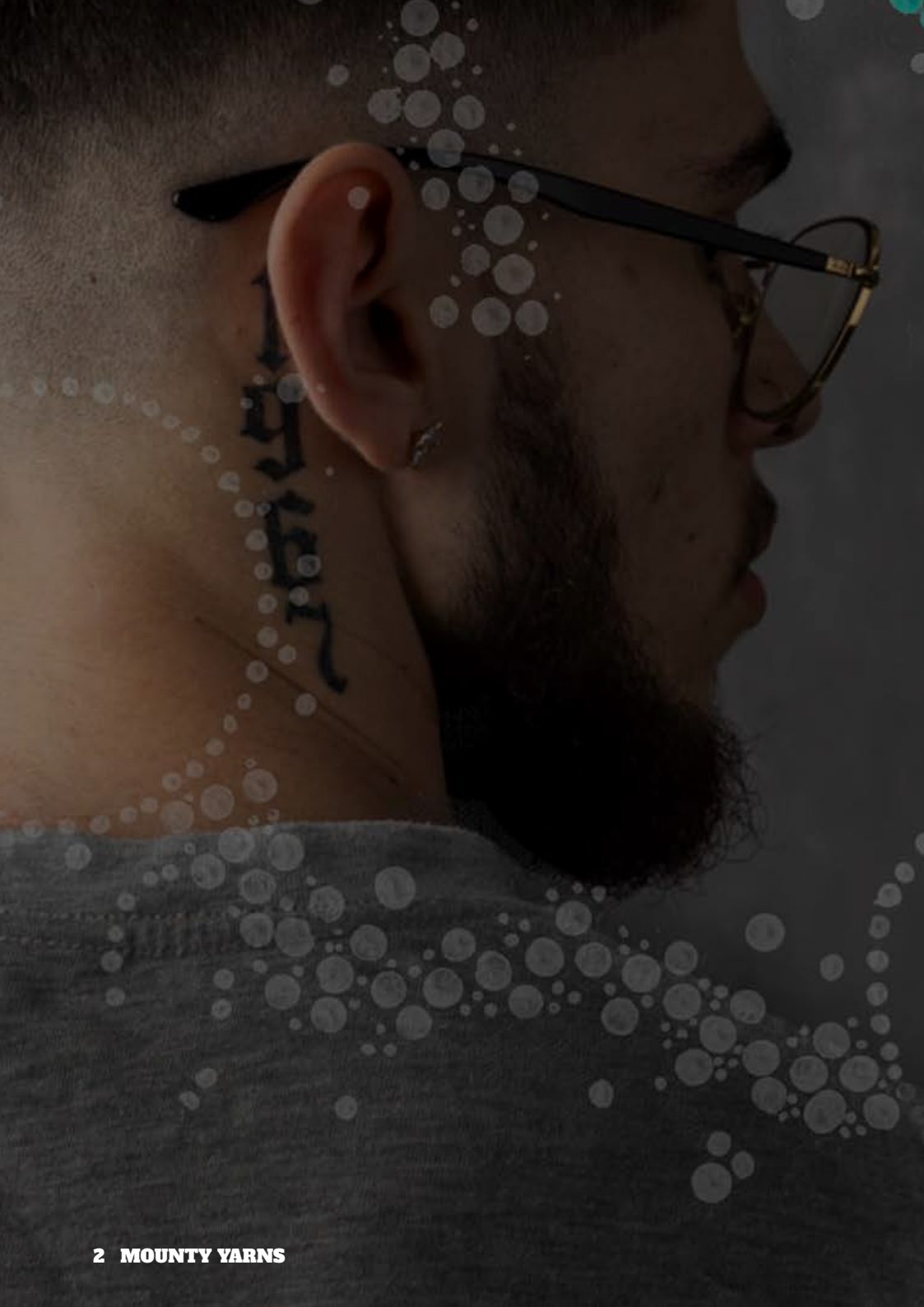


# MOUNTY YARNS

Lived Experiences of  
Aboriginal young people  
in Mt Druitt





## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Mount Druitt, the Darug people. We acknowledge their continuing connection to this land, their ancestors, and their culture. We also acknowledge and respect the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to our community.

As young Aboriginal people, we recognise the importance of our connection to Country, and we acknowledge the significance of Mount Druitt as a meeting place for many cultures. We stand in solidarity with all First Nations peoples and commit to learning, sharing and respecting their knowledge and traditions.

We also acknowledge the impacts of colonisation and ongoing systemic injustices faced by First Nations peoples, and we commit to playing our part in dismantling these systems of oppression. We honour the resilience, strength, and wisdom of our ancestors and strive to carry on their legacy for future generations.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging, and we thank them for their guidance and leadership in our healing journey.





### **Artwork Story:**

My name is Terleaha Williams. I am a proud Kamilaroi and Yuin woman raised in Mount Druitt. I created this piece for the Mounty Yarns program. A program that I am truly passionate about.

The painting represents us as the Aboriginal young people of Mount Druitt, walking beside our community, as we navigate systems that have remained harmful to our people and community for many generations.

We are meeting to listen and yarn. We are acknowledging traditional practices passed down to us whilst drawing on our own lived experiences to shape and deliver new frameworks led by us, for us.

**Graphics:** The graphics in this resource are illustrated by Oumoula Mckenzie.

**Design work:** The design of this resource was done by Amy Allerton from Indigico Creative.

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# FOREWORD

Mounty Yarns are our stories. We are Aboriginal young people from Mount Druitt (Mounty), with lived experience of the criminal justice system. We have gathered stories, expertise and knowledge from Aboriginal young people about the impact the criminal justice system has on our community, and what we want to see change.

These stories show the challenges of growing up in Mount Druitt, challenges which contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the criminal justice system, and show the lack of youth voice in decision-making about the things that affect us.

## **Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt**

Mount Druitt is our home. We are all from different areas, tribes and families. Mount Druitt is a caring, loving, supportive community that comes together in times of need. There are heaps of blackfellas, everyone knows everyone. We have some hectic memories around here that you couldn't lose in your brain even if you wanted to. If you could get a projector in some of our ears and you could see, we'd be here all day laughing in stitches.

The young people of Mounty are loyal, passionate, talented, caring and love to have a laugh. We all grew up going through the same toxic situations as kids, that is this glue stuck to all of us and kept us together no matter what. We can't stress how much this is a family, and how much we love our brothers and sisters. There were some shitty situations that always come up that we couldn't have helped if we tried to, it's just unfair situations that we just took with both hands and ran with it, and we're just overcoming it.

We love and value our culture and our Elders. We recognise that without the resistance and leadership from our old ones that we would not be in a position to speak up and make change. We are willing and proud to take up their fight. Despite our people's longstanding fight for self-determination and land rights, we are still at the mercy of a system that is afraid of us. A system that has traumatised our grandparents, parents, and now us. A system so afraid that it keeps 10-year-old children locked behind barbed wire, controls their contact with family, and repeatedly strip-searches them. The truth is that it is Aboriginal children and young people who should be afraid.

