



FORGOTTEN BY THE SYSTEM

Reconnected by Community

Advocacy and Evaluation of the Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program

From community consultation to culturally grounded early intervention

A call for government action

Melbourne's West | 2026 Delivery Cycle



Culture • Trust • Mentoring • Pathways • Early Intervention

HEEYERSU

Community-led. Strengthening Communities. Creating Change.



REPORT AUTHORS AND PROGRAM TEAM

Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program Advocacy and Evaluation Report

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Acknowledgement

This report recognises the contribution of the youth leadership team, families, community elders, partner organisations and the young people whose participation and feedback shaped the program and this evaluation.

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MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM TEAM

Team Leads and Mentor Profiles

The Youth Reconnecting Program was delivered by a community-led, multidisciplinary team whose combined expertise spanned case management, research, program design, youth engagement, technology, physical training, wellbeing and health, budgeting, family and stakeholder engagement, creative practice, advocacy, analysis, and employment pathways.

Sherinald Shwe Case Management, Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Program Design Lead Sherinald provides overall participant coordination, case management oversight, research, program development and program design. She works with young people, families, schools, justice services, community organisations and stakeholders to coordinate individualised support. She also leads monitoring, evaluation, reporting, partnership development and continuous improvement.	Ler Ka Paw Say IT Systems Lead Ler leads the program's information technology systems and supports the effective use of digital tools, platforms and processes. Ler helps maintain organised systems for communication, information management, digital resources and program promotion, while mentoring young people in technology, creativity and digital participation.
Thaw Thee Htoo Youth Engagement Lead Thaw plays a frontline role in youth outreach, trust-building, communication and participant retention. He maintains regular contact with young people, identifies barriers to attendance, supports weekly session delivery and provides consistent follow-up before, during and after the program.	Juliet Tennyson Budget Lead Juliet co-leads program budgeting, financial planning, expenditure monitoring and accountability. Her role helps ensure that program resources are responsibly planned, transparently managed and directed toward delivery priorities.
Diana Thomas Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead Diana supports participants' emotional wellbeing through reflective activities, wellbeing check-ins, emotional literacy and resilience-building approaches. She promotes positive coping strategies, self-awareness, help-seeking and appropriate follow-up for young people requiring additional support.	Paw Lwe Moo Nay Aye Health, Nutrition and Budget Lead Paw Lwe leads practical health and nutrition education, helping young people understand the connection between physical health, cultural ways of living, mental wellbeing and everyday routines. She also oversees youth program budgeting and contributes to responsible planning and use of program resources.
Cha Mu Wah Naw Nyo Program Coordinator and Design, Veteran Mentor and Physical Training Lead Cha designs and coordinates the program's structure and delivery while leading physical training and discipline-based mentoring. Drawing on his army leadership and service experience, he supports young people to build confidence, resilience, teamwork, self-control, respect and personal responsibility in a culturally safe and structured environment.	

MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM TEAM — CONTINUED

Integrated roles strengthen engagement, safety, accountability and follow-through.

Maung Hnin Thwe Parent and Stakeholder Engagement Lead Maung strengthens relationships with parents, caregivers, community leaders, referral partners and external services. She supports culturally safe communication, family participation, partnership development and community connections that strengthen engagement and outcomes for young people.	Ah Eh Soe Parent Engagement Lead Ah Eh works closely with parents and caregivers to build trust, strengthen communication and support their involvement in the young person's re-engagement journey. He helps families understand the program, identify support needs and remain connected to appropriate community and service pathways.
Sa Hay Blut Moo Soe Youth Coordination and Music Lead Sa Hay supports youth coordination and leads music activities that strengthen creativity, confidence, identity and belonging. Music provides another pathway for young people to participate, connect with culture, work with others and express their experiences.	Hsa Sher Blu (Moe) Art and Youth Coordinator Lead Moe leads art and creative expression while coordinating youth participation and engagement. Through visual arts, storytelling, communication and youth follow-up, Moe helps young people build confidence, share experiences, develop new skills and remain connected to the program.
Shadow Toke Advocacy Lead Shadow champions community-led advocacy, ensuring people's experiences guide conversations, shape priorities, and influence improvements across programs and services.	Ko Yeh Talor Employment Mentor Ko Yeh supports young people to explore education, training, employment and future pathways. Through mentoring and practical guidance, he helps participants build confidence, set realistic goals, develop work-readiness skills and connect with relevant opportunities and services.
Mark Htoosaw Kunoo Budget Lead Mark leads program budgeting and supports financial planning, expenditure tracking, resource allocation and budget accountability. His role helps ensure activities are delivered responsibly, transparently and within available community-raised resources.	

Report Status and Confidentiality

This report evaluates the completed 12-week Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program and presents the advocacy case for sustained government investment. It uses program documentation, registration and survey data, intake information, participant comments and facilitator records, together with the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Karen Community Project consultation evidence, de-identified case studies and the Heeyersu Community Support Group proposal.

Confidentiality and youth protection

No participant names, contact details or uniquely identifying case information are included. Youth comments are presented anonymously. Intake findings are aggregated, and any narrative examples are composite descriptions drawn from more than one record.

The report is intended for government decision-makers, funders, philanthropic organisations, youth justice and community-service providers, schools, and Heeyersu's community partners.

The findings should be read as an evaluation of short-term reach, engagement, implementation and participant-reported outcomes. The available data does not establish long-term causal effects on justice involvement, school attendance, substance use or family functioning.

Evidence Snapshot

40 young people	35 registered	27 pre-surveys	21 post-surveys	18 intakes
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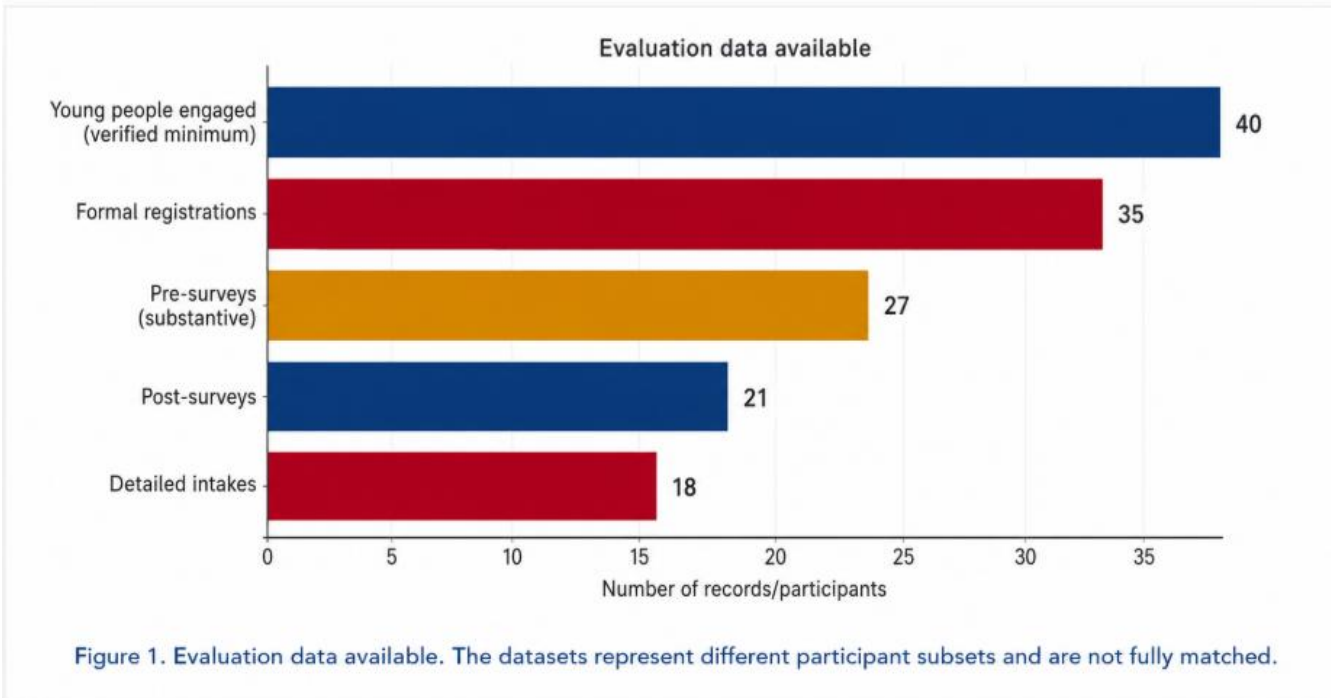


Figure 1. Evaluation data available. The datasets represent different participant subsets and are not fully matched.

