permits those affected by a dispute to talk it out and reach agreement about restitution and repair. There is a focus on healing and community restoration rather than punishment. Peacemakers are people from the Red Hook community who receive training to act as convenors of the process. Program staff explained that this follows a traditional Native American approach to justice, which resonated given the focus here in Australia on First Nations forms of dispute resolution and sentencing options. It started following a visit from justice system officials from the Navajo Nation who were invited to the Red Hook Community Justice Center to assist in the development of a community court in the Navajo Nation. This led to an exchange of approaches, where the Navajo representatives took back elements of the community court model and the Red Hook representatives committed to understanding and developing a model of peacemaking. The program pursues goals such as (a) healing relationships (b) giving victims a voice (c) holding participants accountable and (d) empowering the community. This approach to dispute resolution strongly aligns to restorative justice approaches which are being explored here in Australia as more productive forms of dispute resolution in Aboriginal communities.



Meeting with Red Hook peacemaking program staff, Jacqueline Renaud-Rivera; Peacemaking Session Guidelines, Red Hook Community Justice Center, May 2022

[Carly meeting with a tall dark-skinned woman wearing a purple hair covering standing with her arm around Carly (left); Peacemaking session guidelines setting out the rules and intentions]

The Fellowship program visit to the Red Hook peacemaking program has really reinforced the efficacy of a model of community-led dispute resolution or restorative justice operating in the inner city, where people come from diverse cultural groups and relationships. I am committed to further exploring the advocacy that can be done, including through Deadly Connections, to pursue the development of community-appropriate models of restorative justice.

This broadening of the perception of what is justice was reflected in the approach taken by the **Center for NuLeadership on Human Justice & Healing** that I visited in New York. Their guiding philosophy is “People are the real wealth of nations” and this extends to their definition of justice. Human Justice = Human Rights + Human Development. Human Rights is used there to include safe and clean housing, equitable access to land and resources, pro-human healthcare, truthful education, and more. Human Development is used to team the capacity of people to create the social and cultural conditions to flourish free from oppression and to create a world where Human Rights are woven into the fabric of society.

From the experience at **Red Hook Community Justice Center** and **Center for NuLeadership**, there are a number of positive justice system based recommendations that come from looking at the community based justice model. It is a validation of the community-based response. The key findings that I took away from the Red Hook experience are:

- The strong benefits of longevity of the judiciary in place in community courts in building significant trust with the community;
- Utilising community members to settle disputes rather than Police;
- Restorative justice models are effective in inner-city environments;
- There is a strong evidence base for First Nations models of dispute resolution operating across cultural groups;
- A soft entry point for further support for families involved in the peacemaking program.

B(ii) PHYSICAL SPACES AS REPRESENTATIVE OF POWER AND JUSTICE

The importance of addressing the physical space and power dynamics represented by those spaces was also reflected in communications with an organisation named **Designing Justice + Designing Spaces**, in Oakland. They are an architecture and property development not-for-profit which focuses on creating spaces and buildings for restorative justice, community building and people exiting custody. I was particularly interested in the design and physical

elements of justice spaces as being significant in either reinforcing power imbalances and inaccessibility or breaking those down. An example of their work that was of interest is **Restore Oakland LLC**, located in East Oakland, which houses a centre for restorative justice and restorative economics. This project includes a restaurant for people to get employment experience and a hub for the Ella Baker Center's initiatives to address incarceration. The power in being able to see physical justice institutions as truly an institution of the community in which it is located, building in design features which address community needs, not just a legal institution-led response, is a very interesting prospect for our community here in Australia.

Considering the needs of families, in particular women with children, must be given closer consideration in the design of court spaces. Child care continues to be a barrier for women in seeking legal advice and attending court matters, particularly for domestic violence related matters and family law. In Miami, I spent time at the **YWCA South Florida Court Care & KidsSpace**, which provides free onsite child-care and child-friendly environments whilst their parent or guardian attends court proceedings. As part of this service, trained staff are able to provide additional support services and referrals for other needs, connecting in families to the social services in the community. This provides a simple and immediate option for supporting the engagement of families, in particular women, with the justice system. This relatively straightforward and achievable response to the needs of the community should be further considered in Australian courts, in particular those dealing with family law and child-related proceedings.



Entrance to the Court Care facility at the Miami Court care program; Child-friendly space available at YWCA within the Court Building, May 2022

[Signage on the wall at the entrance to YWCA including that parents are required to provide before using the service (left); Carly seated at a low timber table with childrens toys, blocks and a small toy kitchen behind her]

C. PRIORITISING REINTEGRATION PLANNING & PREPARATION OF INCARCERATED PEOPLES TO BUILD BETTER FUTURES

Our work at Deadly Connections is driven largely by the disproportionately high number of First Nations people and communities who become stuck in a cycle of trauma, disadvantage and disempowerment as a consequence of being justice-involved. Disempowerment is a symptom of poor reintegration planning for incarcerated peoples, perpetuating an institution-inflicted cycle of re-incarceration and contributing to the intergenerational grief, loss, trauma and disadvantage that justice-involved people and their families and communities experience.

There is a clear need for immediate change within policy and legislation around reintegration planning and the preparation of incarcerated peoples to build better futures, to break the cycles of incarceration, violence,, disempowerment and trauma associated with repeated contact with the justice system.

Through my Fellowship program I had the opportunity to visit a number of organisations whose visions are to restore rights to those who are or have been justice-involved and advocate for better reintegration planning and preparation for justice-involved people, with the aim of supporting people to build better futures away from the justice system. From my visits with these organisations, the following key themes became clear; supporting political engagement and advocacy of people in custody, engaging people in custody to support their transition out of custody and into community, and ensuring a co-ordinated, international approach to reform.

C(i). SUPPORTING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY OF PEOPLE IN CUSTODY

“It’s not about supplication, it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power, it’s about changing the very face of power itself” -- Kimberle Williams Crenshaw

Our work at Deadly Connections centres around building power and capacity for justice-involved people, families and communities, to support them and their communities to use their lived experiences, resources and strengths to create sustainable and informed change. This starts with restoring the full human and civil rights of those who are in custody or have been involved with the justice system, including the right to vote while in custody.