We grow up expecting bad things to happen to us.

We worry that things won't change, so we are going to change them. People from Mount Druitt are always labelled. We are all so proud to be from this community. We want to create our solutions, and though we know it's not going to be easy, we are committed to building a better future for our families and communities.

We want to tell young people that you need to talk up and tell people where you want to see change in your community. That's what we've been doing, because we're sick of seeing all our brothers, cousins, aunties and uncles coming in and out of jail all the time. If you want change around here, just never be scared to speak up.

***“We don't want the next generation to go through what we went through. We want to be a voice so others don't have to keep repeating their stories. We need to make sure young fullas' voices are being heard now.”***

- Terleaha Williams and Isaiah Sines, Youth Project Leads Mounty Yarns





**OUR  
VOICES  
WILL  
BE  
HEARD**



# CALL TO ACTION

**As a community and as young people, we know what works for us. Solutions need a strong focus on self-determination, investing in young people, and changing the way other people look at young people in Mount Druitt.**

**Solutions need to be centred around youth and community leadership, with the goal of intergenerational change.**

As Aboriginal young people we can tell you that the “Justice System” is not working, and is actually having a devastating effect. Our young people need to know that we as a community care for them. The way systems are set up at the moment, it is hard to tell. Nothing improves by locking up kids. When you do, you take us away from everything we value – our family, our culture, our country.

Governments need to stop investing so much in police and prisons and start investing in young people, with proper support to keep them away from the criminal justice system in the first place. We are strong advocates for raising the age of criminal responsibility. As you read through the experiences of young people in Mount Druitt and see how young we were when we were harassed, traumatised and brutalised by police, and harmed by systems that didn't support us, remember that no young person should be experiencing these things.

We want everyone to be able to learn from the experiences, strengths, challenges and resilience of us as young people. We speak for those young people who aren't usually given a voice or listened to, young people who are actively disbelieved.

**We share these yarns with you and ask that you listen and hear our truths.**

**We hope that you hear our solutions and back us to make change.**



# WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

At their core, all of the ideas that young Aboriginal people came up with require these pathways for change.



## Stand against racism

Change the way people look at young people in Mt Druiitt



## Self-Determination

Young people need and want to have more of a role in decision making



## Invest in young people

Provide flexible and responsive funding that meets young people's needs





# THE MOUNTY YARNS APPROACH

**We are just some of the strong Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt fighting for a better future for our young people. We want to build a better future for our families and communities. We want to build the solutions.**

We, as Aboriginal young people with our own experiences of the impact of the criminal justice system, have gathered these stories and bring our own experiences of growing up in Mount Druitt into this work. We have had one-on-one yarns and yarning circles, run sessions in schools and youth justice centres. We have talked to our friends, families and communities.

We are talking to and hearing from the young people who many say, “you can’t engage with”. Many of those young people are now involved in leading this work. We’ve talked to almost 100 young people. Their ages range from 6 years old to 26 years old, with the majority of in-depth contributors being between the ages of 15-23. 12 young people have taken up lead roles in this work. With the right support and trust in place, young people do want to be involved, share their knowledge and that they care deeply.

The young people we talked to, and who have led this work, have experiences of being in foster care, being suspended and excluded from multiple schools, and of being in and out of custody during this project. We have repeatedly been let down by services and broken government systems.

**Every young person had a traumatising story with the police. Too often those stories get laughed off and normalised.**

Young people told us that they wanted a short film to come out of this work, so the Mounty Yarns film was created. The report and film are for young people to use as advocacy tools.

We didn’t wait for these advocacy tools to be finished, because we knew this work couldn’t wait. We have already started leading change. We have partnered with organisations. Our OzTag program has been a key part of the youth engagement for Mounty Yarns. Young people also asked for a music program which is up and running; the stories told through our music is an important part of how we can listen to young people’s experiences.

We have also been advocating for our community. We have sat down with the Executive Director of Youth Justice and the Advocate for Children and Young People. We have presented at conferences and published articles. We have met with academics, with community members, with service providers, and with the National Children’s Commissioner of the Australian Human Rights Commission. We’ve advocated for our peers at court and in meetings with police. We’ve met with corporates and philanthropists to ask for flexible and responsive funding for things that young people want.

**We are showing that what works is young people leading their own solutions.**

Young people trust us because we have been through what they have and they can see us making change.

We couldn't include every yarn, every idea, but this is just the beginning. We are going to keep yarning, advocating and making change.

## **Structure of Mouny Yarns**

We were inspired by the Koorie Youth Council's Ngaga-dji report and want to extend our thanks for their support and shared learnings.

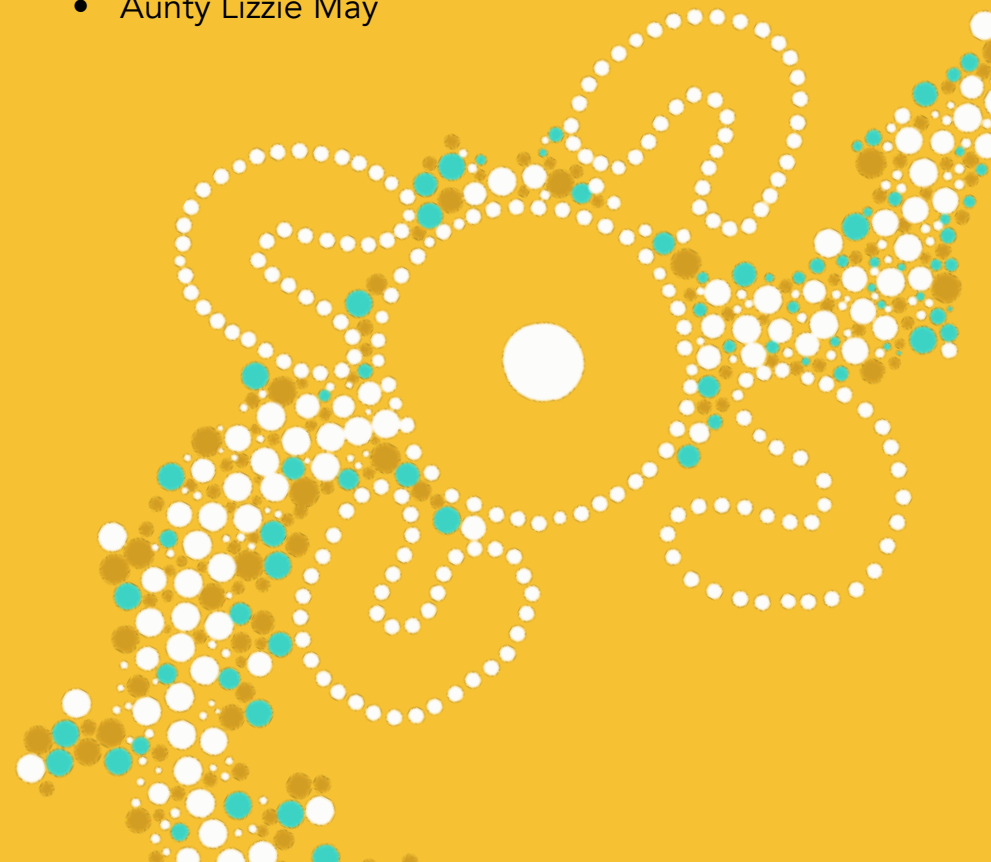
Each of the short stories in the Mouny Yarns report is made up of stories that we heard again and again, and that we had experienced too. These stories have been de-identified and young people have had final say over what goes in the report. The second section of the report "Our Solutions" contains our ideas and pathways for change.