Executive Summary

The Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program was established for young people who were disconnected, at risk of further disengagement, or not being reached effectively by conventional services. The program combined physical training, cultural identity, mentoring, wellbeing, creative expression, family connection, education and employment pathways, justice awareness, shared food and practical referrals.

The program was not conceived as a stand-alone pilot. It is the direct implementation of evidence gathered through the former Karen Community Project (KCP). Phase 1 brought together more than 70 leaders and participants connected to 14 Karen community and faith-based organisations. Phase 2 extended that evidence through 14 community-led consultations with young people, parents, elders, women, carers, people with disability, faith leaders and service groups. Across both phases, the message was consistent, the community needed early intervention, safe youth spaces, sport, culture, mentoring, leadership, legal education, employment support, family engagement and trusted referral pathways.

Following the community's transition and rebranding from KCP to Heeyersu, these recommendations were translated into the Heeyersu Community Support Group (CSG) model. The Youth Reconnecting Program is one integrated stream within that model, alongside the Saturday Community Clinic, Elders and Leaders Visitation/Mentoring, community legal education, community capacity building, partnership coordination and the longer-term goal of a trusted community hub.

This evaluation therefore examines more than 12 weekly sessions. It tests whether a community-identified solution could be translated from consultation into practice. The findings show that it could: at least 35 young people were formally registered, strong immediate outcomes were reported, previously hidden needs were identified and trusted help-seeking pathways were created - despite the absence of dedicated external funding.

The evaluation finds that the program was highly relevant to the needs of the cohort, coherent in its design and strongly valued by the young people who completed the post-program survey. It created a trusted point of connection through which young people could build relationships, strengthen cultural identity, discuss difficult issues and access practical support.

COMMUNITY-FUNDED DELIVERY

Heeyersu advises that the program received no dedicated government, philanthropic or commissioned funding. The 12-week program was made possible through the collective efforts of young people, families, mentors and community members, who contributed funds, time and other resources. The program was therefore not cost-free; its costs were largely carried by the community. The positive outcomes were achieved despite the absence of external funding, not because the program did not require investment.

This strengthens the evidence of local demand, ownership and trust, but it also exposes a serious equity and sustainability issue. A program supporting young people with complex needs should not depend on those same young people and their community to finance the response to service gaps. Community fundraising proved the model; it should not be expected to sustain it.

Central evaluation finding

The young people were not inherently hard to reach. They engaged when the pathway was culturally grounded, relational, practical and delivered by adults they trusted.

The program's strongest evidence relates to immediate outcomes. All 21 post-survey respondents reported increased confidence. Positive response rates were 95% for relationships (19 of 20 valid responses), cultural and community connection (20 of 21), mentor support (19 of 20) and hope for the future (20 of 21), 90% for useful life skills (19 of 21), and 85% for better decision-making (17 of 20).

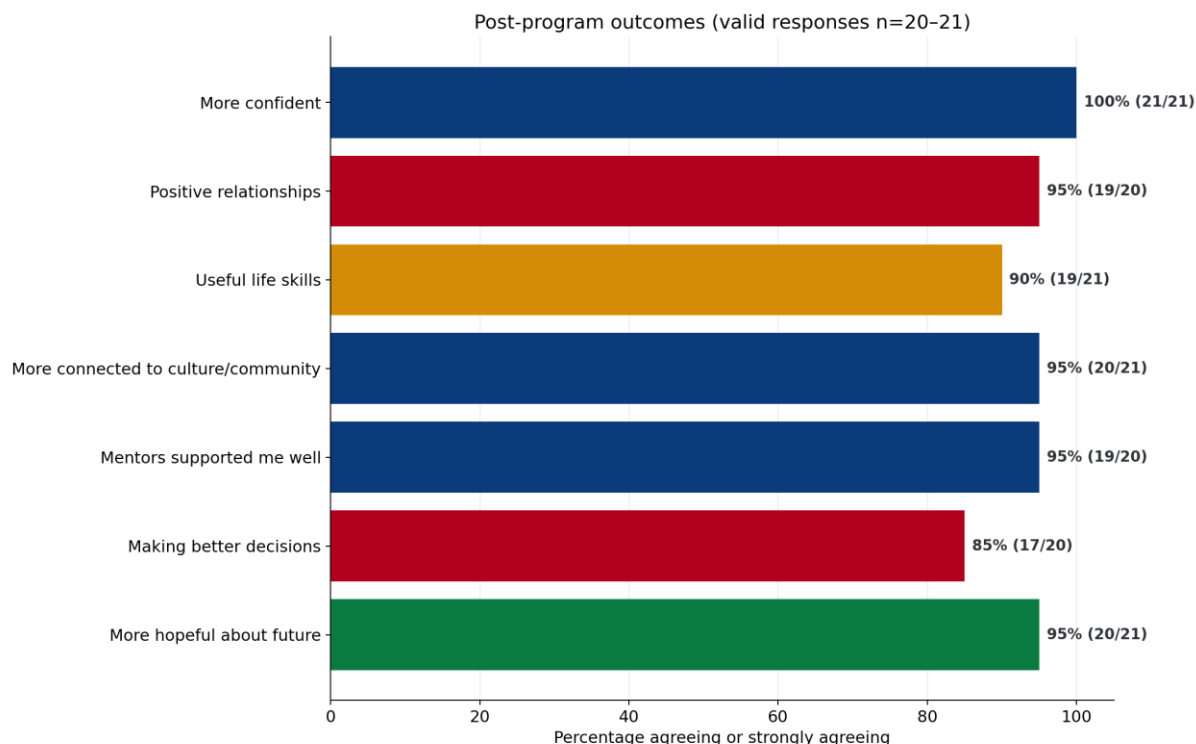


Figure 2. Percentage of valid post-survey responses agreeing or strongly agreeing with each outcome statement. Valid denominators range from 20 to 21.

The detailed intake data also show that the program reached young people with intersecting needs. Thirteen of the 18 young people who completed a detailed intake had at least one stated support need or significant concern involving education, employment, legal or financial issues, family circumstances, wellbeing, substance use or service navigation.

The program design was supported by a multidisciplinary, community-led staffing model, with dedicated functions across case management, youth engagement, veteran mentoring and physical training, mental health and wellbeing, family engagement, health and nutrition, creative expression, employment pathways and stakeholder engagement. The governance documentation also set out weekly planning, debriefing, follow-up, risk oversight and continuous improvement processes.

The program's documented child-safe approach aligns cultural safety with the Victorian Child Safe Standards and emphasises youth voice, family involvement, suitable staff and volunteers, reporting processes, physical and online safety, privacy and continuous improvement.

The main risk is sustainability. A 12-week program can build trust and demonstrate what works, but it is too short to consolidate education, employment, legal, health or behavioural outcomes for young people with complex needs. Ending support after trust has been established may reproduce the instability the program was designed to address.

ADVOCACY CONCLUSION

The community has already undertaken consultation, co-design, fundraising, program delivery and initial evaluation. The next step for government is to invest earlier, before young people experience school exclusion, repeated police contact, court involvement, detention, family breakdown or crisis. What is now required is a funded, accountable and multi-year early-intervention partnership, rather than another unfunded pilot or consultation process.