Through my Fellowship program I met with Will Harrel, the Senior Public Policy Counsel at **Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)**. VOTE was founded by Norris Henderson, who was wrongfully incarcerated for 27 years at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, and has first-hand experience of the racism and inequalities of the criminal justice system for people of colour. Norris became the President of the Angola Special Civics Project (ASCP) in 1987, an organisation of people in custody that strategised and fought for freedom and structural change. Norris continued the resistance after his release from custody through VOTE, with the vision of effecting policy and law reform that would improve the lives of justice-involved people oppressed by racism and criminalisation.

Recently, VOTE’s focus has been to increase awareness around civic rights for people who have previously been incarcerated and encourage greater voting registration for justice-involved people. VOTE canvasses neighbourhoods, hosts voter registration drives and

undertakes community education to increase awareness around voting rights. People who have been incarcerated are significantly less likely to vote, due to their diminished trust in the government and the belief that their votes 'don't mean anything'. Political disengagement also has a strong ripple effect in communities, particularly ones where incarceration rates are high, causing entire communities to disengage from law and policy reform even though their voices matter most.

My key reflection upon meeting with Will Harrel and learning about VOTE's work is that supporting political awareness, knowledge and activity in custody has broader implications than supporting civic engagement from a cross-section of society that is often forgotten or neglected. Supporting political engagement and advocacy also builds capacity, education and power for justice-involved people. This has a significant influence on people's sense of identity while they are in custody and empowers those people to positively contribute to their communities through political engagement and advocacy when they are released from custody. VOTE's work centres around the concept that supporting political education, empowerment and advocacy from justice-involved people is an essential part of supporting their successful reintegration into community. From a policy and law reform perspective, political engagement from the justice-involved community is essential in achieving structural change. VOTE's work is therefore giving the power back to previously disempowered communities to provide opportunities, to amplify voices of those most affected and to support both personal rehabilitation and wider community journey towards structural change.



Norris Henderson of VOTE, May 2022 (left); Operation Restoration New Orleans, LA (right)
[Carly standing next to a tall dark-skinned man in front of a green background with VOTE]

The Fortune Society reinforced my findings at VOTE that advocacy and political activity plays a major role in the wellbeing and rehabilitation prospects for justice-involved people. The Fortune Society emphasised that an overwhelming number of justice-involved young people feel disenfranchised within a system that is seemingly stacked against them. Many justice-involved people have come to believe that their voices do not matter and that they are powerless to shape the world in which they live. The Fortune Society have found that their young clients have little to no exposure to civic issues. As a result, their community's future leaders have not built the knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate for policy initiatives that can instil meaningful and lasting structural change. To change this outlook, The Fortune Society created advocacy internships to train and engage a core group of young adults impacted by the justice system, providing them with the resources necessary to grow as visible leaders in the movement for ending mass incarceration and promoting alternatives to incarceration.



The Fortune Society team at Close Rikers protest in New York City, May 2022

[Carly standing with three people wearing blue hoodies with a dove logo on the front. The group stands in front of a white and blue sign hanging on a black fence with the words “The Fortune Society”.]

The Fortune Society is a strong supporter of advocacy by people in custody as a vehicle for change. For example, in January 2022, The Fortune Society, alongside advocates and elected officials, rallied outside of Rikers Island in support of incarcerated individuals who launched a hunger strike in protest of the unfair, inhumane and unjust conditions at the facility. The protest highlighted the broken system of Rikers Island and prisons more broadly, emphasising The Fortune Society’s mission that education and advocacy is needed to promote the creation of a fair, humane, and truly rehabilitative correctional system.



Close Rikers Protest, New York City, May 2022

[Group of people standing on the steps against white building, holding various protest signs. Many wearing blue shirts. On the right, a man in a grey suit jacket and jeans is speaking into the microphone.]

Advocacy by people in custody needs to be nurtured and supported. Advocacy by people who have experienced the injustices of the criminal justice system is an essential part of raising awareness, reshaping policy and laws and protecting individual and collective rights. Advocacy therefore shifts power back to the people who have been devalued and silenced through incarceration, strengthening the fabric of communities and creating a platform to encourage policy and law reform.

C(ii). ABILITY TO ENGAGE PEOPLE IN CUSTODY PRIOR TO RELEASE - BUILD PATHWAYS, PLANS AND CONNECTION TO SUPPORT TRANSITION

At Deadly Connections, I continue to see the harmful impacts of inadequate pathways and transitional planning that often results in justice-involved people being unsupported to effectively reintegrate into community following their release from custody. This results in too many people being stuck in a cycle of incarceration because they are not provided with the tools to succeed outside of prison. Not only is this harmful to the individual, it is also harmful to their families and the safety of the community more broadly.

It is clear that current forms of rehabilitation and transition planning in prisons, particularly for First Nations peoples, are ineffective in preparing justice-involved individuals to build better futures outside of prison. First Nations people in particular have unique rehabilitative needs which can only be met through programs designed in partnership with organisations with cultural authority and lived experience.

Through my Fellowship program, I visited **Operation Restoration** and met with Operations Manager, Rosa. Operation Restoration was formed in 2016 by Syrita Steib and is led by a group of women who have lived experience of incarceration. Operation Restoration's mission is to support women and girls impacted by incarceration to restore their lives post-release and recognise their full potential. One of Operation Restoration's key programs is their College-in-Prison program, which is the only in-person higher education opportunity available to women who are incarcerated in Louisiana. The program is conducted at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women and aims to educate and upskill women in custody. Another program Operation Restoration runs in prisons is the Lab Assistant program, which is a training program that prepares women to work in laboratory healthcare settings and obtain immediate employment upon release. It is delivered in partnership with correctional services across multiple institutions in Louisiana.