**WARNING:** the following pages contain distressing content and coarse language.

# **Endorsement of Mouny Yarns**

We've spoken to our Elders and community leaders who want young people like us to lead and will back us to make change. They include:

- Aunty Zona Wilkinson
- Aunty Jenny Ebsworth
- Aunty Sandra Hickey
- Aunty Elaine Gordon
- Uncle Tony Hunter
- Aunty Lizzie May





# OUR YARNS



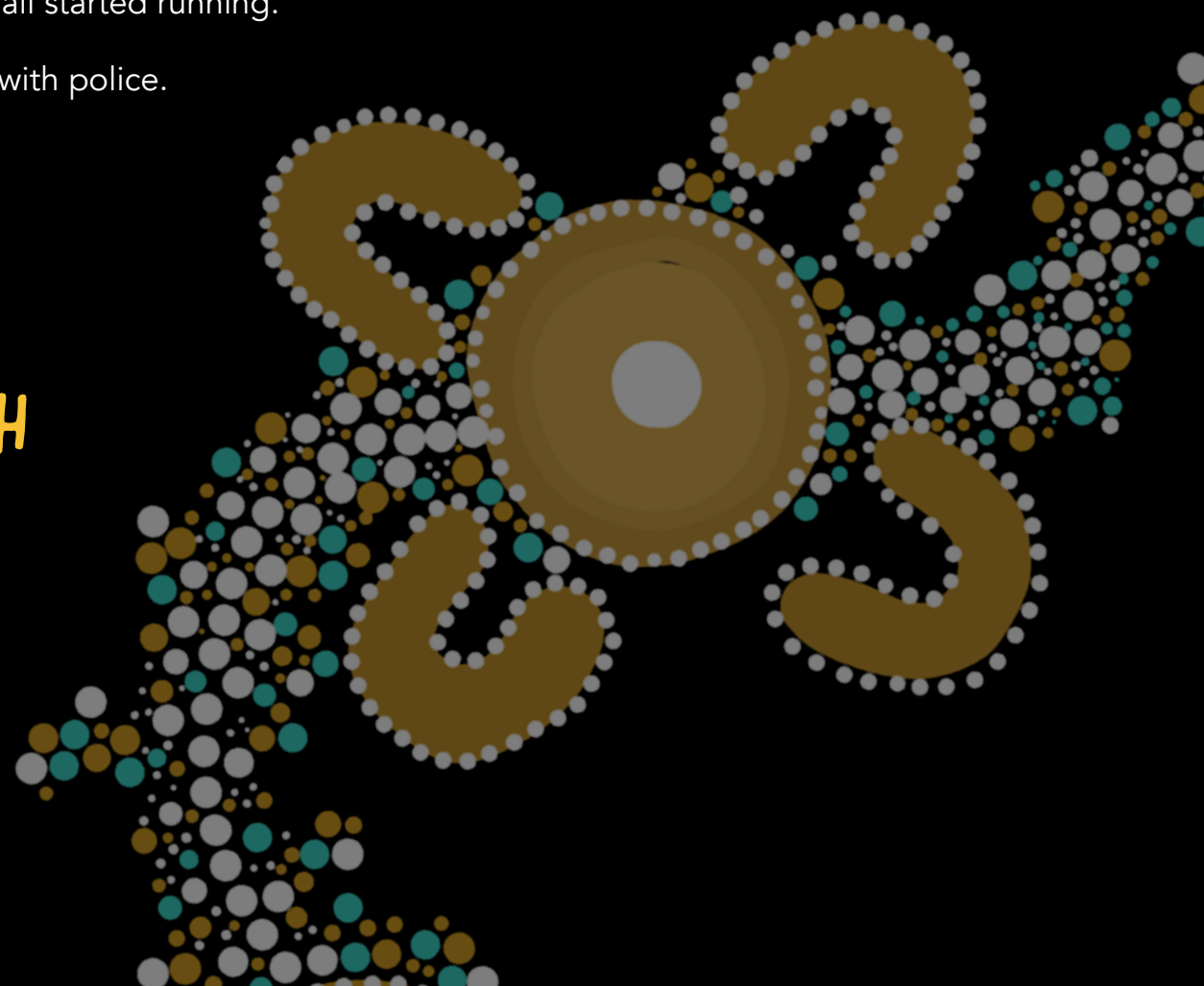
**A BLACK FULLA IS NEVER LONELY WE  
ALWAYS GOT THE POLICE NEAR BY**

## Just the usual

It was a sunny afternoon at Whalan Reserve and we were passing the ball around getting ready for the game. We were laughing and mucking around, everyone was geed because we were in the semis for OzTag. We finished and started walking to the shops to grab a feed. As we were walking down the street we saw the coppers and we just all started running.

Because we know, for us, there are no good interactions with police.

“...FOR US, THERE ARE NO GOOD INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE.”





# I can't even walk down the street

I started running home, my heart pounding in my chest as my feet hit the pavement. It was fight or flight. We hate them. And they hate us. It's always been like that. The tension between the police and our community never stops. It only gets worse.

The first time I was assaulted by police, I was only eight or nine years old. I was with a couple of mates and we used to just walk around, hang around shops - Whalan shops - and every time we would see a copper we would just run, or they'd just pull us over and harass us, like they always do. One time, there were two coppers, they chased us, and my older brothers got away, but I was young back then, and one copper, he caught me. He pushed me to the ground and hit me on the back of the head with a bat. I had a split in the back of my head. I still have the scar.

We all have a story, and the anger and trauma lasts for so long. A copper walks up to me and I just feel anger all over my body. Anytime we are anywhere we have our escape routes planned in case we need to run. We can't even walk down the street without being harassed. We are scared. Just because we know what the outcome is going to be like.

So I run.

I grew up here so I hit the back lanes. I could hear them put on the sirens and knew they were chasing us. When I looked over my shoulder, I could see my cousin was running the same way as me. The other boys must have cut in different directions. That's good because it gives us a better chance.

Then, out of nowhere, a car came out of the street and they tried to run us over when we ran down that way. The car was just straight behind us, speeding up on us. Boom.