Headline findings

- The reach was strong and locally concentrated: the current registration table contains 35 formal participant records, providing a verified minimum reach of 35 young people; 34 of 35 registrations (97%) were from the City of Wyndham.
- The program has a documented community mandate. It directly responds to recommendations from Phase 1 and Phase 2 KCP consultations across 14 Karen community, faith-based and service groups.
- The full 12-week program was delivered without dedicated external funding. Young people and community members raised money and contributed resources to make the program possible. This demonstrates extraordinary ownership and unmet demand, but it is not a sustainable substitute for government or philanthropic investment.
- The Youth Reconnecting Program is not an isolated recreation project. It is the youth early-intervention stream of the broader Heeyersu Community Support Group model, designed to connect youth engagement with family support, service navigation, legal education, mentoring and warm referrals.
- The program reached a broad age range, approximately 9 to 23 years, including children, adolescents and young adults requiring continued youth-focused support.
- Post-program experience was strongly positive: 100% of respondents reported greater confidence; 95% reported positive relationships, stronger cultural/community connection, supportive mentoring and greater hope; 90% reported useful life skills; and 85% reported better decision-making. Denominators varied from 20 to 21 because some items were unanswered.
- The program created a trusted help-seeking pathway. Young people wrote that they had people to talk to and could ask for help when needed.
- Culture operated as a core engagement and protective mechanism, not an additional activity.
- Boxing and physical training were the most frequently selected activities and functioned as a gateway to routine, discipline, self-regulation and mentoring.
- Detailed intake records showed hidden and intersecting needs that were unlikely to be identified through a recreation-only or referral-only model.
- The evidence supports continuation and strengthening of the model, but the current data system is not yet sufficient to verify long-term outcomes or the program team's estimate that approximately 80% of the wider cohort were justice-involved or disengaged from mainstream services.
- The evidence supports government investment with rigorous evaluation. It does not yet prove reduced offending or reoffending; it demonstrates the precursor outcomes on which prevention depends; engagement, trust, belonging, help-seeking, positive relationships, future orientation and connection to support.

1. Program Overview

The Youth Reconnecting Program was a 12-week, community-led, culturally safe, trauma-informed and strengths-based model for young people who may be disengaged from school, family, community, services or positive pathways.

The program included a Veteran Mentor and Physical Training Lead as a consistent presence throughout the 12 weeks. The role was designed to translate discipline, lived experience, service, resilience, teamwork and values-based leadership into practical learning, rather than punishment.

From KCP Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultation to Heeyersu action

The Youth Reconnecting Program was developed in response to evidence gathered directly from the community, rather than introduced as an external or pre-designed intervention. Beginning in 2025, Karen community leaders formed the Karen Community Project to understand barriers to justice, safety and service access, and to identify community-led solutions. The consultation process deliberately used trusted organisations, faith groups, leaders and bilingual facilitation because participants reported greater safety and willingness to speak in culturally familiar settings.

Phase 1 engaged more than 70 leaders and participants connected to 14 Karen organisations and included young people, youth leaders, parents, elders, faith leaders, people with disability and people with lived experience of the justice system. Phase 2 then involved 14 further community-led group consultations. The consistency across these different settings gave the program a strong community mandate, young people needed a safe place combining sport, culture, trusted adults, legal knowledge, wellbeing, leadership, education and employment pathways.

Stage	Community evidence or action	Meaning for the Youth Reconnecting Program
Phase 1: Community Leaders Consultation	More than 70 leaders and participants connected to 14 Karen community and faith-based organisations identified justice, safety, language, trust and youth-engagement barriers.	Established the need for prevention, cultural safety, legal education, youth leadership and community ownership.
Phase 2: 14 community-led consultations	Youth, families, elders, women, carers, disability participants, faith groups and service organisations reported consistent barriers and priorities.	Confirmed that youth needs were connected to family stress, language, trauma, peer influence, service fragmentation, education, employment and wellbeing.
Community recommendation	A trusted Karen-led first point of contact and youth programs combining sport, culture, mentoring, leadership, legal education, wellbeing and pathways.	Provided the design brief for a culturally grounded, practical and relationship-based youth model.
Transition from KCP to Heeyersu	The community moved from consultation and advocacy into coordinated delivery, prevention, capacity building and service navigation.	The Youth Reconnecting Program became a practical response to the findings rather than another report without implementation.
12-week delivery and evaluation	The community raised the money, delivered the program and collected initial evidence of reach, experience and short-term outcomes.	Demonstrated feasibility, trust, local demand and the case for sustained public investment with stronger longitudinal evaluation.

The Youth Reconnecting Program within the Community Support Group model

The consolidated community report positioned Heeyersu as a Community Support Group model, a culturally safe first point of contact that strengthens, rather than replaces, legal, youth, health, settlement, education and government services. The Youth Reconnecting Program is one stream in this integrated model. This is important because young people's needs do not fit neatly into one service category. A conversation during physical training may reveal school disengagement, a legal issue, family stress, alcohol or other drug concerns, housing instability or uncertainty about employment. The wider CSG model provides the pathway for follow-up.

CSG stream	Function and connection to early intervention
Saturday Community Clinic	Intake, triage, document support, service navigation, warm referrals and follow-up for young people and families.
Youth Reconnecting Program	Culturally grounded engagement through sport, mentoring, culture, wellbeing, leadership, pathways and justice awareness.
Elders and Leaders Visitation/Mentoring	Cultural mentoring, family connection and continuity for people interacting with youth justice, corrections or other systems.
Community legal education and capacity building	Plain-language information, referral skills, safeguarding and practical knowledge for young people, families and community leaders.
Partnership and referral coordination	Formal links with legal, education, youth justice, health, AOD, employment, settlement and community services.
Community hub/shared space	A safe, confidential and culturally grounded place for support, youth activities, workshops, community accountability and service outreach.

Evaluation implication: the Youth Reconnecting Program should be funded and assessed as part of an integrated early-intervention system, not reduced to a stand-alone sport or recreation activity. Its value lies partly in the trusted pathways it creates into family support, legal assistance, education, employment, health and service navigation.

Program structure

Session component	Indicative time	Purpose
Welcome and check-in	10 minutes	Create safety, routine and connection; identify who may need encouragement or follow-up.
Physical training or movement	30 minutes	Build discipline, body awareness, confidence, teamwork and emotional regulation.
Weekly theme activity	45 minutes	Develop focused knowledge, skills, reflection and practical application.
Break and shared food	15 minutes	Support informal mentoring, cultural connection and relationship-building.
Group discussion or sharing circle	15 minutes	Strengthen youth voice, peer connection, respectful listening and help-seeking.
Reflection and closing	5 minutes	Close safely, identify a takeaway and establish a practical next step.

Twelve-week content sequence

Week	Theme	Intended focus
1	Welcome, safety and belonging	Trust, group expectations, youth voice and safe participation.
2	Identity and culture	Cultural pride, family, identity, belonging and positive role models.
3	Emotions and regulation	Triggers, stress, anger, anxiety and practical self-regulation tools.
4	Confidence, discipline and self-respect	Strengths, resilience, effort, courage and positive self-image.
5	Art, dance and music	Creative expression, cultural storytelling, identity and emotional connection.
6	Health and nutrition	Food, sleep, movement, hydration and everyday wellbeing habits.
7	Family, respect and relationships	Communication, boundaries, repair, accountability and healthy relationships.
8	Leadership, responsibility and teamwork	Service, discipline, positive role modelling and team problem-solving.
9	Education and employment pathways	School, training, apprenticeships, work readiness and goal-setting.
10	Choices, consequences and justice awareness	Peer pressure, rights, risk, consequences and support pathways.
11	Community connection and giving back	Community strengths, contribution, service and belonging.
12	Reflection, celebration and next steps	Recognition, future planning and continued support.

The weekly plans show a repeated rhythm of movement, themed learning, food, creativity, reflection and informal connection. This repetition was a design strength: it created predictability while allowing each week to address a different area of development.

Community-funded delivery

Unlike many short-term youth pilots, the Youth Reconnecting Program was not supported by a government grant, philanthropic grant or commissioned service contract. Young people and community members came together to raise the money required to deliver the 12-week program.

The lack of external funding did not mean that the program was delivered without cost. Instead, the financial responsibility and delivery were carried by a community already responding to unmet youth need. Community fundraising demonstrated legitimacy, urgency and collective responsibility. It should be recognised as community co-investment and evidence of commitment, rather than treated as a sustainable funding model.

