



SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

HEEYERSU YOUTH RECONNECTING PROGRAM

FORGOTTEN BY SYSTEM: Reconnected by community.

12-Week Advocacy and Evaluation Summary

	<i>"The young people were not hard to reach. They engaged when offered a program grounded in their culture, delivered through trusted relationships and connected to practical support."</i>
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40 engaged	35 registered	97% in Wyndham	12 weeks community-led
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Community-led. Culturally grounded. Built through trust.

Program Purpose and Development Rationale

The Heeyersu Youth Reconnecting Program was developed in direct response to the Karen Community Project's Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations. Community members repeatedly called for culturally grounded early intervention combining sport, mentoring, cultural identity, legal education, wellbeing, family engagement and practical pathways.

The program was delivered without external program funding. Young people, families, community members, local supporters and volunteer leaders, raised funds and contributed time, food, expertise, mentoring, and other resources to make the 12-week program possible.

Community funding demonstrates commitment, ownership and demand. It must not be interpreted as evidence that the program can continue without investment.

Program Reach

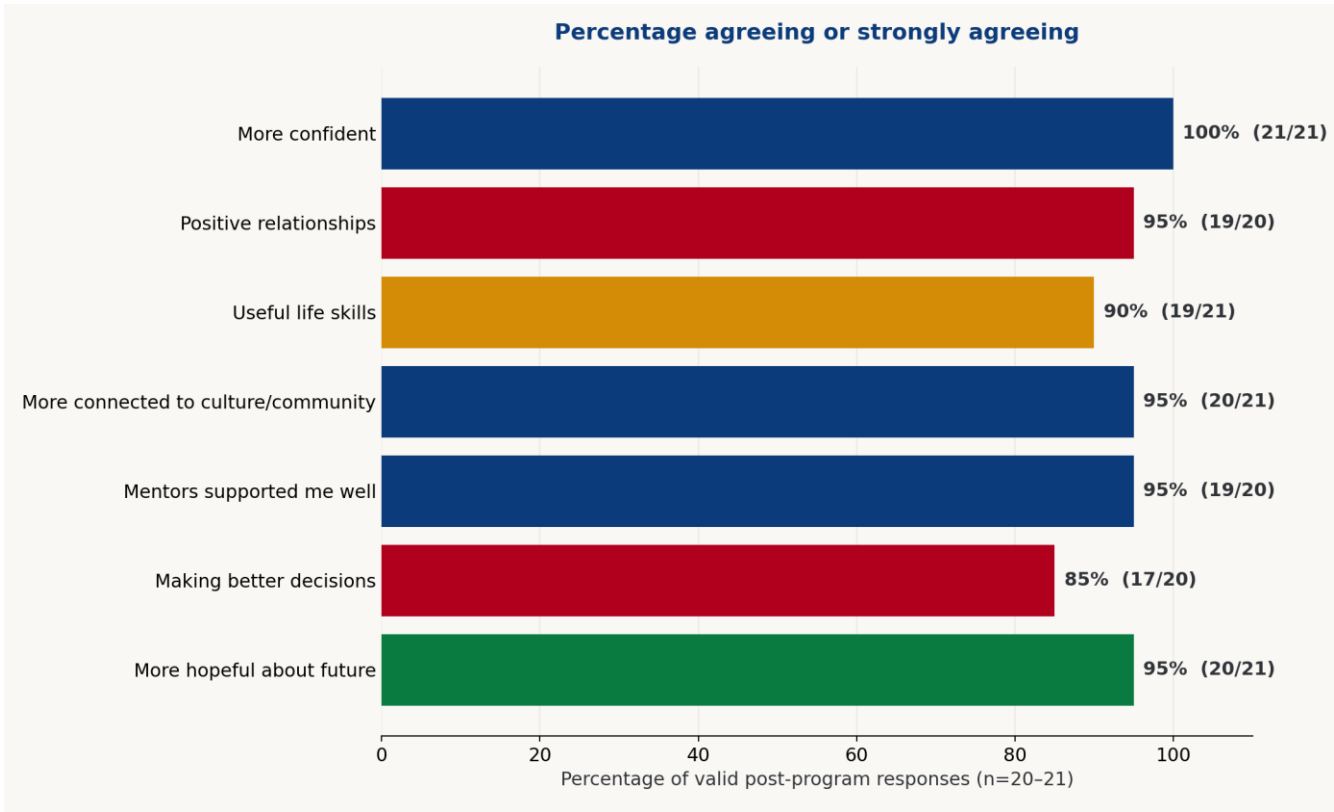
40 engaged	35 registered	35 in Wyndham	Age 9–23
22 under 18	27 pre-surveys	21 post-surveys	18 intakes

Geographic Concentration

More than half of the registered participants were from Wyndham Vale or the neighbouring Jubilee area, highlighting a strong need for accessible youth support in Wyndham Vale and the surrounding suburbs.

Evidence: the pre-survey table contains 27 records, including one blank record that was excluded from the analysis. Post-program percentages are based on valid responses for each item (n = 20–21). Detailed findings on participant needs are based on 18 completed intake assessments.

Headline Outcomes



Among the 21 young people completing the post-program survey, all 21 reported greater confidence. Positive response rates were 95% for relationships, cultural and community connection, mentor support, and hope for the future; 90% for useful life skills; and 85% for better decision-making.