“**ANYTIME WE ARE ANYWHERE WE HAVE OUR ESCAPE ROUTES PLANNED IN CASE WE NEED TO RUN.**”

They got my cousin, so I went back and was tackled by some big bloke. He hit me a few times while I was down. I yelled at him that we haven't done anything wrong, and he said, "Why did you run from us then? **You were lucky we didn't shoot you.**"

They put me at the back of the car because there are cameras at the front. As soon as I gave them my name, they started asking me about my family and who I am related to. Coppers just assume, like once they hear our last name, they just assume that we are getting into trouble or we're up to no good. They never ask about how good anyone is doing, it's always just an interrogation. **There's a target on your back because of your family name.**

It's hard to believe that these cops are only trained for 8 months at the Academy, and they end up with all this power. Power to traumatise, affect our lives forever. Power to be believed over us. I was let go as I had done nothing wrong but run. I get stopped whether I run or not. Whenever police see me, they just see a suspect. It leaves you with a sense of distrust, and you start to feel down about yourself as to why you are treated poorly by them when you've done nothing wrong to begin with.

As I walked home my whole body was shaking but I kept my eyes darting because I know if another cop car sees me I'll be running again.

“WHENEVER POLICE SEE ME, THEY JUST SEE A SUSPECT.”







SILENCE

NOTHING TO SEE  
HERE KEEP IT MOVING

BEING BIAK  
IS LIKE  
HAVING A  
TARGET ON  
YOUR BACK

YOU ARE LUCKY I  
DON'T SHOOT YOU

## Another overnighiter

I didn't even reach around the corner before they had me laying on the ground in cuffs, thrown in the back of a paddy wagon. I knew I'd get bail refused, I have been every time since I turned 10. I'm 13 now. Every time I don't get bail from the cops, the Magistrate at court the next day says I should of got bail.

I heard my friends yelling "which station are you taking him to?" We always try to make sure that someone knows where we are to help keep us safe. In the past the police haven't even let me tell my Aunty when I was getting arrested - she was in a house 15 metres away.

The police said there was reports of break and enters in the area. Always the same excuse. When they looked up our names, they see that me and my cousin have a non-association order.

They put me in the fishtank at the station. The cells are so small and everyone just stares at you.

The police say things to me, to get me to bite back at them. Real racist things.

They tried to ring my carer but they didn't answer. No one came for me. The person in the cell next to me was on ice. The police tried to get me to sign something to get bail and made me say I'd go to PCYC. I don't trust the PCYC. It's run by cops. They are always asking me questions about my brothers if I go there.

I spoke to the Aboriginal Legal Service on the phone and they told me to say nothing. Last time I got bail because my youth worker heard from one of my friends I was in the cells. She showed up and knew the system better than the gunjies\*. They put really strict bail conditions that I couldn't follow but my youth worker helped get it listed at court and got them changed nearly straight away.

I've had a lot of shit bail conditions, like once I had to report to Mount Druitt police but was living in Parramatta and I got fines just going to report. Even this time, that non-association was with a cousin I was living with, where I was bailed to at the time, so I had to be there. I even had one that said I wasn't allowed in Mount Druitt, when I was 11 years old. But everyone I knew lived in Mount Druitt. No one was offering me help to live somewhere else.

I gave them a few addresses and people's places that I could of stayed at but they didn't think it was suitable, so I ended up staying the night in a cell.

*\*police*

**“THE POLICE SAY THINGS TO ME, TO GET ME TO BITE BACK AT THEM. REAL RACIST THINGS.”**



# Here we go again, same shit every day

Finally on the truck. Today is the day. I have been waiting for six months on remand. I am going for bail today and my lawyer reckons I got a good chance. I am excited it will be Youth Koori Court too.

I remember the first time I went to Cobham, I was so scared. A thousand things were going through my mind. **Getting strip searched, it feels like all your dignity gets left there.** I never felt more scared and powerless. You never really get over that feeling or get used to it. But it happens a lot. I felt sick getting strip searched from the cops and then at Cobham again.

They don't tell you nothing. They all think you've been there, done it before. I didn't even know how to use the radio or TV. I had to bang on the door and ask the lady how to do it.

That feels like so long ago, been doing the same routine every day since. I wake up same time, same breakfast, same chores, muster, and go to bed at the same time every day. It even feels like they drag out the whole meal routine, eat, sweep, mop, wipe the benches, so you barely have any time outside of your cell. Even if you've finished your meal in five minutes, you still have to wait for the whole routine. They don't give you a proper chance, they want you to get institutionalised right away.

Being locked up, being away from family, having anxiety, and being locked up in small spaces and stuff, it messes with you mentally. Messes with your head, being in environments like that. You overthink stuff. Think of bad stuff. When I'm always by myself, a lot of stuff gets to me.

It helped to speak to an Elder and some Aboriginal workers. I felt comfortable talking to Elders, you know, one of our Elders that's like you. Haven't been able to yarn to an Elder for a few weeks though. There's so many of us Aboriginal kids in here, it's hard to get to all of us.

I swear they write you up for shitty little things. Writeups get held against you. I hope they don't bring them up in court today. My last one was for singing in the shower. I feel they purposely do it and it's so dependent on their mood coming into work. If they are in a bad mood, they don't care about you. They'll write you up, put you in your room, they don't care. Just when I start going good, boom another writeup. This place isn't about helping, it's all about earning your points. That's what they try to do, bribe you to get points, like if you don't go to school, you don't earn your points. You miss two points, you lose your TV.

And you can't complain about the writeups either. You get targeted if you complain. You can't get through to the Ombo\*. I tried 23 times in one day before I got through or it just goes to the Centre Manager and you get targeted. So who do we complain to about the Ombo? The boys complain to the Official Visitors about the food quality but it doesn't change, even though she's good. Complaints take so long. We wanted to get cutlery. Even that didn't work. Complaints go nowhere.

I used to have dreams that I would break out of my room, and like, run down to admissions and get all my stuff and walk out of the Centre. It's just being in that environment and having it in your thoughts, you go to sleep thinking of it and you just dream about it. Everyone does.

I grew up without an identity. I didn't know who my family was. And being in juvie tipped me over. Seeing my brothers leaving and coming back again. We are all so stuck in the system. Being an inmate was becoming my identity. They make it so hard for family to visit, it's almost like they want to keep you apart from them. Even to get them on your dial list takes so long. It can take up to three months to get calls or visits. It depends on your behaviour sometimes.

The last time I got out, I felt like the workers didn't want me to succeed, no one helped me find accommodation. I got out too late to go to a refuge, so a worker ended up paying for two nights in a hotel to give me some space to find somewhere. I left custody without any photo ID, no licence, no working bank card. I think a lot of people still don't want me to succeed, but I learned about my culture this time and have started piecing together my identity. The Aboriginal staff and Elders helped me a lot.

**But you shouldn't have to go into custody to learn this stuff. It doesn't feel like the right place to do it, but it's the only way to connect to culture and do stuff. It's the only chance you get.**

I hope this time is different for me. As I get off the truck at court I see my brothers from Mounty getting off too. They must of come in overnight. We give each other a nod and ask to be put in the cell underneath the court together.