Resource limitations also constrained the program's ability to provide intensive follow-up, formal case coordination, transport support, specialist input, comprehensive data collection and longer-term outcome monitoring. The results in this report therefore show what the model achieved under significant resource constraints and may understate what could be achieved with stable funding.

2. Evaluation Purpose and Questions

The evaluation was designed to determine whether the program reached its intended cohort, was delivered through a coherent and safe model, produced meaningful short-term outcomes, and provides a credible basis for continued investment.

Evaluation questions

1. **Relevance:** Did the program respond to the needs and barriers experienced by young people in Melbourne's West?
2. **Reach:** Who engaged, where did they live, and did the program reach young people experiencing disconnection or multiple support needs?
3. **Implementation:** Was the program model coherent, culturally grounded, multidisciplinary and aligned with its intended 12-week design?
4. **Engagement and safety:** Did young people experience the program as welcoming, supportive, culturally connected and safe?
5. **Immediate outcomes:** Did participants report changes in confidence, relationships, cultural connection, life skills, decision-making and hope?
6. **Pathways and support:** Did the program identify needs and connect young people to practical assistance or external services?
7. **Sustainability:** What is required to retain engagement and build longer-term outcomes?
8. **Resourcing and equity:** What did community-funded delivery reveal about local ownership, feasibility and the need for sustainable external investment?

3. Evaluation Methodology

A mixed-methods, practice-based and contribution-focused evaluation was used. The approach combined a process evaluation of program design and implementation; an outcome evaluation of participant-reported change and identified support needs; and an evidence-lineage analysis tracing how Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultation recommendations were translated into the Heeyersu Community Support Group model and the Youth Reconnecting Program.

3.1 Data sources

The evaluation also considered Heeyersu's program information confirming that delivery was not externally funded and that young people and community members raised money and contributed resources to support the 12 weeks.

Source	Records reviewed	Contribution to the evaluation
Program registrations	35	Participant reach, age range, suburb and basic cohort profile.
Pre-program surveys	24 substantive responses (25 table records; 1 blank)	Entry motivations, baseline perceptions of connection, support, confidence, cultural pride and help-seeking.
Post-program surveys	21	Participant-reported outcomes, preferred activities, learning, improvement suggestions and the meaning of Heeyersu.
Detailed youth intake assessments	18	Education, employment, legal, financial, family, wellbeing, substance-use and service-navigation needs.
12-week program pack	1 program model	Intended program logic, weekly structure, themes, expected outcomes and facilitator principles.

Source	Records reviewed	Contribution to the evaluation
Weekly session plans	Weeks 1-12 supplied	Evidence of planned delivery content, staff roles, food, activities, guest contributions and adaptations.
Governance and staffing model	1 document	Role accountability, multidisciplinary delivery, planning, follow-up, risk oversight and continuous improvement.
Child Safe Standards Policy	1 document	Safeguarding commitments, youth voice, family involvement, cultural safety, reporting, privacy and risk management.
Facilitator observations and program records	Practice evidence	Contextual information regarding engagement, disclosures, referrals and program implementation.
KCP Phase 1 Community Leaders Consultation Report	1 report; more than 70 participants linked to 14 organisations	Origin, community mandate, early-intervention priorities, youth recommendations, justice-reinvestment framing and limitations.
KCP/Heeyersu Phase 2 Consolidated 14-Group Report	14 consultation reports consolidated	Cross-group themes, youth-specific needs, service gaps, CSG recommendations and the transition from community voice to Heeyersu delivery.
De-identified community case studies	24 theme-based case studies	Illustration of escalation pathways, family and youth system-navigation barriers, and the potential role of early community intervention.
Heeyersu Community Support Group proposal	1 integrated model and 12-month budget	Relationship between Youth Reconnecting, Saturday Clinic, Elders/Leaders mentoring, governance, proposed staffing and investment requirements.
Confidential interviews	Restricted thematic review only	Used to confirm context and recurring themes. No identifying information or direct confidential interview material is reproduced in this public report.

3.2 Analysis

- Descriptive quantitative analysis was applied to participant counts, registration characteristics and survey response distributions.
- Open-text survey responses were reviewed thematically, with repeated ideas grouped into themes such as belonging, culture, mentoring, help-seeking, leadership, respect and hope.
- Detailed intake records were coded at an aggregate level across education, employment, legal, financial, family, wellbeing, substance-use and service-navigation needs.
- Documentary analysis assessed the program's internal coherence, governance, staffing, safety framework and alignment between weekly content and intended outcomes.
- Contribution analysis mapped the Phase 1 and Phase 2 recommendations against the program design to assess whether the delivered model responded to the needs the community had identified.
- An advocacy and investment analysis considered the program's place within the Community Support Group model and the case for government reinvestment in prevention, while distinguishing demonstrated short-term outcomes from longer-term outcomes that remain to be tested.
- A resourcing and sustainability analysis considered the absence of external funding, community fundraising and contributed resources, and the implications for equity, scale, workforce continuity and continuation.

- Triangulation was used to compare survey results, intake findings, program design and participant comments. A finding was considered stronger when it appeared across more than one evidence source.

3.3 Evaluation framework

The program was assessed across relevance, reach, design coherence, implementation, cultural safety, safeguarding, short-term effectiveness, service connection, sustainability and evidence quality. Ratings are evaluative judgements for this report and are not external accreditation, community ownership, resourcing equity and funding sustainability.

3.4 Ethical and child-safe approach

- All findings are reported in aggregate, and no personal identifiers are included.
- Open-text comments are quoted anonymously and only where they do not reveal identity.
- Detailed case information has been converted into broad themes or composite descriptions.
- Confidential interview records were treated as restricted material. The public report relies on aggregate themes and de-identified case-study evidence rather than identifiable interview content.
- The evaluation recognises that disclosure is voluntary and that an absence of recorded need does not establish an absence of need.
- The interpretation is consistent with the program's no-pressure, trauma-informed and culturally safe practice principles.

3.5 Methodological limitations

- The 35 young people represented in the current registration data were not all represented in every evaluation dataset.
- The current data include 35 registration records, 27 substantive pre-survey responses, 21 post-survey responses and 18 detailed intakes.
- The pre- and post-surveys were anonymous and could not be matched participant by participant.
- Survey respondents may have been more engaged or more satisfied than non-respondents.
- The post-survey measured participant perceptions rather than independently verified behavioural outcomes.
- Attendance, retention, dosage, referral completion and follow-up outcomes were not available in a consistent dataset.
- The supplied session plans demonstrate intended delivery; they do not by themselves verify that every component was delivered exactly as planned.
- The available evidence does not establish long-term effects on school attendance, employment, justice contact, substance use, family relationships or mental health.
- The Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports are qualitative community consultation evidence, not population-level statistical studies. Their strength lies in the consistency of findings across 14 community settings.
- No formal economic evaluation or independently validated avoided-cost analysis was undertaken. The report therefore makes a policy case for investment and evaluation, but does not claim a proven financial saving or reduction in offending or reoffending.
- The evaluation did not include audited financial statements or a complete cost and in-kind contribution ledger. The community-funded status is based on Heeyersu's program information and is not assigned a dollar value in this report.

4. Program Logic and Theory of Change

The program's theory of change can be stated simply: when young people are offered a culturally grounded, safe and consistent environment that combines physical activity, trusted mentoring, youth voice, practical learning, family and community connection, and supported pathways, they are more likely to engage, disclose needs, build confidence, strengthen belonging and take positive next steps.

The wider CSG theory of change adds a second layer: when the trusted youth program is connected to family support, community navigation, legal education, elders, schools and formal service partners, early engagement is more likely to lead to sustained support rather than another unsupported referral.

Inputs	Activities	Immediate outputs	Short-term outcomes	Longer-term outcomes sought
Community leadership; multidisciplinary mentors; culturally trusted relationships; safe venue; partners; food and activities	PT and boxing; cultural learning; mentoring; wellbeing; art/music; family and relationship work; pathway sessions; justice awareness; warm referrals	Weekly participation; trusted conversations; identified needs; goal setting; referrals; peer and mentor relationships	Confidence; belonging; cultural pride; emotional regulation; help-seeking; life skills; hope; improved decision awareness	Re-engagement with education/training/work; reduced crisis escalation; stronger family and community connection; safer choices; sustained service engagement

Important evaluation distinction

The available evidence supports the immediate outputs and short-term outcomes. Longer-term outcomes remain intended outcomes and require follow-up measurement.