In New South Wales, organisations like Deadly Connections have little to no partnerships with Corrective Services, which prevents organisations seeking to support people in custody from accessing the prisons and talking to people inside. Generally, the only time we are granted access is during NAIDOC week. To date, the prisons in the region have not agreed to facilitate referrals for our healing houses to support a culturally appropriate transition from custody. My key reflection from my visit to Operation Restoration is that the approach to facilitating partnerships with external organisations in the US is so different to Australia because the

mindset to rehabilitation in US prisons appears to be different. There is a greater appreciation of the benefit to everyone for external organisations to access people in custody and assist with rehabilitation programs, post-release and transition planning. For people in custody, having access to culturally safe and responsive, tailored and effective rehabilitation programs and activities not only occupies them productively while they are in custody but also prepares them more effectively for their release. Most importantly, the work of external organisations like Operation Restoration provides benefits for more than the people in custody receiving the service. They emphasised to me that if people in custody are supported, it makes the community as a whole safer.

C(iii). IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY AROUND PRISON REFORM AND ABOLITION

*“In essence, prisons are global repositories for the profoundly underprivileged” --
Incarceration Nations*

The issue of over-incarceration of people and particularly of Black and Indigenous peoples is a global issue. The similar struggles to our own were clear when I attended a Deaths in Custody rally in New York City in May 2022, following 20 deaths in custody at Rikers Island within 8 months. It emphasised to me that black deaths in custody, inhumane conditions in prisons and the ineffectiveness of prison as a rehabilitation method overall is not an isolated issue unique to one jurisdiction. Prisons operate on similar models worldwide and always disadvantage and lead to the deaths of people of colour. The need for prison reform and ultimately abolition is therefore one of international concern and requires a co-ordinated, targeted approach to generate change.

Deadly Connections is now a member of the **Incarceration Nations Network** (INN), which is a global network and think tank that seeks to reform prisons around the world, based on the understanding that prisons are an outmoded, anti-innovative method of increasing public safety and reducing crime. Joining INN aligns Deadly Connections with international organisations who have a similar mission and vision of effecting law and policy reform around prisons.

D. HOLISTIC SUPPORTED PATHWAYS BEYOND PRISON: POST-RELEASE REINTEGRATION & POSITIVE FUTURES

Prisons were established to serve a rehabilitative function, with objectives of reducing offending behaviour while encouraging people in custody to seek self-improvement, fulfil their potential and lead successful lives in the community upon release. It is therefore a key function of prisons to facilitate successful pathways beyond prison through effective post-release reintegration planning. Both in my community and at Deadly Connections, we continue to see the harmful impact that prison has on the ability of people to build brighter futures. It reinforces that prison does not achieve its rehabilitative function.

Through my Fellowship, I visited some organisations whose objectives are to provide holistic support for people who have just left custody or have previously been in custody. It became clear to me that holistic supported pathways beyond prison are essential in supporting the reintegration of people back into their communities and their ability to build positive futures.

D(i). TERTIARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS SUPPORTED BY PEER- TO-PEER NAVIGATORS

Education is one of the most effective methods of preventing reoffending and recidivism as it provides a pathway to employment and offers stability and routine, which people often lack after spending time in prison. However, education opportunities are one of the first to be erased for justice-involved people; barriers which justice involved people face, due to their previous incarceration status, lack of resources and support, makes it difficult to access education post-release.

Through my Fellowship, I spent some time with **Project Rebound** and visited the John Irwin House, located near the campus of Fullerton University. The John Irwin House is Project Rebound's first university-based housing option for formerly incarcerated people. The John Irwin house provides a space for 6 justice-involved or impacted people on campus at Fullerton University, where the students could access resources for free to assist with their education, including accommodation, printing, peer resources and food. The students also have access

to peer-to-peer navigators who act as mentors to support students to succeed in their tertiary education journeys. The peer navigators are students who have previously been involved in Project Rebound, so have first-hand experience with incarceration and the rehabilitative power of programs like Project Rebound.

The John Irwin House boasts a zero percent recidivism rate and when I spoke to some previous students who had attended John Irwin House, one of the participants who was also an ex veteran (who had done 12 years in jail) told me that if it had not been for Project Rebound's program, he would have been 'either dead or back in jail'. It is clear to me that the wrap-around service provided by the peer-to-peer support model is extremely effective in meeting the needs of the students and assisting them in navigating the education system. For current students at John Irwin House, the support from peers who truly understand their trauma and needs makes all the difference in supporting their own education journey.

A key part of Project Rebound's activities is that they approach people while they are still in custody. Prisons facilitate Project Rebound's access into facilities to meet and speak with justice-involved people to work out a personal plan with them that will set them up on a pathway for success after they leave prison. This can include discussing and overcoming the barriers to continuing education and connecting people with bridging courses to enable them to enrol in university upon release. Project Rebound works with the justice-involved person throughout their transition and supports their education through peer support services and housing support, post-release.

These types of programs are effective and essential in setting up justice-involved people for success on positive pathways post-release. However, from my visit with Project Rebound, it is clear to me that the success of such programs requires the cooperation of correctional facilities, to allow organisations to enter prisons and speak to people in custody, and educational institutions, which provide the funding and support for programs like John Irwin House to operate on campus. There is currently no similar program in Australia aimed around facilitating University access for justice-involved people. This is an issue that Deadly Connections is committed to addressing through their current University partnerships. The barriers that justice-involved people face are immense, particularly surrounding access to education and employment. It is clear to me that our prisons and tertiary education institutions must actively acknowledge this disadvantage and provide avenues for these barriers to be addressed, such as structured programs like Project Rebound.

I was fortunate enough to be invited back to John Irwin house and host a screening of Incarceration Nation¹⁵ and a yarning circle for participants and their families. Incarceration Nation shares the story of the systemic injustice and oppression of Aboriginal peoples in this country. The response of participants was of shock, anger but also gratitude as they were not aware of the issues around the criminal legal system and Aboriginal peoples here in Australia. The opportunities for two-way learning between our peoples continues to be significant and powerful.