*\*Ombudsman*







BLB

WFX

CJ  
WAS  
HERE

FTA

FTP

BFL

WILL RISE AGAIN

# Where's our support?

Wasn't downstairs long before I went up to court. I've spent so many hours waiting at this court. At least I got to see one of the brothers downstairs that's been away for a while. I got bail but got let out and there was no one there to support me. There is never any support. The court kept trying to get me to go to PCYC programs. **Everyone knows you can't trust the police. The PCYC "engaged" with us but then they'd come back and flog us, and use everything they learnt about us against us.** They know all our nicknames, I seen it in my briefs from the police.

I wanted to stay out of trouble but it's so boring. We done dumb shit 'cos there's nothing to do around here. There's no places to go and just hang out, especially after hours. That's when we really need stuff and support, outside of 9-5pm. Case workers think they aren't responsible or don't care about us after 5pm, they clock off.

**It don't feel like my voice is heard.** There's no support for me. I pretty much have to beg for something. For me I don't like asking for help. We need more people who give a fuck and actually ask what we want and what's really going on and won't arrest or remove us.

I had one program that helped me, but it only lasted 12 weeks, they renewed me for another 12 but then that was it. At least I'm still young. I look at my older brother and once you hit 18, it looks like you just get dumped on the ground again, and there's no one to reach out for because there literally isn't many supports for people 18 and over, no one making sure they're not slipping back under.

We're both homeless and I was hoping that he could get a place for us both. But there's a waiting list for the service that helps with that and then you get told the waiting list for housing in Mount Druitt is around 10-15 years wait. We've been homeless since we were removed and have stayed in so many abandoned houses and it still takes so long to get a place. No surprise that some of my older family end up in jail just to have a place to stay.

I've had like 15 FACS\* caseworkers in two years. There's no support there. You learn their name and when you go to ring them up they aren't your caseworker anymore.

## The brothers are my only support.

I never knew I was entitled to anything because I grew up in and out of FACS. Most of my friends who grew up like me have no idea. A worker got me a "Leaving Care Plan", and she had to follow up with my FACS worker every week until I got it. Even then, I didn't know how to access the money, and no one was helping me.

That worker just left and now I don't know who to ring. Maybe I'll ask the lawyer the next time they lock me up.

*\*Family and Community Services - formerly known as DOCS, now comes under Department of Communities and Justice*

**“WE NEED MORE PEOPLE WHO GIVE A FUCK...”**



# POLICE CITIZENS YOUTH CLUB



# Taught us how to read and white

As I left court I was mad. They gave me a bail condition to go to school. I haven't been at school in more than a year. I was kicked out of mostly every school and now when I get suspended I'm happy because I don't have to go to school.

The teachers I've had are racist and called me "stupid", "ADHD", "ODD", "shit". They said I was a "bad kid". **It made me feel dumb as hell.**

Teachers also targeted me and my friends and jumped to conclusions about us because of our last names.

Teachers used to try and like raise their voice at me because I didn't know as much. And I used to get all defensive and angry, so then I would just swear at them and lose my temper, and that's most of the reasons why I got suspended. Sometimes school let me come back for one hour a day, but I didn't really see the point in going for just one hour.

**I wish instead of just suspending me all the time, they could have helped me, because the more they suspended me the more I didn't care.**

The teachers didn't really know what to do with us, because a lot of the time we didn't even want to be there. But they didn't really try to find out why we didn't want to be there. Instead of sitting down and actually talking to us and trying to understand where we were coming from, they would try to get

us out of the school and out of the way. We know things about surviving systems that they'll never know. We knew then that if teachers didn't care enough to try with us, then no one else would.

It feels like no one ever listens to us at school. There needs to be other options, not just forcing us to stay at school when it's not working and teachers pick on you.

One of my cousins used to teach at the school. He was always doing these programs, like Aboriginal programs, like dancing, Koori dance and stuff. That was probably the only thing that I was interested in at school, and having Elders and like having cultural programs and stuff, during school hours. Learning about culture is what I was into. That's what made me want to go to school, doing those kinds of programs. They mainly happened in primary school though.

I didn't tell my lawyer that schools won't take me because then I might not get bail and have to stay in custody.

**“WE KNEW THEN THAT IF TEACHERS DIDN'T CARE ENOUGH TO TRY WITH US, THEN NO ONE ELSE WOULD.”**



**WHY  
ARE  
YOU PEOPLE  
SO DUMB!**

FUCK THE SYSTEM

THIS COUNTRY BELONGS  
TO US! THEY BUILT THEIR  
COLONY ON OUR BLOOD

# Retelling your trauma, for what?

I'm late for my appointment. It took so long for my adrenaline to come down last night after we copped that chase but I smoked 'em. I'm stressing, because I have to go all the way into Parramatta to meet this counsellor that the court said I had to do. Lucky my friend is coming with me.

I've been ordered to go there before. Got sat in this tiny room inside and the psych kept asking me to repeat my story over and over again. Each time the court ordered me to go to a psych, I had to tell my story again, and again, and again. Nothing has helped. I started using to numb the talk in my head. Then it wasn't long until I was in Cobham.

In community there's heaps of shame around it. I guess that's why most of us end up in jail. That's the sad truth. Like, a lot of the boys don't have anyone to talk to. So, they just do dumb things and end up in jail. Yeah that's their version of Headspace, what I know about mental health is jail. We don't get any help until we are in jail, then, it's too late.

At Cobham I went to the psychologist. I didn't want to be there, but I had to otherwise I would lose points. I couldn't really understand her properly. And she was just making me angry. She kept telling me there were things wrong with me and how I should change, nothing about how the system is fucked.

We are all carrying so much of our own stuff, such heavy burdens, but also all of the stuff that our families went through and the impacts of racism that we experience from police, teachers, shop owners, security, community members, every day. It's huge. It weighs on us.

She was just pissing me right off so I just got up and left. I felt judged, confused and rushed to talk, I've already told my story to so many people, over and over. Why would I trust this lady who has no idea where I come from?

“WE DON'T GET ANY HELP  
UNTIL WE ARE IN JAIL,  
THEN, IT'S TOO LATE.”