5. Implementation Evaluation

5.1 Coherent and differentiated weekly design

The program pack shows a clear progression from safety and identity toward self-regulation, confidence, health, relationships, leadership, pathways, justice awareness, community contribution and future planning. The sequence is developmentally coherent, young people are not asked to discuss consequences or future goals before the program has invested in safety, trust and identity.

The weekly plans also show practical adaptation. Cultural food, dance, music, creative writing, floral and food-making activities, guest speakers, rights education and group challenges were used to make abstract themes concrete and engaging.

5.2 Multidisciplinary delivery

The governance and staffing model distributed responsibility across case management, stakeholder engagement, youth outreach, veteran mentoring, physical training, mental health and wellbeing, health and nutrition, family engagement, creative expression and employment pathways. This design reduced reliance on a single worker and increased the program's ability to respond to multiple needs.

The delivery team brought together 14 leads and mentors across case management, research and design, IT systems, youth engagement, veteran mentoring and physical training, mental health, health and nutrition, budgeting, parent and stakeholder engagement, music, art, advocacy, report analysis and employment pathways. This breadth allowed engagement activities, risk awareness, family support, referrals, accountability and future planning to operate as one coordinated model rather than separate interventions.

A key strength was the connection between weekly group delivery and support outside the session. The governance model described intake, needs identification, attendance monitoring, family liaison, referral coordination, individual follow-up, team debriefing and communication with schools and external services.

5.3 Cultural safety and youth voice

Cultural identity was embedded across the model through language, food, music, dance, storytelling, family and community leadership. Young people were also invited to influence program expectations and activities, and the facilitator principles protected the right to pass or decline public sharing.

5.4 Safeguarding

The Child Safe Standards Policy documented commitments to zero tolerance of abuse, racism and harmful behaviour; cultural safety; youth empowerment; family involvement; staff and volunteer suitability; complaints and reporting; physical and online safety; privacy; and continuous improvement.

This provides a credible safeguarding foundation. However, policy quality is not the same as implementation assurance. Future evaluation should document staff induction, Working with Children Checks, risk assessments, incidents, complaints, consent, supervision and policy review in a routine compliance register.

5.5 Implementation fidelity

The documentary evidence indicates strong fidelity at the level of program philosophy and intended structure. Repeated components—welcome, physical training, themed learning, shared food, group reflection and mentoring—appear consistently across the program pack and weekly plans.

Actual delivery fidelity cannot be fully verified from the available records. The session-plan set contains some version-control issues, including inconsistent week labels and repeated template content, and the evaluation did not receive a complete session-by-session implementation log. This is an administrative weakness rather than evidence that delivery was poor, but it limits the strength of conclusions about exactly what was delivered each week.

5.6 Community-funded delivery

The program was delivered without dedicated external funding. Young people and community members mobilised to raise money and sustain delivery. This is a significant implementation achievement because it shows that the model was not imposed on the community: participants, families and community leaders considered the need urgent enough to invest in collectively.

The evaluation does not treat successful fundraising as proof that the program can continue unfunded. Dependence on community fundraising creates uncertainty, places pressure on young people and families, limits workforce and follow-up capacity, and risks interruption just as trust begins to develop.

Evaluation judgement: community fundraising was a strength of mobilisation, ownership and collective responsibility, while the absence of external investment was a major implementation constraint. The community should be recognised for proving the model, not expected to carry its ongoing costs.

6. Reach and Participant Profile

The current registration table contains 34 formal participant records. This provides a verified minimum reach of 34 young people. A final reconciliation with session attendance is still recommended to determine whether any additional young people attended without completing registration.

97% Wyndham registrations	9–23 age range	65% under 18	35% 18 or older
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Geographic reach

Location	Registered participants
Wyndham Vale (including Jubilee)	20
Werribee	7
Hoppers Crossing	4
Tarneit	1
Manor Lakes	1
Wyndham - not further specified	1
Corio	1

More than half of registrations were from Wyndham Vale or the neighbouring Jubilee area. This concentration demonstrates local demand and supports future delivery in an accessible Wyndham location. The broad age range also indicates that transition-age young adults remain in need of culturally grounded youth support beyond age 18.

Reasons for joining and support requested

Young people joined because of friends, family encouragement, community connection, motivation, a desire to meet others, and the need for help. Employment was a recurring priority. Pre-survey respondents also identified housing, Centrelink, financial, legal, health, immigration and document-understanding needs.

Evaluation interpretation

The program functioned as a low-barrier entry point. A young person could initially attend for friends, exercise or food and later access mentoring, legal information, employment support or another service pathway.

7. Participant-Reported Outcomes

7.1 Pre-program position

Pre-program statement	Agree/strongly agree	Percentage
I feel connected to my community	21 of 24	88%
I have people I can talk to	21 of 23	91%
I feel confident about my future	14 of 24	58%
I feel proud of my culture	22 of 24	92%
I know where to get help if needed	19 of 24	79%

The baseline pattern is important. Most respondents reported some connection to community, culture and trusted people, but confidence about the future was lower. Ten of the 24 substantive respondents did not clearly express future confidence, and five did not clearly indicate that they knew where to seek help.

7.2 Post-program outcomes

Post-program outcome	Agree/strongly agree	Percentage
The program helped me feel more confident	21 of 21	100%
I built positive relationships	19 of 20	95%
I learned useful life skills	19 of 21	90%
I feel more connected to culture/community	20 of 21	95%
The mentors supported me well	19 of 20	95%
I make better decisions now	17 of 20	85%
I feel more hopeful about my future	20 of 21	95%

The post-program response pattern was strongly positive. One negative response was recorded across the seven outcome questions, one participant disagreed that they had built positive relationships. Other non-positive responses were neutral or unanswered. The strongest conclusion is that the program generated credible short-term evidence of confidence, connection, mentor support, life skills, decision awareness and hope among respondents.

The results must not be described as a matched pre-post improvement because respondents were anonymous and the questions were not identical. The pattern is nevertheless consistent with the program's intended short-term outcomes.

8. Key Themes from the Evaluation

Ten interconnected themes emerged from the participant comments, survey patterns, intake data and program design.

Theme 1: Trust and belonging were the gateway to engagement

Young people described Heeyersu as “friendship,” “family,” “a safe place,” and a place where they could spend time with people who cared about them. These comments show that the program's value was relational, not transactional.

The program did not begin with assessment, correction or referral. It began with welcome, food, movement, names, laughter, repeated contact and the right not to disclose. This created the conditions in which young people could later discuss needs.

“A place where I can hang out with friends and people that I care about and [who] care about me.”

Evaluation judgement: belonging was not only an outcome. It was the principal mechanism that enabled participation and help-seeking.

Theme 2: Culture was a method of engagement and a protective factor

Cultural food, identity activities, music, dance, storytelling and community mentors were embedded across the program. Twenty of the 21 post-survey respondents (95%) reported feeling more connected to culture and community.

“The PT and cultural activities made me feel very good about myself ... our cultural food made me learn a lot.”

Young people also described the program as helping them become “more Knyaw.” This suggests that cultural connection strengthened identity and belonging while making the program feel relevant and owned by the community.

Evaluation judgement: culture was not an optional adaptation to a mainstream model; it was a core active ingredient.

Theme 3: Physical activity created a pathway into regulation, discipline and mentoring

Fifteen of the 21 post-survey respondents selected boxing or physical training as an activity that helped them most. The program pack intentionally linked movement with routine, emotional regulation, effort, teamwork, self-control and confidence.

Physical activity allowed young people to participate before they were ready to speak. It also gave mentors a practical way to model boundaries, persistence and respectful leadership.