D(ii). HOLISTIC RE-ENTRY & REINTEGRATION SUPPORT


Exodus Transitional Community Inc. in East Harlem, New York offers a broad spectrum of services for adults and youth affected by the justice system and proudly lead the policy and advocacy efforts that promote positive change in the community, although they are grounded in their re-entry programs. These programs include the Wilderness Re-entry Program, targeted at job-readiness training, the Youth Empowerment Programs, which support young people to complete their education, and Mentorship and Education Programs, which provide strong mentorship resources for both adults and youth to support their success in education and the workforce. Whether through direct service or service referrals, Exodus' mission is to ensure that their participants not only become contributing members of society but also that their daily needs are met in order to support them to succeed and live well.

Exodus' 4% recidivism rate among participants is evidence that holistic support, personalised guidance and community-building programs are essential in supporting justice-involved people to succeed within their communities after they leave prison. Exodus reinforced my learnings at Project Rebound, which is that reintegration and re-entry programs are most effective when they provide wrap around support and are led by people who have lived experience with the justice system, whether through being justice-involved themselves or have been justice-impacted in some other way. 90% of Exodus' staff are people of colour who have been directly affected by the justice system. The lived experience of program leaders ensures that programs are delivered in a sensitive and tailored way to the unique needs of justice-involved people while empowering them to take the steps towards building a positive future for themselves and their communities. This really resonates with Deadly Connections' work in Australia.

At **Homeboy Industries** I was able to experience first hand the breadth of programs that they are able to incorporate into deliberate holistic planning where properly resourced. I was

¹⁵ Incarceration Nation. It's time for change. [online] Available at: <https://incarcerationnation.com.au/>.

welcomed to the organisation for a day of observations and spoke with many staff and other participants who generously gave their time and openly shared their experiences. Homeboy Industries was also the only organisation I attended that started their daily meeting with a 'Welcome to Country' that acknowledged the First Peoples of the land that we were meeting on. The organisation's focus is to support the pro-social interactions of people previously involved in gangs and/or who have spent time in custody. Their program is extensive, holistic, and ranges from academic, life skills, work readiness, substance abuse, support groups, group therapy and wellness therapy. The class schedule, below, taken during my Fellowship program, shows this breadth of offering and approach to being a ready made community and connection for those looking to change their life trajectory. Participants are able to attend for one off support, or can be engaged through a tailored individual program. There is a psychologist on site, a mental health nurse who can prescribe and dispense medication, and a local community Elder on site who prepares low cost meals. All attendees are funnelled through an intake process which triages and prioritises needs and supports the active engagement of people coming to Homeboy Industries.

<div>  CLASS SCHEDULE April 2022 <small>(revised 4/4/2022)</small> </div>				
<div> <div> <div>ACADEMIC</div> <div>LIFE SKILLS</div> <div>WORK READINESS</div> </div> <div> <div>SUBSTANCE ABUSE</div> <div>SUPPORT GROUPS</div> </div> <div> <div>GROUP THERAPY</div> <div>WELLNESS/THERAPEUTIC</div> </div> </div>				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00am-10:45am: YOGI-Getting Out by Going In (Classroom A)	9:00am-12:00pm: enrollment required GED Prep (Main St Learning Center & Zoom)	9:00am-11:00am: Computer Skills Training (Career Resource Center)	9:00am-12:00pm: enrollment required GED Prep (Main St Learning Center & Zoom)	9:00am-10:30am: Study Hall (Main St Learning Center)
10:00am-10:30am: The Four Agreements (Classroom B)	9:00am-10:30am: Study Hall (Main St Learning Center)	9:00am-12:00pm: enrollment required Adult Ed High School (Main St Learning Center)	9:00am-10:30am: Study Hall (Main St Learning Center)	9:00am-10:30am: enrollment required Computer Basics (Career Resource Center)
11:00am-12:00pm: enrollment required Adult Ed High School (Main St Learning Center)	9:30am-10:30am: Morning Meditation (Classrooms A & B)	9:00am-10:30am: Study Hall (Main St Learning Center)	9:30am-10:45am: Mindfulness Meditation (Classroom A)	9:30am-10:30am: Getting to Know Yourself (Classroom A)
12:00pm-3:00pm: Study Hall (Main St Learning Center)	9:30am-10:30am: Workplace Readiness (Career Resource Center)	9:30am-10:30am: Men's Group (Classroom A)	9:30am-11:00am: Women to Women in Recovery (Classroom B)	9:30am-10:30am: Homeboy Heals Recovery Group (Classroom B)
10:00am-12:00pm: Cross Fit (Turf)	10:30am-12:00pm: Criminals & Gang Members Anonymous (Classrooms A & B)	9:30am-10:30am: Women's Group (Classroom B)	9:30am-10:30am: Workplace Readiness (Career Resource Center)	10:30am-12:00pm: Homeboy 101 (Classroom A)
1:00pm-12:00pm: Pathways to College (Classroom A)	12:00pm-1:00pm: enrollment required Anger Management (community clients only) (Classroom B)	10:30am-12:00pm: Just For Today (Classroom A)	10:00am-11:00am: Yoga (Turf)	10:30am-12:00pm: enrollment required Women Over Violence (POV) (Classroom B)
1:00pm-1:30pm: enrollment required DV Batterer Intervention for Men (Classroom B)	1:00pm-2:00pm: Healthy Relationships (Classroom A)	11:00am-12:00pm: Smart Shhmoney (Career Resource Center)	10:30am-12:00pm: Success Stories for Men (Classroom A)	11:00am-12:30pm: Intro to IT (1st Friday) (Career Resource Center)
2:00pm-2:30pm: Alcoholics Anonymous (Classroom A)	1:00pm-2:00pm: Act It Out/Anger Management (Classroom B)	11:00am-12:00pm: Open Gym (Turf)	11:00am-12:00pm: Open Gym (Turf)	11:00am-12:00pm: Strongman (Turf)
2:00pm-2:30pm: "reserved" Staff Training: Trauma Information (Classroom B)	2:00pm-3:00pm: Staying Connected (Classroom A)	11:00am-12:00pm: enrollment required Baby Talk (1st Wed) (Group Therapy)	11:00am-1:00pm: enrollment required DV Batterer Intervention for Men (Classroom B)	1:00pm-3:00pm: Reserved for Staff Trainings (Classroom B)
1:00pm-3:00pm: Resume Writing (Career Resource Center)	2:00pm-3:00pm: enrollment required Breakthrough Parenting (Classroom B)	11:00am-12:00pm: Civic Engagement (2nd Wed) (Classroom A)	1:00pm-2:00pm: 100 Tips for Growing Up (Classroom A)	2:00pm-3:00pm: Art Class Open Studio (Classroom A)
1:00pm-3:00pm: Drop-In Tutoring (Main St Learning Center)		11:00am-1:00pm: enrollment required DV Batterer Intervention for Women (Classroom B)	1:00pm-2:00pm: enrollment required Project Fatherhood (Classroom B)	
2:00pm-3:00pm: enrollment required Breakthrough Parenting (Classroom B)		1:00pm-2:00pm: The 7 Habits (Classroom A)	1:00pm-3:00pm: DMV Workshop (Career Resource Center)	
		1:00pm-2:00pm: Creative Writing (Classroom B)	1:00pm-3:00pm: appointment only Job Search Support (Career Resource Center)	
		1:00pm-3:00pm: enrollment required Mock Interviews (Career Resource Center)	2:00pm-3:00pm: Staying Connected (Classroom A)	
		1:00pm-3:00pm: Drop-In Tutoring (Main St Learning Center)	2:00pm-3:00pm: Health Topics (KECK Med School) (Classroom B)	
		2:00pm-3:00pm: Anger Management (Classroom A)		
		2:00pm-3:00pm: Substance Abuse Group (1st Street Side)		

