

Community-led change through justice reinvestment

Build communities, not prisons

“Too many young people are getting caught up in the criminal justice system. Being locked up just makes things worse. People aren’t being given the chance to build a future.”

Taleigha Glover (Just Reinvest NSW Youth Ambassador)

What is ‘justice reinvestment’

Justice reinvestment is a way of working that is led by the community, informed by data and builds strategies to address issues at a local level. The aim is to redirect funding away from prisons and into communities that have high rates of contact with the criminal justice system, through both community-led initiatives and state-wide policy and legislative reform.

Justice reinvestment is not a ‘program’. It is a long evolving process that improves service coordination and collaboration to build stronger communities. It recognises the power in placing communities in the driving seat to identify problems and lead solutions to reduce the number of Aboriginal people contacting the criminal justice system and thereby being imprisoned for minor offences. This includes finding impactful ‘circuit breakers’ that disrupt known pathways to prison, such as providing drivers’ license training to reduce traffic offences.

The role of Just Reinvest NSW

Our goal and approach

Just Reinvest NSW supports Aboriginal communities to explore and establish justice reinvestment initiatives and advocates for systemic changes that build safer and stronger communities.

Our goal is to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system and in prisons in NSW. Our approach is to work alongside Aboriginal communities to support place-based, community-led and data driven approaches to inform local solutions, such as devising local ‘justice circuit breakers’. Our place-based approach feeds into our broader policy and advocacy work to create levers for change. Our Strategic Plan 2020-2024 details our strategies and activities to reach this goal, and the values and principles underpinning our approach.

Who supports us

We began in 2011 as a coalition of more than 20 organisations and strategic initiative of the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT. Our small team are guided by an Executive of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and supported by a network of champions, youth ambassadors and supporters across the corporate, government and for-purpose sectors. Members include: Aboriginal Education Council, Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern, AIASF, ANTaR, Ashurst Australia, Australian Red Cross, Community Legal Centres NSW, Gilbert + Tobin, Herbert Smith Freehills, Infinite Hope Aboriginal Corporation, Johnson

Winter & Slattery, King & Wood Mallesons, Legal Aid NSW, NADA, NCOSS, Reconciliation NSW, Save the Children Australia, Shopfront Youth Legal Service, Show Me the Way, Weave, White Lion, Youth Action and the Youth Justice Coalition.

How we operate

Resources are in the hands of the community, funding local backbone teams, capability building and governance support, alongside strategic assistance from a supporting body. The below graphic sets out our phased approach to place-based justice reinvestment.



Maranguka: showing what's possible

In 2013, Bourke became the first major site in Australia to implement an Aboriginal-led place-based model of justice reinvestment through a collaboration between Maranguka, Bourke Tribal Council and Just Reinvest NSW.

“Too many of my community were being locked up. Kids were being taken away. Families were being shattered, again and again. We decided that a new way of thinking and doing things needed to be developed that helped our children.”

Alistair Ferguson (Executive Director, Maranguka)

A KPMG Impact Assessment of Maranguka estimated that the changes in Bourke in 2017 achieved outcomes in areas such as:

- Family strength (including a 23% reduction in police recorded rates of domestic violence)
- Youth development (including a 31% increase in Year 12 retention) and;
- Adult empowerment (including a 42% reduction in days spent in custody).

The same report calculated that this saved the NSW economy \$3.1 million through the impact of the justice system and broader local economy, that's five times Maranguka's operating costs in the same year.

What's next

Maranguka has become a lighthouse for other communities wishing to explore justice reinvestment approaches, with over 20 communities approaching Just Reinvest NSW to work in a similar way to Bourke. Along with continuing to support Maranguka, Just Reinvest NSW is now working in Moree and Mount Druitt to support local Aboriginal leadership and explore the potential for a justice reinvestment initiative.