Evaluation judgement: the physical component should be retained, but its effectiveness depended on being integrated with culture, food, reflection and mentoring rather than delivered as a stand-alone sport program.

Theme 4: Consistent mentors turned awareness of services into real help-seeking

Nineteen of the 20 respondents who answered the mentor-support item (95%) agreed that mentors supported them well. Young people wrote that they had people to help them, could ask for help and had people to talk to.

“I learnt that I have people to help me if I need.”

A list of services is not a pathway when a young person does not trust the system, know what to say or believe they will be understood. The program's mentors acted as trusted intermediaries who could explain, introduce, follow up and remain alongside the young person.

Evaluation judgement: relationship continuity was one of the program's strongest assets and should be funded as core service infrastructure, not treated as volunteer goodwill.

Theme 5: Confidence and hope opened future pathways

Fifty-eight per cent of substantive pre-survey respondents expressed confidence about their future. At post-survey, all 21 respondents reported increased confidence and 20 of 21 (95%) reported greater hope.

Young people linked the program to leadership, goals, employment, culture and having someone to speak with. The pathway sessions also included education, training, apprenticeships, employment skills, guest speakers and practical next-step planning.

Evaluation judgement: the program produced strong evidence of future orientation, but actual education and employment outcomes require follow-up at 3, 6 and 12 months.

Theme 6: Complex needs became visible through relationships

Eleven of 16 detailed intake records contained at least one stated legal, educational, employment, family, wellbeing, substance-use or service-navigation need. The records showed that “disengagement” was rarely a single issue.

A participant missing school might also experience family conflict or financial pressure. A young person not working or studying might also carry caring responsibilities or substance-use concerns. A young person may be deeply affected by a family member's justice involvement without being personally charged.

Composite youth experience

Across the intake records, young people were balancing school or work uncertainty, family responsibilities, legal or financial stress, sleep and wellbeing concerns, and the effects of justice or substance use within the family. The program gave these issues somewhere to surface together rather than sending the young person to separate systems.

Evaluation judgement: the program functioned as an early-identification and navigation model, not simply a weekly activity.

Theme 7: Accountability was delivered with care rather than shame

The program repeatedly addressed respect, choices, consequences, rights, repair and responsibility. Veteran mentoring and justice-awareness content were framed around pause, self-control, service and safer decisions.

The facilitator principle of “accountability with care” is significant. Young people were encouraged to understand consequences without being reduced to their behaviour or previous contact with systems.

Evaluation judgement: this approach is particularly relevant for young people who have experienced punitive responses or expect judgement from adults.

Theme 8: Youth voice and creativity increased ownership

Young people were invited to co-create group agreements, identify what they wanted from the program, write lyrics, share music and art, reflect on leadership and recommend improvements.

Their suggestions were practical: a larger venue, more activities, more involvement and excursions. Most did not request a different model; they requested more opportunities within it.

Evaluation judgement: youth voice was present in program activities and evaluation, but future delivery should establish a formal youth advisory role in design, review and governance.

Theme 9: Community investment proved demand, but exposed systemic underinvestment

The program was not externally funded. Young people and community members raised money to make the 12 weeks possible. This created shared ownership and demonstrated that the program addressed a need the community considered immediate and important.

The capacity of a community to mobilise should not become a reason for government, funders or service systems to withdraw. The burden of filling youth-service gaps should not fall on young people, families and community leaders. Community fundraising can begin or test a model; it cannot reliably fund sustained mentoring, specialist support, case coordination, safeguarding, transport, evaluation and long-term follow-up.

Evaluation judgement: the community-funded delivery model is evidence of commitment, trust and unmet demand. It is not evidence of financial sustainability.

Theme 10: The program was community evidence translated into action

The design closely mirrors the priorities identified in both consultation phases: safe spaces, sport, culture, mentoring, leadership, mental health and wellbeing, legal education, family connection, education and employment pathways, and trusted adults. This alignment is not incidental. The program was created because the community had already documented what was missing and what young people said would help.

This strengthens the program's relevance and legitimacy. It also changes the advocacy question. Government is not being asked to fund an idea generated without evidence. It is being asked to stabilise, strengthen and evaluate a solution that emerged from broad community consultation, was co-designed by community and youth leaders, was delivered through community investment and produced strong immediate participant-reported outcomes.

Evaluation judgement: there is strong qualitative evidence that the program responds directly to an established community mandate and fills a gap identified consistently across the 14 consultation settings.

9. Advocacy Case: Government Reinvestment in Early Intervention

The central advocacy finding is that the community has already carried out the work usually requested before investment: it identified the problem, consulted widely, co-designed a response, raised funds, mobilised a multidisciplinary team, delivered the program and collected initial evaluation evidence. Repeating consultation without resourcing implementation would deepen consultation fatigue and shift responsibility back onto the community.

9.1 Why earlier investment matters

The Phase 1 and Phase 2 evidence and the de-identified case studies show how risk can escalate when early support is absent: school disengagement can combine with peer influence; first police contact can occur without clear follow-up; parents may not understand police, child protection or court processes; young people may distrust formal services; and legal, family, housing, substance-use and wellbeing pressures may compound one another. By the time a system responds, the issue may be more serious, more expensive and more harmful.

The Youth Reconnecting Program intervenes at an earlier point by strengthening the protective conditions around a young person: a safe place, cultural identity, trusted adults, structure, emotional regulation, positive peers, family connection, future goals and supported pathways. The present evaluation does not prove reduced offending or reoffending. It does show that these foundational conditions can be created and that young people will engage with them.

9.2 What government reinvestment should mean

- In this report, government reinvestment means allocating sustained public resources to locally governed prevention and community navigation before crisis and deeper justice involvement, while maintaining access to statutory and specialist services. It is not a request for Heeyersu to replace youth justice, legal, health or education systems. It is a request to fund the trusted bridge that enables young people and families to reach those systems earlier and more safely.
- Multi-year funding for weekly youth engagement, outreach, mentoring, family contact and follow-up.
- Paid bicultural and community-led roles across youth coordination, case navigation, wellbeing, employment, family engagement and program leadership.
- Formal referral partnerships and feedback loops with youth justice, schools, legal services, health, alcohol and other drug services, employment and settlement providers.
- Accessible venue, transport, food, physical activities, cultural activities and youth-led excursions.
- Strong safeguarding, supervision, staff development, data systems and independent or partnered evaluation.
- Community accountability through regular reporting to the 14 participating groups and structured youth and family input.

9.3 Current investment pathway

The current Heeyersu CSG proposal identifies a 12-month investment of \$263,000 for the Youth Reconnecting Program within a \$720,000 integrated Community Support Group model. These figures are proposal estimates and should be finalised through detailed costing and government due diligence. They nevertheless show that the youth stream requires funded staffing, delivery and operating capacity - not only activity costs.

Proposed CSG stream	Purpose	Draft 12-month investment
Youth Reconnecting Program	Early intervention through mentoring, physical activity, culture, life skills, pathways, family engagement and justice awareness.	\$263,000
Saturday Community Clinic / CSG coordination	Intake, triage, navigation, legal and practical support, referrals and follow-up.	\$200,000
Elders and Leaders Visitation/Mentoring	Cultural mentoring, justice-system connection, family and community continuity.	\$257,000
Integrated model total	Three connected streams with governance, staffing, delivery, operations, monitoring and partnerships.	\$720,000

9.4 Impact pathway and accountability

A funded next phase should be judged against a transparent impact pathway. Immediate outcomes already evidenced include engagement, confidence, relationships, culture, mentor support, hope and identification of needs. A 12-month funded phase should test retention, referral completion, education and employment pathways, family engagement, wellbeing and safer decision-making. Longer-term claims relating to justice contact, reoffending or avoided system costs should be made only after matched longitudinal data and appropriate economic analysis are available.

A CALL FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Fund a 12-month Heeyersu CSG development and evaluation phase, with a pathway to multi-year investment. Recognise the Youth Reconnecting Program as community-led early-intervention infrastructure. Require strong outcome measurement and community accountability, but do not make the community repeatedly prove need through unpaid consultation and fundraising.