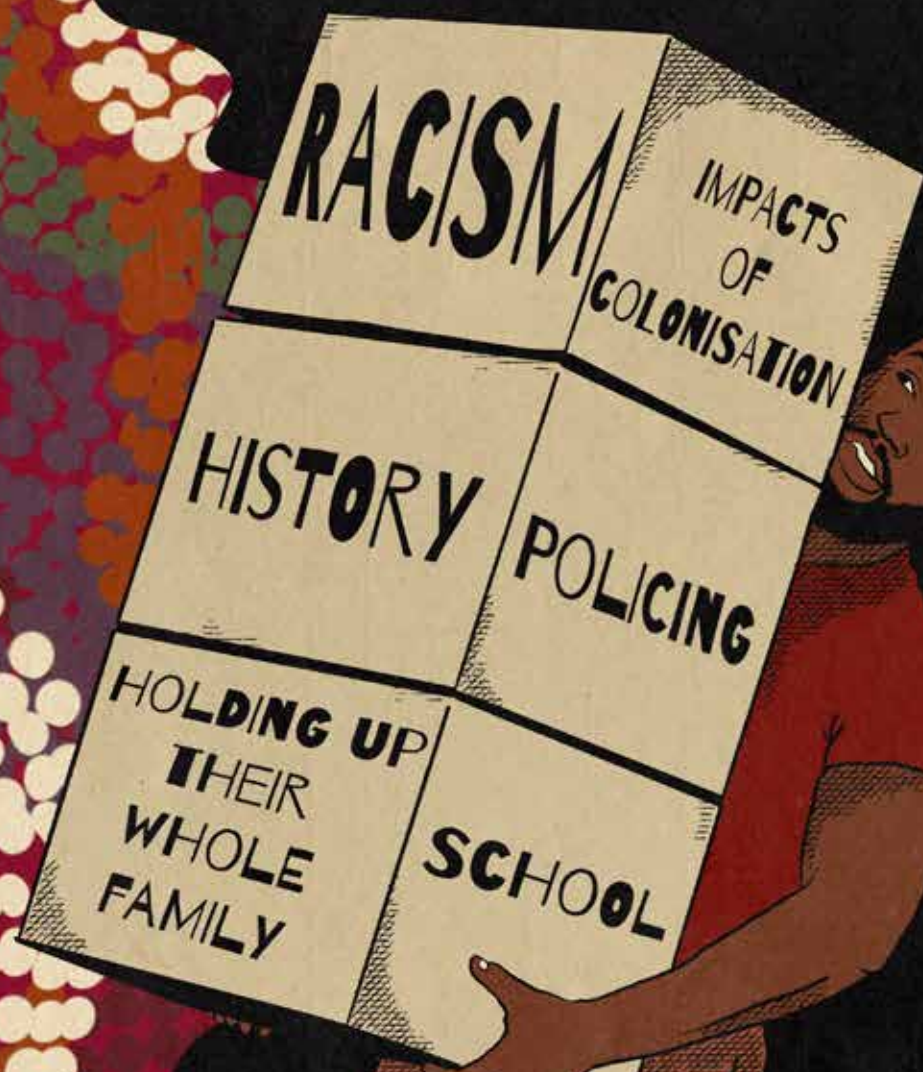
I watched other kids go into custody normal-as, but they can't handle being locked up and they get on the drugs like sleepers and that and they full fry themselves hard, like they full change themselves forever. They do it to themselves or the screws do it to them, to help control them they put them on the drugs. I didn't want that to be me, so whenever they gave me tablets to take I would trade them for chocolates and chips. I suppose on the inside and on the out, we just get fed drugs to deal with our trauma, the main difference is who the dealer is.

It feels to us like the drug problem here in Mount Druitt is getting worse. The kids who are taking drugs are just getting younger and younger, which just makes it more and more dangerous, more and more fucked. They're young and do things without thinking, or do things to impress the boys. Lots of the young people here act like it's nothing, like they don't have a problem. They don't see how it's affecting them and their community.

We have nowhere to go, even if we do want to get clean or want help to stop drinking. If you go into custody you just get on different drugs. There is only one Aboriginal alcohol and drug service near Mount Druitt and that's for adults. They have helped out my aunties and uncles. But they have different problems to us and if you're a young person, you don't want to sit around with fully grown men and women talking about your problems.

Sometimes the best thing has been just being surrounded by the brothers, having a safe space to yarn. **For me, it was more the boys who were the people that actually listened to me, that I could tell things like maybe my mindset, my mental state and stuff, I could talk to the boys about it, tell 'em how I'm feeling. But with other people it felt like they didn't care or they just couldn't be bothered listening. But with the boys, I feel like I could share anything with them.** I can't wait for the next game of OzTag so I can spin a yarn.

I can't tell the court or anyone here that though. They would just laugh at me and think they know better for me. I just hope they don't lock me up.



**SUCH HEAVY BURDENS  
ON OUR  
SHOULDERS  
FROM SUCH  
A YOUNG  
AGE**



# Just another way to harass us

We are walking through Dawson Mall towards Mount Druitt Station and already feeling anxious because there's never a day that the cops aren't there. If my mate didn't have to get to Parra for some appointment and we weren't running late we would of walked to Rooty Hill to avoid 'em. Do they seriously not have anything better to do? I don't have the money for a ticket but need to get to court. I'll need to wait till they leave, I'm already so stressed out about court. I see another young person try jump the barrier but there are cops on either side and they get caught. I slip through the barrier while they are distracted.

I'm stressing on the train because I know I can still get fined and because everyone is beefing and I don't want to get jumped. I hate this feeling, I get it every time I get on the train to report to my Youth Justice in Penrith too. **Every time I get pulled up by police, even if it's just an Opal ticket, my whole body just starts shaking, like full just shaking. I feel like I'm getting real bad anxiety just 'cos you don't know what they're gonna do.**

When I get off at the station for court the transit police are waiting. They give me another fine, to add to my fines for not wearing a helmet, riding a pushbike, walking across the road with it, crossing when the light is red, you know, stupid things like that. It's a power trip for them.

I don't know what their go is. Maybe because they can't get us

on any other thing so they hit us for fines? That's the only way they're going to get us. Or they want to ask about my family, when my brother's on the run. When they pull me over, there's always a question about where my brother is. It's never, oh, why are you on the road, walking across. The first question will be, have you seen this fella, or have you been hanging around this group again?

I can't afford the \$200 fine. I have friends that have more than \$10,000 worth of fines. I only have \$4000. It's all fake money, it only really affects you when you're trying to get your life back on track, when you want to get your licence and that.

I only know I got that much in fines from when I went to the Youth Koori Court. One of the lawyers asked me some questions and I signed some stuff. Then they told me the amount. I don't think I will ever be able to pay it off because I keep getting new ones as I work off my old ones. When we play OzTag one of the workers has it set up so that it works off our fines. If it wasn't for that I don't think I would ever get a licence.

“**..THEY GIVE ME ANOTHER FINE, TO ADD TO MY FINES ...IT'S A POWER TRIP FOR THEM.”**





**POLICE ZONE** FTP  
 PREPARE TO BE STRIPPED  
 SEARCHED IF INDIGENOUS OR  
 ANY OTHER MINORITY



ANYTHING  
 DARKER  
 THEN THIS,  
 ARREST ON  
 SITE

CHECK FOR LAST NAMES



# Koori Court is probably the best thing I know

I am graduating Youth Koori Court today. I've been doing really good. I'm even managing the boys OzTag team. One of the older fullas from the area started an OzTag team for us and a bunch of us in the Youth Koori Court play or work to support it. I was worried last night when the police followed the OzTag bus to the boys' houses but everyone was allowed to be out for OzTag even if they had curfew or house arrest. Our worker told them so, but the boys were still freaking out.