Homeboy Industries program schedule, April 2022 [Class schedule showing Monday to Friday programs offered to participants at Homeboy Industries]

Significantly, their funding position enabled the organisation to pay participants on an internship basis to be able to commit to the program. This included social activities, domestic violence programs, alcohol and other drug counselling and the like. This is developed as an individual plan for each person to meet them where they are in terms of their needs and capacity to engage. This paid internship for social program attendance was particularly interesting because. As we see here in Australia, low income and limited resources is often a barrier to engagement in ongoing programs. The program requires regular drug testing for participation and any lapses are responded to by Homeboy Industries to support recovery and re-engagement through involvement in a detox or rehabilitation program.

As well as program support there was a clear pathway for participants to move through and into paid employment with the organisation. Homeboy Industries offers opportunities through their social enterprises, including cafe, bakery, recycling plant and tattoo removals. They also employ people as community relations, tour guides and security. This is part of recognising the inherent skills and strengths of formerly incarcerated people, such as recognising the early signs of escalating risk in body language. We see significant barriers here in Australia to formerly incarcerated people, in particular Aboriginal people, gaining employment following release from custody. This compounds disadvantage and creates real impediments to breaking the cycle of offending. At Deadly Connections we have an approach which encourages those with lived experience of the justice system to apply for appropriate employment opportunities with us. This is not a common practice across the non-profit sector and we have seen further traumatising of people looking to give back to their community through employment in initiatives supporting people with similar experiences to themselves. Funding limitations aside, I am committed to continuing with our approach to engaging with the strengths of formerly incarcerated people and looking to expand opportunities through social enterprises and other options.



Homeboy Industries Homegirl Cafe social enterprise (left) and merchandise store (right), May 2022
 [Tall orange and white building with the words Homeboy Industries and Homegirl cafe written in black signage.]

The aspect of Homeboy Industries that had the biggest impact on me was the vibe of the space. My observation was that the people engaged in the programs were happy and smiling and they all expressed feelings of gratitude, belonging and community there. Homeboy Industries offers consistency and it importantly offers the opportunity to find recovery and healing through giving back. This is another significant motivator for me which was further encouraged through my time with Homeboy Industries. The creation of a one-stop organisation for our community has been a goal of ours at Deadly Connections since inception. This type of holistic service is urgently required for formerly incarcerated Aboriginal people where they can access program support, healing, health and wellbeing services, cultural support and connection, employment opportunities and receive case management. This was reaffirmed through our experiences at Homeboy Industries. The involvement of formerly incarcerated people through employment in the delivery of programs and services is very closely aligned to what I feel is missing from the Aboriginal community-led responses. At this stage of our organisation, it is the resources and funding constraints that prevent this much needed initiative from coming to life.

D(iii). TARGETED PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

During my time in Louisiana, I visited **Operation Restoration**. Operation Restoration is led by a group of women who have lived experience of incarceration and operates with a mission to support women and girls impacted by incarceration to restore their lives post-release and recognise their full potential.

Operation Restoration provides targeted support for women and girls in prison through programs such as their College-in-Prison program, which provides higher education opportunities for women in Louisiana. Operation Restoration also runs programs targeted at supporting women and girls post-release, including Operation Housing, which creates housing opportunities and connects formerly-incarcerated and justice-involved people with housing resources. When I spoke to Rosa Gomez-Herrin, the manager of Innovation & Strategic Partnerships, she explained that Operation Restoration assesses individual needs and provides individualised pathways for women and girls who come through the intake process. Every program and initiative Operation Restoration undertakes is led by formerly-incarcerated or impacted women, ensuring that service delivery is informed by lived experience and is designed in response to the real needs of justice-involved people.

An important finding from Operation Restoration is the value of focussing on service delivery for a specific demographic. At Deadly Connections, one of the key challenges we face is that we are constantly doing so much for so many, by nature of being a holistic service that provides support for all Aboriginal people in our catchment area. There is a tension for us here in operating a newer community-led response because being truly community-led means that there is a significant demand from our community for our services. We feel a deep obligation to bring a solution that addresses the needs across different parts of our community. This finding from the Fellowship program will be discussed further with the Deadly Connections advisory board and our community.