10. Overall Evaluation Judgement

Evaluation domain	Judgement	Evidence-based assessment
Relevance and need	Strong	The program responded directly to cultural disconnection, low service trust, school/work uncertainty, legal and family pressures, wellbeing concerns and the need for practical pathways.
Program design coherence	Strong	The 12-week sequence progressed logically from safety and identity to regulation, relationships, leadership, pathways, justice awareness and next steps.
Local reach and accessibility	Strong	Thirty-four young people are represented in the current registration data and 97% of formal registrants were from Wyndham, with substantial concentration in Wyndham Vale and Jubilee.
Engagement and participant experience	Strong	Post-survey respondents consistently reported confidence, relationships, connection, mentor support and hope; qualitative comments described safety, family and friendship.
Short-term outcomes	Promising	The evidence supports meaningful immediate outcomes, although small, unmatched survey samples limit causal or cohort-wide claims.
Identification of complex needs	Promising	Eleven of 16 detailed intakes identified stated intersecting needs, demonstrating early-identification value; the intake subset does not represent the full cohort.
Cultural safety and equity	Strong	Culture, family, community leadership, food, creativity and identity were embedded throughout the model, supported by a documented child-safe and equity approach.
Governance and safeguarding	Moderate	The written framework is comprehensive, but implementation records such as training, checks, incidents, risk assessments and supervision audits were not evaluated.
Service integration and referral outcomes	Moderate	The model clearly provides case coordination and warm referral functions, but referral completion and external service outcomes were not systematically available.
Community ownership and mobilisation	Strong	Young people and community members raised money and contributed resources to deliver the program without dedicated external funding, demonstrating exceptional ownership, legitimacy and demand.
Sustainability	Critical risk	The first 12 weeks were delivered through youth and community fundraising rather than dedicated external funding. This is inequitable and cannot secure workforce continuity, follow-up, scale or lasting outcomes.
Evidence quality	Moderate	The pilot has useful mixed evidence, but incomplete registration, unmatched surveys, limited intake coverage and absence of longitudinal tracking constrain conclusions.
Community mandate and consultation lineage	Strong	The program directly responds to consistent recommendations from Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations across 14 Karen community, faith-based and service groups.
CSG integration and policy relevance	Strong	The youth program is coherently positioned within an integrated model linking engagement, family support, legal education, navigation, mentoring and formal service partnerships.
Justice and economic impact evidence	Not yet established	The evaluation supports investment in a longer development and evaluation phase, but does not establish reduced offending, reoffending or independently verified avoided costs.

Overall conclusion

The program achieved its immediate purpose of engaging young people, strengthening connection and confidence, and creating a trusted pathway into support. It provides a credible model for continued investment but should move into a longer delivery and evaluation phase before claims are made about long-term system outcomes.

11. What worked and what should be strengthened

Demonstrated strengths

- A culturally legitimate, community-led point of entry.
- A consistent weekly structure that balanced routine and flexibility.
- Physical training used constructively for regulation, confidence and teamwork.
- Trusted mentors and a multidisciplinary team rather than a single-worker model.
- Cultural food, creativity and identity integrated into delivery.
- A no-pressure, strengths-based and trauma-informed approach.
- Practical education, employment and justice-awareness content.
- Family and stakeholder engagement linked to individual support.
- Strong participant-reported experience and immediate outcomes.
- Exceptional youth and community mobilisation that raised the money required to deliver an otherwise unfunded program.
- Direct alignment with recommendations from Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations, demonstrating that community voice was translated into program design.
- Clear integration within the Heeyersu Community Support Group model rather than stand-alone activity delivery.

Areas requiring strengthening

- Formalise the distinction between young people engaged, registered, regularly attending and completing the program.
- Introduce consistent attendance and dosage data for every session.
- Use a unique anonymous participant code to match registration, pre-survey, post-survey, intake, referrals and follow-up.
- Complete baseline surveys before or during the first session.
- Standardise intake criteria and record the denominator for all headline percentages.
- Create a referral tracker recording referral date, service, warm handover, attendance, outcome and follow-up.
- Resolve version-control issues in session plans and maintain a final delivered-session record.
- Document safeguarding implementation, including checks, training, risk assessments, complaints, incidents and consent.
- Measure education, employment, service engagement, wellbeing and justice outcomes at 3, 6 and 12 months.
- Establish formal youth and family participation in program governance and evaluation.
- Develop a fully costed program budget and record community fundraising, donated resources and contributed time so the true cost and level of community co-investment are visible.
- Develop a formal government investment and accountability framework linking funding, implementation milestones, community reporting, youth voice and outcome measurement.
- Undertake independent economic evaluation before publishing claims about avoided justice-system costs or return on investment.

12. Recommendations

1. Government should fund an immediate 12-month Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting development and evaluation phase, with a pathway to multi-year investment. The first 12 weeks were delivered through youth and community fundraising; continuation must not depend on transferring the financial burden back to young people, families and volunteer leaders. Weekly delivery should be combined with outreach, individual mentoring, family engagement, referral navigation and follow-up.
2. Establish a dedicated culturally grounded Youth Navigator or Case Coordination role. The role should bridge youth justice, legal services, schools, employment, health, housing, Centrelink, child and family services and alcohol and other drug support.
3. Retain boxing, physical training and movement as core engagement methods. They should remain integrated with mentoring, cultural learning, reflection and practical pathway work.
4. Protect continuity of trusted mentors. Funding should recognise preparation, contact between sessions, family communication, debriefing and follow-up as core work.
5. Develop formal partner protocols. Agreements should specify referral contacts, response times, warm handovers, feedback loops, privacy and escalation for priority needs.
6. Strengthen family and caregiver support. Provide culturally accessible information, family conversations and navigation assistance where safe and appropriate.
7. Create a youth advisory group. Young people should help review content, choose activities, advise on communication and assess whether the program remains relevant and safe.
8. Upgrade the evaluation system. Use matched anonymous data, consistent attendance, outcome measures, referral tracking and longitudinal follow-up.
9. Undertake an annual child-safe implementation audit. Review staff and volunteer checks, induction, supervision, online communication, transport, consent, complaints and incident procedures.
10. Establish the program as a justice-reinvestment demonstration: invest before crisis, track outcomes transparently and test whether sustained community-led engagement improves retention, service connection, education, employment, wellbeing and safer decision-making over 12 to 36 months.
11. Recognise and value the community contribution. Record funds raised, donated goods and services, contributed time and other in-kind support to establish the true cost of the pilot and demonstrate the level of community co-investment already made.
12. Fund the Youth Reconnecting Program as an integrated stream of the Heeyersu Community Support Group model. Investment should connect the youth program with the Saturday Community Clinic, Elders and Leaders mentoring, community legal education, family support, capacity building and partnership coordination.
13. Resource paid Karen and bicultural workforce pathways. Government and service partners should fund youth engagement, case navigation, wellbeing, family liaison, employment mentoring, data and governance roles rather than relying on unpaid community labour.
14. Create a government-community partnership and accountability mechanism. Heeyersu, young people, families, the 14 groups and relevant agencies should review progress, referrals, barriers and emerging needs at least quarterly.
15. Respond to the consultation with action rather than further extraction of community knowledge. Any additional consultation should have a clear decision purpose, remuneration, feedback loop and published response explaining what will be funded, changed or progressed.

13. Recommended methodology for the next delivery cycle

The next phase should retain a mixed-methods approach but strengthen participant matching, implementation records and longitudinal outcomes.