I was so happy when I got accepted into the Youth Koori Court. **In Youth Koori Court they actually see the effort you're making, even the small things that feel big to you.** In normal court, they don't care how long it's been between your offending.

When I first started getting locked up at the police station at 11, they told my mum that I had to have an offence and plead guilty before she could get help with me. I could hear her on the phone at night calling FACS for help even. Youth Koori Court was how I got linked into a worker who I trusted. I spent a lot of time in custody before then though and got told to go to some shit service.

As we walked in I saw my cousin waiting for normal court. I feel bad for her because she isn't on Youth Koori Court. I told her about it and that she should go for it if she doesn't beat her charge.

At Youth Koori Court they actually give you a chance and listen to you. They listen to what you have to say and how you feel. They actually sit down and talk about what's going on for you, so they can try and understand why you've ended up here. **It's not just people deciding what's best for you without even knowing anything about you. It feels like they actually care and that they want to help you, not just lock you up.** It definitely helps, stuff actually gets done. In other courts they just look at the charge and then look at you like that's you. They only see one side.

The Magistrate, she's nice, and she wants to know about our Aboriginal culture. She just wants to help us. Having an Elder in there with you too, it makes a big difference. It makes you feel more comfortable and it's good for young Koori brothers and sisters to see an Elder in the courtroom. There should be more opportunities for young fellas to go through Koori court.

They were all so excited when I told them about the OzTag Final and one of the lawyers got me a cake. The Magistrate said she would come down and watch the Final even. One of my older cousins is hopefully getting out today too and he is a weapon and is going to play with us.

I walked out that court door hopefully for the last time. I just got to wait to sign the papers then finally I am free.

## Can't hold us down

It always feels weird being back here at court. This place separated me from my family twice, first through the care system and then the justice system. But I am here today to support one of the younger brothers who is getting out after going on a "little holiday".

I come from a big family, and at seven years old I was taken from my family. They took me from school, and more than a decade later, I still can't handle going near that school. We all got taken to the principal's office then they locked the door and we never went home. The first time I went back to that suburb I was on a motorbike and I blacked out. It just brought all the trauma rushing back.

My dad was also taken from his family, and growing up, we didn't know much about who we were. Like I knew I was black and from up the coast but that was about all.

I grew up in foster care, moving from one placement to another, spending time in kinship placements, foster care, and emergency accommodation. I never had stable accommodation until I came into custody, where I finally had a bed to sleep in and a three-course meal. I travelled all over NSW with different people, and even when I had a good family, they weren't mine, and they didn't understand. I spent most of my time with the boys because they were my family.

The brothers who had families, shared them. They never pushed anyone away, they were always welcoming and especially a couple of us boys who were with DOCS and on the streets, they gave us a place to stay, fed us and not just

out of pity for us, but just 'cos we were family and they didn't want to see any of the boys on the street or vice versa you know.

Us boys, we never had anyone telling us not to do something or to stay home, that there were other ways to have fun. We started using, got in trouble, and ended up in custody. Imagine reconnecting with your blood brothers after being in care for so long, and it's in jail. All of my seven brothers were once handcuffed at a funeral out on day leave. It used to be like a Mount Druitt reunion in there, with almost every unit full of us boys from Mount Druitt.

But the only reason why I know what I know is that I love the feeling, the brotherhood of our group of boys, and the sense of family. That connection helped me through some tough times. As soon as I saw my boys, all my worries and problems went away.

I had an Aboriginal mentor who started visiting me before I left custody and would take me for day trips. More young people need people like him, people who aren't "give up" people.

“**IMAGINE RECONNECTING WITH YOUR BLOOD BROTHERS AFTER BEING IN CARE FOR SO LONG, AND IT'S IN JAIL.**”



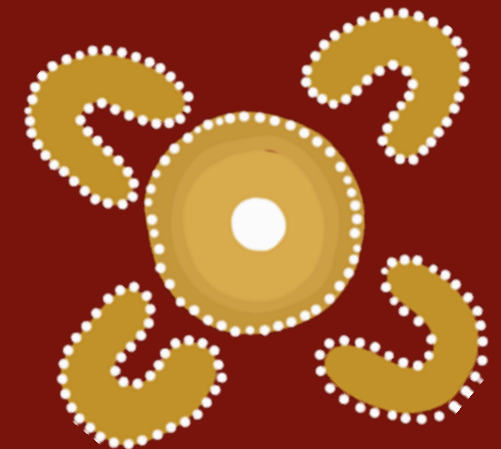
So when I got out I wanted to do the same for my brothers and sisters that those mentors and workers did for me. We started to talk and plan for things we could do together to change our lives and our community. We started MOUNTY YARNS, a safe place, because we're all family, and we all go through the same stuff and can relate to it. It's a place where you can come and be yourself, explain what your life is like without being laughed at because we all feel the same way. It feels good to be around positive people, and we all do something that's good and it gets our minds off things. We can all be ourselves around each other and express our feelings. Because we are a family.

One of the first things we did was create an Oz tag team. As kids, we would have big games, and the police would often show up and give us Move Along Orders. The boys loved playing, so I came up with the idea to bring them together for games and partner with services so that the police couldn't pick on us.

We do the things young people ask us to do and now do cultural days on Country, music workshops and a whole bunch of things that young people tell us they want to do. I am here at the court to tell them that and so it can all be added to my younger brother's support plan.

**Now that I have a child, I want their life to be nothing like what I went through, and I am working hard to make that a reality.** They will know their connection to Country and Culture, grow up with their family, and always have a home to go to with services that are ready to support them if they need it.

“WE STARTED MOUNTY YARNS, A SAFE PLACE, BECAUSE WE'RE ALL FAMILY... IT'S A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN COME AND BE YOURSELF, EXPLAIN WHAT YOUR LIFE IS LIKE WITHOUT BEING LAUGHED AT BECAUSE WE ALL FEEL THE SAME WAY.”







# OUR SOLUTIONS

## Pathways for Change - Mount Druitt is getting ready for a beautiful new beginning

Note: When we say “young people” we are referring to Aboriginal young people from Mount Druitt who have been involved in Mounty Yarns.

*“Mount Druitt’s home. Like you could ask anyone around here. Most of the stories you hear about Mount Druitt are bad, but to us it’s good like, nothing bad out here... Like I can’t put more than any words than to say it’s home.”*

Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt are strong, resilient, talented, and support each other and their community.

Aboriginal young people want to change the way other people view young people in Mount Druitt. They want to stand up and challenge the racism they face every day. They want people to understand what they experience in their everyday lives, the intergenerational challenges they face and the strengths they can draw on from each other and their community.