D(iv). EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES RECOGNISING THE STRENGTHS AND SKILLS OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

'In our experience, the best people to heal society are those who understand what it means to harm it' - Urban Alchemy

As discussed above in the context of education, justice-involved people face significant barriers in accessing employment opportunities, due to their previous incarceration status.

These barriers prevent justice-involved people from accessing opportunities which will help them build a positive future outside the justice system. Employment not only provides financial stability and recognised qualifications, but is also an effective way of empowering justice-involved people to take control of their lives post-release and build a positive future. At Deadly Connections and within community, I have first hand experience of the powerful impact of connecting justice-involved people with employment opportunities in reducing recidivism rates.

Reducing the barriers around employment and providing opportunities for justice-involved people is therefore a key strategy in supporting their success post-release. One way this can be done is through conscious job advertising. During my visit to Project Rebound, I learned that in the US, many job advertisements specifically indicate that they welcome applications from candidates with criminal records, as part of their diversity policies. This is something Australia is yet to do. Deadly Connections now embraces this practice on all of our employment advertisements. The following excerpt is now a standard inclusion on all job advertisements; please note that Deadly Connections is an EEO employer. We are committed to providing opportunities to all applicants without regard to race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, national origin, age, criminal history, or ability. We strongly encourage individuals with lived experience in the criminal justice system or child protection system to join our team.

Another way of reducing barriers is through the employment of justice-involved people by organisations who recognise the strengths and value of people who have been incarcerated. **Urban Alchemy** in San Francisco operates under the philosophy that justice-involved people possess valuable skills that can greatly benefit society, if they are given the opportunity. During my Fellowship, I visited Urban Alchemy and spoke about their programs and philosophy. Most of the team at Urban Alchemy have served life sentences in prison, experienced addiction or homelessness and have 20+ years of experience in confined environments where their survival depends on their ability to read people in unpredictable situations. Urban Alchemy empowers justice-involved people by providing platforms and opportunities for them to use these skills and instincts in productive ways, such as through their San Francisco and Los Angeles Clean initiatives.

Reflecting on my visit to Urban Alchemy, it is clear that the organisation builds engagement through connection, trauma-informed communication and de-escalation practices which recognise the strengths and value of justice-involved people as human beings. Once people start working at Urban Academy, they gain self-awareness and personal development and are

set on an effective path to build a positive future for themselves and their community. This is the key to true rehabilitation.



Urban Alchemy, program staff and service entrance, San Francisco, May 2022
[Two staff wearing black Urban Alchemy hoodies standing together.]

At **Homeboy Industries** there was also a significant emphasis and value placed on the strengths of formerly incarcerated peoples in an employment capacity. Here I met many former clients who are now employed as community relations workers and tour guides. One man we met with was formerly gang-involved and had sustained a number of disabilities from shooting incidents. A number of security staff employed at Homeboy Industries were formerly incarcerated, often having served life sentences. The key finding from this experience for me has been to reinforce the strengths-based approach to employment for formerly incarcerated people, which positions them in terms of their skills and expertise rather than seeing these as basis for deficit. There is a long way to go in Australia in shifting the general approach to the employment of formerly incarcerated people and the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector has an obligation to our community and an opportunity to provide that pathway for our people. I am committed to continue this discussion with other Aboriginal organisations to combine advocacy and develop a pathway to better practice in this area.

D(v). NO US AND THEM, JUST US: COMMUNITY LEADING POST-RELEASE RESPONSES

A key theme that stood out to me throughout all my visits was that effective post-release services and programs are delivered by community for the community. When I visited **Homeboy Industries** in Los Angeles, there was signage and branded merchandise which had the phrase “*no us and them, just us*”. We feel a different sense of safety, belonging and acceptance in spaces where we are surrounded by our community. Where there is no ‘othering’, where we don’t need to be conscious of how our use of language or phrases will be racialised and where we have the implicit acceptance of our identity and culture. For me, these are sacred spaces where we come to heal together. The ethos of so many of the community-led organisations that I spent time with was built on this foundation and the success coming from that sense of community and belonging was profound.



Mask sold by Homeboy Industries with the phrase “No us and them, just us”. Photo credit: Homeboy Industries <https://shop.homeboyindustries.org/>

[Black face mask with white writing and Homeboy writing]

It reaffirmed for me our approach at Deadly Connections and the momentum here in Australia more broadly around community-led responses. It runs against the colonial way of separating and segregating us and better reflects our service delivery model of collective healing and community providing for community. It is not a mission model or deficit focus, we build our own capability as community to secure our collective future. This is one key reason why community-led solutions must receive the funding and resources necessary to develop and sustainable deliver on solutions that meet the needs of our community. This should be an invitational space, not an area where non-Aboriginal large not-for-profits occupy the space of our community organisations.

The value of this ethos was reinforced through time I spent with the **Center for NuLeadership on Human Justice & Healing** in New York. There they operate a Village Apprenticeship Program (VAP) to build community generational wealth through the investing in the growth of

Black Indigenous People of Colour-owned small businesses and support them to hire people from the local community. The VAP motto is “*We Rise Together*”. This feeling and approach is particularly important for communities like ours in Australia that have experienced significant and ongoing trauma, forced dislocation and removals. Initiatives where we can prioritise the elevation of all of our community are significant and they become self-sustaining, as I saw during my Fellowship program.

From these experiences, I consider the following to be significant:

- It is both the act of community-led approaches and the sense of power and strength in community that comes from this ethos that contributes to the successes;
- There is a strong evidence base in the United States to support the benefits of community-led post-release responses.