Evaluation area	Recommended measure	Timing
Reach	Registrations, referral source, suburb, age, target-cohort indicators	At entry
Engagement	Weekly attendance, minutes attended, activity participation, reasons for absence, re-engagement contacts	Every session
Safety and belonging	Brief validated or program-specific scale; qualitative check-in; complaints and incidents	Entry, midpoint, exit
Confidence and hope	Matched Likert items using anonymous participant codes	Entry, midpoint, exit, 6 months
Culture and identity	Connection, pride, belonging and culturally safe experience	Entry and exit
Mentoring and support	Trusted-adult access, help-seeking confidence, mentor contact	Entry, exit, follow-up
Education and employment	School attendance/status, training, applications, interviews, employment or volunteering	Entry, exit, 3/6/12 months
Service navigation	Needs identified, referral made, warm handover, service attended, outcome	Ongoing
Justice and legal support	Legal issues identified, advice/referral received, court or diversion support where relevant	Ongoing and follow-up
Wellbeing	Self-reported coping, sleep, regulation, distress and access to support	Entry, exit, follow-up
Youth voice	Focus group or interview; youth advisory feedback	Midpoint and exit
Family perspective	Optional culturally safe family feedback	Midpoint and exit
Implementation fidelity	Delivered-session checklist, staff present, adaptations, risks, debrief and follow-up actions	Every session
Long-term outcomes	Sustained engagement, education/work status, service connection and participant-defined goals	3, 6 and 12 months
Resourcing and community contribution	External funding, funds raised, donated goods/services, mentor and volunteer time, direct delivery costs and unmet resource needs	Monthly and end of cycle
Community mandate and accountability	Quarterly reporting to 14 groups; youth/family advisory input; actions taken in response to feedback	Quarterly
Government partnership performance	Referral response times, outreach delivered, feedback loops, unresolved system barriers and partner commitments	Quarterly and annually
Economic evaluation	Full program cost, community in-kind contribution, service use and carefully defined avoided-cost methodology	At 12 months and after sufficient longitudinal data

Recommended qualitative methods

- Two youth focus groups facilitated by a trusted person who is not the main mentor.
- Optional one-to-one interviews for young people who prefer private participation.
- A small number of consent-based participant journey studies using composite or fully de-identified reporting.
- Family and caregiver interviews where safe and appropriate.
- Facilitator reflective logs and structured debrief summaries.
- Partner feedback regarding referral accessibility, responsiveness and service coordination.

14. Conclusion

The strongest conclusion from this evaluation is that the Youth Reconnecting Program was not an isolated project. It was the practical result of a community-led evidence process. Phase 1 and Phase 2 documented the need. The Community Support Group model created the structure. Young people and community leaders then raised funds and delivered the response.

The Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program reached young people who were looking for friendship, motivation, culture, practical help and a future pathway. Some were also navigating school disengagement, unemployment, legal and financial stress, substance-use concerns, family instability and the effects of justice-system involvement.

The program did not ask young people to enter through the language of risk, diagnosis or service eligibility. It gave them a culturally familiar place to move, eat, create, talk, learn and build relationships.

That approach produced strong immediate evidence. Young people reported confidence, positive relationships, cultural connection, supportive mentors, useful learning and greater hope. They described Heeyersu as family, friendship and safety.

The evaluation does not establish that 12 weeks changed long-term justice, education or health outcomes. It establishes something that comes first: young people engaged, trusted, participated, disclosed needs and began to identify positive next steps.

The impact is more significant because it was achieved without dedicated external funding. Young people and community members raised the money needed to run the program. This should be recognised as evidence of need, trust and local ownership - not used to normalise community-financed service delivery.

The community has already demonstrated its commitment. Government and philanthropic investment should now meet that commitment and provide the stability required to protect the relationships, outcomes and pathways created during the first 12 weeks.

This closes a loop that too often remains unfinished: community consultation produces a report, but not the investment required to act. Heeyersu moved from evidence to action without waiting for a funded service contract. Government should now move from acknowledgement to reinvestment.

The advocacy ask is not for another taskforce, another short pilot or another round of unpaid consultation. It is for a funded and accountable early-intervention partnership that recognises community leadership as essential infrastructure, connects young people and families to formal services earlier and tests longer-term outcomes rigorously.

The evidence should be represented honestly, the program has demonstrated reach, trust, engagement and strong immediate participant-reported outcomes. It has not yet proved reduced offending, reoffending or system savings. That is the reason to invest in a longer evaluated phase - not a reason to withdraw support before the model has had the time and resources required to show sustained impact.

The community has already identified the need, designed the response and demonstrated what is possible. The next responsibility belongs to government and partners; invest early, walk beside the community and sustain the pathway long enough for trust and hope to become lasting change. Forgotten by systems does not mean without value. Disengaged from services does not mean without hope. Every young person has a story, strengths and potential.

Final message

These young people were not unreachable. They were reached through culture, consistency, practical support and community leadership. The next responsibility is to sustain the pathway long enough for early trust and hope to become lasting change.

Appendix A. Evidence and confidence matrix

Indicator	Finding	Evidence source	Confidence
Total reach	40 young people represented in current program	Registration table	High for formal registrations; attendance reconciliation may identify additional reach
Formal registrations	35 records	Registration table	High
Local reach	34 of 35 registrations from Wyndham	Registration table	High
Confidence	21 of 21 positive	Post-survey	Moderate - voluntary sample
Positive relationships	19 of 20 positive; 1 disagreed	Post-survey	Moderate
Life skills	19 of 21 positive; 2 neutral	Post-survey	Moderate
Cultural/community connection	20 of 21 positive; 1 neutral	Post-survey and qualitative comments	Moderate to strong
Mentor support	19 of 20 positive; 1 neutral	Post-survey and qualitative comments	Moderate to strong
Decision-making	17 of 20 positive; 3 neutral	Post-survey	Moderate
Hope	20 of 21 positive; 1 neutral	Post-survey	Moderate
Complex support needs	11 of 16 detailed intakes contained at least one stated need or significant concern	Intake table	Moderate for intake subset; low for full cohort
Justice/disengagement estimate	Approximately 80% estimated by program team	Facilitator estimate; not verified across all 34	Low until participant-level criteria are applied
Long-term outcomes	Not measured	No longitudinal dataset	Insufficient evidence
Funding model	No dedicated external funding; young people and community raised money and contributed resources to deliver the 12 weeks	Program information supplied by Heeyersu	Moderate - funding status confirmed by program leadership; detailed financial and in-kind valuation not audited in this evaluation
Consultation mandate	Phase 1 and 14 Phase 2 group consultations consistently recommended youth prevention, safe spaces, sport, culture, mentoring, legal education and pathways.	KCP Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports	Strong qualitative evidence across multiple community settings
CSG model alignment	Youth Reconnecting is an integrated CSG stream connected to clinic/navigation, elders/mentoring, legal education, capacity building and partnerships.	Consolidated report and CSG proposal	Strong documentary alignment
Reduced offending/reoffending	Not measured.	No longitudinal justice dataset	Insufficient evidence

Appendix B. Source documents reviewed

- Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program: Weeks 1-12 Program Pack.
- Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program: Program Governance and Staffing.
- Heeyersu Child Safe Standards Policy: Youth Reconnecting Program & Community Support Activities.
- Weekly session plans supplied for Weeks 1-10.
- Youth program team role biographies.
- Airtable: Youth Reconnecting registration table.
- Airtable: Youth Reconnecting pre-program survey.
- Airtable: Youth Reconnecting post-program survey.
- Airtable: detailed youth intake table.
- Karen Community Project: Access to Justice Community Leaders Consultation Report (Phase 1).
- Karen Community Project / Heeyersu: Consolidated Overall Report from 14 community, faith-based and service groups (Phase 2 evidence base).
- Appendix E: De-identified Case Studies.
- Heeyersu Community Support Group Model and DJCS briefing proposal.
- Confidential community interviews reviewed for thematic context only; no identifiable material reproduced.

REPORT CONTACT AND ENQUIRIES

Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program Advocacy and Evaluation Report

General and program enquiries	Heeyersu Email: info@heeyersu.com Melbourne's West, Victoria, Australia
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Youth program delivery	For enquiries about participation, youth mentoring, referrals, partnerships or future delivery, contact Heeyersu through info@heeyersu.com.
Child safety concerns	Heeyersu is committed to the safety, wellbeing and empowerment of children and young people. Direct child safety concerns to info@heeyersu.com.
Immediate danger	Call 000 where a child or young person is in immediate danger or requires urgent emergency assistance.

Suggested reference

Heeyersu. (2026). Forgotten by the System, Reconnected by Community: Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program Advocacy and Evaluation Report. Melbourne's West, Victoria.

Every young person has a story, strengths and potential.

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