Only one participant recorded a negative response across the seven outcome questions, disagreeing that they had built positive relationships. The remaining non-positive responses were neutral responses or unanswered items. Overall, the results show a strongly positive pattern across all seven outcomes, while the findings do not yet establish longer-term behavioural change.

The immediate outcomes demonstrate a consistent and strongly positive pattern. These findings support continued program delivery and longer-term outcome tracking, while not yet establishing sustained behavioural change.

The Voices of Young People

"Coming together and learning and connecting with culture."		
"A safe place."	"Friendship."	"Family."
"A place where I can hang out with friends and people that I care about and [who] care about me."		

These responses show that Heeyersu created more than weekly activities. It created a trusted environment in which young people experienced belonging, reciprocal care, and connection to positive adults and peers.

Why Young People Engaged

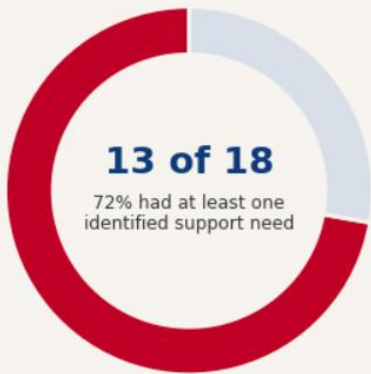
How engagement became practical support



1. Culture created the pathway into engagement Culture was not an additional activity. Cultural identity, food, music, art, storytelling, language and trusted community relationships helped young people feel recognised and safe.	2. Relationships came before disclosure Young people disclosed complex issues after trust had developed. Consistent mentors, shared meals, physical activity and informal conversations created an environment that supported earlier help-seeking.
3. Physical activity was an effective engagement tool Boxing, Muay Thai and physical training were the most frequently valued activities. They supported confidence, discipline, teamwork, routine, emotional regulation and connection with mentors.	4. Mentoring strengthened hope and help-seeking Nineteen of 21 respondents who answered the mentor-support item felt well supported by mentors. Young people reported learning that they had trusted people they could approach when they needed help
	<i>“Culture was not the decoration around the program. It was the pathway through which safety, trust, disclosure and practical support became possible.”</i>

Needs Identified Through Trusted Relationships

Complex needs identified through trusted intake



Thirteen of the 18 detailed intake records contained at least one stated support need or significant concern.

Identified support needs included:

- school attendance or education disengagement
- unemployment, training or apprenticeship pathways
- legal or financial issues
- alcohol and other drug concerns
- family relationships and family stress
- emotional wellbeing or sleep difficulties
- justice-system impacts on the young person or family
- difficulty navigating mainstream services

The program identified needs that may have remained hidden in a recreation-only or referral-only service model.

5. Practical support was essential The program supported young people beyond group sessions through education and employment guidance, legal information, referrals, service navigation and family engagement.	6. Community leadership was a core strength Delivery drew on youth engagement, case management, research, program design, physical training, mental health, health and nutrition, family engagement, music, art, employment, advocacy, IT systems and financial accountability.
7. Community funding showed commitment and system failure The community's willingness to raise money and contribute substantial unpaid labour demonstrates ownership, trust and demand. It should not be treated as proof that the program is sustainable without investment.	8. Twelve weeks was not enough Trust was established and immediate outcomes were promising, but 12 weeks is too short to consolidate long-term change in education, employment, wellbeing, family relationships, substance use or justice-system contact.

Overall evaluation judgement

Evaluation area	Judgement
Relevance to community need	Strong
Cultural grounding and safety	Strong
Program design and coherence	Strong
Participant experience	Strong
Confidence, belonging and hope outcomes	Promising to strong
Identification of complex needs	Strong within the intake subset
Evidence of long-term behavioural change	Not yet established
Sustainability without funding	High risk
Case for continued investment	Strong
	Overall judgement: the program was highly relevant, culturally safe and well received. The immediate evidence is promising to strong, but a funded 12-month model is needed to test and sustain longer-term change.

What the evidence does — and does not — show

- It shows strong engagement, positive participant experience, confidence, belonging, hope and trusted mentoring.
- It shows that culturally grounded intake can identify complex needs that may otherwise remain hidden.
- It does not yet establish sustained change in education, employment, substance use, family relationships or justice-system contact.
- It supports continued investment with longer-term tracking; a conclusion can not be made after just 12 weeks.

Government and Funding Implication

The program provides early evidence that culturally grounded, community-led intervention can reach young people who do not engage consistently with conventional services.

Government reinvestment should occur before young people reach deeper crisis points:

Repeated police contact	School exclusion	Court involvement or detention
Escalating substance use	Family breakdown	Homelessness

Recommended next step

	Fund a 12-month Youth Reconnecting model with paid bicultural staff, individual mentoring, family support, physical and cultural activities, legal and service navigation, education and employment pathways, and longer-term outcome tracking.
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A 12-month model should include

✓ Paid bicultural youth workers and mentors	✓ Individual mentoring and case coordination
✓ Family engagement and culturally safe support	✓ Physical activity, culture, music, art and shared meals
✓ Legal information, referral and service navigation	✓ Education, training and employment pathways
✓ Wellbeing and alcohol and other drug support	✓ Independent evaluation and longitudinal tracking

	<i>“The community has already demonstrated what is possible. The next step is not another short consultation. It is sustained investment in the trusted, culturally grounded model that young people have already chosen to engage with.”</i>
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Community-led support • Youth engagement • Stronger pathways