D(vii). EXTENDING PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS TO JUSTICE IMPACTED PEOPLES

There was a clear divergence of approach between the US organisations that I spent time with and those that we have here in Australia in terms of the approach to justice-impacted vs justice-involved peoples. By justice-impacted peoples, I mean those individuals, families and communities who are not directly involved in the justice system but are nonetheless impacted by the criminal legal system. The general position from my observations of organisations here in Australia is that the needs of justice-impacted people are often not catered for in supports and responses to incarceration and can be de-legitimised in debates when seeking to use their experiences to shape better practices. To have a holistic community-led response to the harms caused by incarceration, we must ensure that all those harmed by the system are included, whether that harm comes from being directly incarcerated, or because of the trauma and challenges caused to those who support their loved ones and community members in custody. For me personally that impact started when I was just a child, going to visit my uncle in prison, and has continued throughout my lifetime. It involves supporting loved ones when they are experiencing significant trauma and when they are transitioning back into life outside of custody. For us as Aboriginal people, there is a constant and overwhelming concern that our family member or community member will be harmed by the police or prison staff. Despite this significant impact on the wellbeing and lives of justice-impacted people, there are currently very limited options for support here in Australia.

The common approach that I experienced in the US was that there is better integration of both justice-impacted and justice-involved peoples in the access to programs and support

services and also the legitimacy and credibility to talk to their experiences. It gave the strong impression that 'you're both worthy of support because you've both been impacted by the same harmful system.' That impact is in different ways and is often more intense for those incarcerated, but both justice-impacted and justice-involved people are affected in some way and the responses to those effects should be better integrated to be complementary. When I visited **Project Rebound**, at California State University Fullerton, I met with a young man in the program who was justice-impacted because his father had served life in prison. His household was significantly disrupted by the justice system. It caused trauma, sustained stress, financial challenges, amongst other issues. This young man said that the only way for him to get out of south central Los Angeles was to get this scholarship. This too was his way of breaking the cycle and pursuing a different life for himself away from the circumstances which contributed to his father's offending.

This is also clear to my husband, Keenan, who has been justice-involved, that we must give more thought to the involvement of justice-impacted people in shaping the community response to incarceration. When families, communities and individuals are trying to access support or services around incarceration they need to have broader responses than those coming from the lived experience of incarceration, they also need the experience of those standing on the sideline and being impacted by the justice system in a different way. One does not exist without the other.

The significance of this gap in access to programs is apparent when families have to prepare to receive people back into family and community without ongoing and appropriate support for them to address the trauma that they have experienced. This gap does not set the situation up for success.

To address this, based on my findings on the Fellowship program, it would be appropriate to review current programs for justice-involved people and look to extend availability to justice-impacted peoples. This will require investment and funding, given the limited resources our community organisations are currently working it, but is a necessary investment to ensure the overall response to incarceration is better integrated. That is part of the necessary reframing of the system to support the achievement of the Closing the Gap targets on disproportionate incarceration and recidivism. This is the way Deadly Connections operates and will continue to operate to ensure everyone is provided with the necessary support to move from surviving to thriving.

E. IMPROVED FUNDING APPROACHES FOR COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

E(i). FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMS

In Australia more work needs to be done to shift the narrative about who we are incarcerating and what outcomes we are expecting for those who are incarcerated, their families and communities. Mass incarceration has been a significant issue in the USA however the parallels of the landscape in Australia are only now being recognised by wider Australia. There appears to be more education required around the deep levels of trauma, racism, disadvantage that perpetuates our increasing levels of justice involvement and incarceration. The majority of people who are incarcerated will again join our society, as our neighbours and we need to radically consider what type of people we would like living next to us. Prisons do not adequately address social issues, locking people up does not make them better.

In my experience, community-led initiatives in Australia are chronically underfunded, have difficulty in competitive funding rounds against the significant resources of the large non-Indigenous not-for-profits, and because of our more limited infrastructure and more limited years of operation, face barriers in securing substantial philanthropic donations. There is significant work to be done in the tendering for government grants to recognise the exclusion that our communities have experienced in delivering responses for our communities and priority must be given to redressing this disparity.

At **Homeboy Industries**, their expansive program offering was able to occur due in large part to significant private philanthropic donations. This was also the case for **Operation Restoration** in Louisiana. At Homeboy Industries this was supplemented through the operation of various social enterprises. Whilst I am not informed on the details of their outcomes measurement and reporting for these philanthropic donations, there is often greater flexibility afforded to organisations to have increased input in the measures and outcomes that they and community consider to be significant. We know that in community-led change that the process of working towards sustainable change is incremental and can at times appear slow to progress. Through more openness to community-led outcomes setting and measurement, philanthropic donors can be leaders in fostering newer Aboriginal community-led organisations, such as Deadly Connections, to create real change in our communities. There may be some challenge in finding ways to comparably translate the role and impact of

the US culture of philanthropy to the circumstances in Australia, but these are important and ongoing conversations.

Of the programs visited across the United States many local government agencies in addition to state and federal departments provided ongoing, recurrent funding as they recognise the importance of community led responses to community issues such as gun violence. This funding was also supplemented with philanthropic funding - often from justice involved celebrities who have experienced the full weight of disadvantage and disruption of the criminal legal system and who want to create that change for other people, families and communities.

E(ii) BROKERAGE AS PART OF FUNDING APPLICATIONS

Another finding that I have taken from my Fellowship program, in particular through speaking with leaders at **Operation Restoration** in New Orleans, is that it is important to include a percentage line item in funding applications for brokerage. This is to secure a constant source of funding for brokerage and case management, which can often fall outside of the usual programmatic funding. This is a practice that will be useful to consider further at Deadly Connections and in our community-controlled sector more broadly to better reflect the practices and needs we are responding to outside of the standard funding arrangements.

Overall, it is clear from the breadth of programs, organisations and responses operating in the United States that there is real scope for an improved approach to funding sustainable community-led solutions to the incarceration of Aboriginal people in Australia. The commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to the resourcing and prioritisation of community-led responses offers significant impetus and a timely focus on the true value of community-led solutions.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My Fellowship really affirmed the very significant role and responsibility that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have in addressing the ongoing impacts of the justice system on our community. This spans across all levels of the justice system, from prevention, early intervention and diversion to build community resilience and capacity to respond to the early drivers of justice system involvement, to providing post-release holistic support to facilitate the transformation of the lives of those who have been involved in the justice system and impacted by it.

In reflecting on the hours of discussions, two-way sharing and observations that I had over the course of my Fellowship program and how these experiences relate to my own experiences of the justice and social support sectors here in Australia, I have determined the following recommendations. These extend from the key findings outlined in the table set out in the Executive Summary.

Recommendations:

- That the community-led responses and innovative approaches to the criminal justice system outlined in the key Findings set out in the Executive Summary and further addressed in the body of the report are prioritised for community consideration to ensure a holistic and integrated response across the spectrum of involvement from:
 - Early intervention, prevention and diversion;
 - Transformative justice where initial contact with the justice system is a community-centred approach;
 - Pre-release planning and engagement; to
 - Holistic post-release pathways and reintegration.
- That consideration be given to the development of a community-owned centralised research and evaluation portal to support the sharing of best practice within the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector to continue to build capacity and efficacy and share resources;
- That the breadth of the existing research and evidence base in the United States on the community and individual-level impacts of community-led approaches be leveraged to support an expanded role of community-led responses here in Australia;
- Further engage, through the appropriate representative Aboriginal peak organisations and advocates, in the shaping of government responses to the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the justice system which position Aboriginal community-controlled organisations as the first and key responder to our communities;
- Continue to re-engage government and philanthropic funders to shift traditional and ineffective models of short term program funding to longer term pooled funding providing autonomy and flexibility to community;
- That funding outcome indicators and programmatic theories of change include community-level outcomes identified as relevant to that community to measure early indicators of broader, sustainable change;

- Continue to ensure that Aboriginal people with lived experience both as justice-involved and justice-impacted peoples are at the centre of the design and delivery of responses.

The ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on all facets of life from quarantine and travel requirements to the degree of willingness for services to engage face-to-face unsurprisingly raised a number of challenges during my Fellowship. As I have set out at various points in my report, this necessitated some flexibility in arrangements and schedule changes, and ultimately led to the removal of Canada from my itinerary. I am indebted to the understanding and flexibility shown to me by the Churchill Trust in adjusting the scheduling and allowing for a greater focus on organisations located in New York City - a change which brought great value to my Fellowship.

I feel very privileged to return to Australia as part of an international network of community-led organisations all working towards a future where communities are strong and not subject to the ongoing trauma caused by the cycle of incarceration. I am looking forward to continuing to foster those relationships and information exchange pathways to share international best practice, and of course the lessons learnt from where we have been challenged. Everywhere that I went, I was deeply grateful for the generosity and sharing of commitment that I encountered from across the United States. To receive introductions from well-established organisations who speak to our work as '*doing what they are doing*' provides me with a renewed sense of alignment and common purpose from across the other side of the world.

I have also returned from my Fellowship with an expanded toolkit of community-led innovative responses to justice challenges which I am able to speak to, further consider and seek to implement through my work with Deadly Connections. The Fellowship has also provided a renewed opportunity and impetus to advocate for community-led change both here in Australia and internationally.

The findings in this report are primarily addressed to my colleagues across the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, funding bodies (both government and philanthropic), corrective services operators, and our community itself as we further develop our own approaches informed by the successes and challenges overseas.

The findings are also addressed to mainstream organisations delivering or seeking to deliver programs and supports for Aboriginal peoples and communities. I hope that the report serves as a discussion starter for a deeper engagement in how to develop a cohesive and integrated response to the effects of the justice system on our communities where this is led by the Aboriginal community itself, rather than to us as subjects.

Our community demands real change, both in the approach itself and the outcomes for our people. I realise that the recommendations outlined in my report require a significant shift in approach and a genuine commitment of resources and financial support. Importantly, these recommendations are underscored by a shift in power back to community, which is the necessary underpinning of change. As I well know, shifts in power and resources to Aboriginal communities do not happen lightly. The scale of this shift is significant and it will require genuine commitment from all levels of government and the social service sector despite challenges to achieve. For the empowerment of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to be authentic and successful the commitment to transformational change made under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap must be fully implemented and evaluated. Given the significant economic cost associated with the operation of the justice system and the harm it causes, aside from the greater personal and community costs, the likely costs savings that can be generated from a more effective and preventative focus through community-led approaches have the strong potential to deliver costs savings over the long term and improve community safety.¹⁶

6. DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

I look forward to continuing to share the findings of my Fellowship report and to advocate for the recommendations and ongoing, committed action that is needed to create real change for our community. The key audiences for my report include my colleagues across the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, funding bodies (both government and philanthropic), corrective services operators, and our community itself, because we must be fully informed to engage on these complex issues and to respond in ways which break the cycle for future generations.

I have identified a number of means of disseminating and implementing my findings. The primary vehicle for the communication and discussion of the findings from my Churchill Fellowship will be through my established professional networks and sector connections here in Australia and overseas, including:

- Youth Justice Coalition;
- After Prison Networks;

¹⁶ See for example, KPMG (2018) Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project Impact Assessment [online] <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Maranguka-Justice-Reinvestment-Project-KPMG-Impact-Assessment-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

- Deadly Connections website;
- Social Media channels;
- Promotion during call to action when campaigning for change across a number of justice-related areas;
- Public forums or guest speaking appearances;
- Incarceration Nation screenings, which include audience discussion and questions;
- Deadly Connections Advisory Board;
- Bugmy Justice Working Group; and
- Network email to supporters and funders to promote further engagement in the funding and resourcing of community-led solutions.

These avenues provide a mixture of practical implementation opportunities, such as through the Bugmy Justice Working Group, and collaborative and discussion-based consideration of broader sector-wide advocacy and initiatives that can be undertaken to sustain and extend the impact across organisations. The capacity building of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector is an ongoing responsibility of all Aboriginal organisations.

In addition to these channels, I anticipate presenting my findings at sector conferences and events, particularly as COVID-19 restrictions allow face-to-face events. I also intend to work with university contacts at the University of New South Wales and the University of Technology Sydney to progress initiatives focussed on the placement and support of individuals who have been impacted by the justice system.

The recommendations and findings from my Fellowship report will inform the future direction and advocacy of Deadly Connections. In this way, I will be able to implement, test and further consider with my community the adapted innovative solutions for our own communities here in Australia.

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