The Yarns you just read reflect a number of the systemic challenges Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt are up against. The following section shares their ideas for change and their solutions for creating a safer, stronger community. Greater investment in young people is needed; investment that is flexible and responsive to young people’s needs. Giving young people decision-making power over how this money should be spent is critical. Without this shift in power nothing is going to change.

Although Mount Druitt continues to rank amongst the highest in the state for youth crime per capita, Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt know what they want to strengthen their community. They want young people and their families to be free from harmful systems. They want to be free from over-policing and feeling like they have a target on their back because of the colour of their skin or their family name. They want to be free from the negative stereotypes and want to be treated as young people, not criminals.

They want the out-of-home-care system to stop tearing their families apart and taking them away from their family, culture and community. They want more safe and supported housing options, because how is a young person supposed to stay out of trouble without a roof over their head? They want better pre and post release support from custody, preferably from a community-based organisation. They want an education system that values them and their culture.

They want all the harmful systems that impact their lives to be accountable to them and their community. They don’t want to feel like the justice system is actively working against them. They don’t want to have to wait until they are involved in the justice system to be able to get support, have access to basic services or even access to culture.

Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt want to feel valued and supported by the systems and services in their community. They want to feel connected and proud of their culture, identity and community. They want more opportunities to connect to culture and Country and more Aboriginal workers, who understand where they are coming from. They want a safe place for all Aboriginal young people and their families to be able to access culturally safe support, not a PCYC run by police. They want workers and services to be flexible in how they work with young people, by working outside of 9am-5pm and having workers who care and who aren't restrained by strict criteria for giving support.

They want their voices to be heard and their ideas for change to be implemented, because who knows better about the system than those who have lived it? Most of all, they want a better future for themselves, their families, and their entire community.

Aboriginal young people and their families want access to culturally safe and trauma-informed services. Service providers need to better understand the context of colonisation, features of family/kin relationships, cultural load, cultural understandings, the intergenerational impacts of colonisation and social exclusion, as well as an Aboriginal definition of mental health:

*"...not just the physical well-being of an individual but [referring] to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community."*

- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Aboriginal young people deserve systems and services that support them and are responsive to what they need. They want to be able to trust and rely on other people and systems, not only on each other.





# HOW TO BACK US

The current punitive approach to criminal justice and youth offending is clearly not working. The way the criminal justice system and the systems feeding it are currently set up, prioritises locking up a 10 year old rather than addressing the underlying drivers of offending. To change this, a real investment in Aboriginal young people is needed and Aboriginal young people with lived experience must be involved in decision making. People need to stop looking at Aboriginal young people as the problem, but rather the solution.

In this section we highlight recommendations from Aboriginal young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, on what changes are needed to better support Aboriginal young people and the Mount Druitt community.

At the core of these recommendations are three fundamental shifts. Without these shifts in thinking and practices, young people will continue to face systems that work against them:



It costs \$1,956 per day, per person to keep a young person locked up. Imagine what this money could do if it was spent on supporting young people and their families before they end up in prison.

# 1. Support young people in community

## 1.1 An Aboriginal Controlled Youth Service for Mount Druitt - a place for all Aboriginal young people and families

An Aboriginal Controlled Youth Service in Mount Druitt could provide:

- Early support and engagement with young people before issues escalate
- More support for young people over 18
- Advocacy opportunities and training
- Opportunities to challenge the negative perceptions of young Aboriginal people in Mount Druitt
- More activities for young people after-hours that young people want to do and are involved in leading
- Cultural activities and engagement
- Opportunities to meet young people where they feel safe and supported (this may be at OzTag, a drop-in centre, Music Program etc.)
- A community space where young people and families can access outreach workers from Youth Justice, Health etc.
- Access to community-based throughcare (pre and post release support)
- Access to culturally appropriate mental health, alcohol and other drugs support
- A community-based driver licencing program
- Help to link young people back into education
- A place Elders can come and yarn with young people
- An Aboriginal-run bail house in Mount Druitt
- Support in police custody outside of 9am-5pm
- Access to mentors and role models
- More Koori workers

**[WHAT WOULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE]: COMMUNITY RUN PROGRAMS LIKE PCYC BUT NOT RUN BY COPPERS. LIKE MORE COMMUNITY STUFF BUT NOT RAN BY POLICE.”**

**TAKE THE FUNDING FROM PCYC AND PUT IT INTO A COMMUNITY HUB, DROP IN CENTRES, MEN’S SHEDS.”**

**HAVE A DROP IN PLACE THAT IS A SAFE HAVEN – NO WARRANTS, NO BAIL CHECKS – LED BY KIDS, A REFUGE, A CENTRAL PLACE WHERE THEY CAN COME AND FEEL SAFE.”**

**KIDS NEED A SAFE SPACE, JUST THEM, TO KICK BACK WITH THEIR MATES – AND SOME FAMILIES NEED THEIR OWN SUPPORT.”**

**ABORIGINAL–CONTROLLED YOUTH SERVICE IN MOUNT DRUITT WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAFE, CAN DROP IN TO LEARN LIFE SKILLS AND RECEIVE COUNSELLING OR TO JUST RELAX AND LEARN FIRST AID, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT, BRICK LAYING, OR TO JUST RELAX AND ENGAGE WITH CULTURE.”**



## 1.2 One service isn't the whole solution, systems need to change the way they work and what they fund

What Aboriginal young people want from services and workers:

- Access to support that is flexible and open after hours
- Access to mentors and role models
- More Koori workers
- Increased cultural sensitivity training for workers
- More workers that know the system and can navigate it with young people

“YOUNG PEOPLE IN MOUNT DRUITT WANT SERVICES THAT OPERATE OUTSIDE OF NINE-TO-FIVE, THEY WANT YOUTH WORKERS WHO CARE, WHO KNOW THE SYSTEM WELL, WHO HAVE ABORIGINAL CONNECTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE, THEY WANT TO STOP BEING HARASSED BY THE POLICE.”

“ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL HOURS TO KEEP THEM FROM GETTING BORED AND ENGAGING IN CRIME, PROGRAMS LIKE OZTAG.”

“PEOPLE SHOULD CARE AND BE WILLING TO FIGHT FOR US TO HAVE THINGS BETTER. THEY SHOULD DO THINGS THEY SAY THEY ARE GOING TO DO AND HELP US TO NAVIGATE SYSTEMS.”

“WHAT I WANT TO SEE HAPPEN IS BETTER COPPERS, BETTER YOUTH PROGRAMS FOR KIDS. THERE'S GOT TO BE A LOT OF PROGRAMS. THERE'S NOTHING HERE TO DO, NOTHING FOR THE KIDS. AFTER HOURS IS THE WORST. IF THERE WERE PROGRAMS AFTER HOURS THERE WOULD BE A LOT MORE TRUST AND THE KIDS WOULDN'T BE SO BORED ON THE STREETS.”

“ACLOS WORK 7AM TILL 3PM – NOT WHEN PEOPLE NEED THEM.”

“MORE KOORI WORKERS – SO THAT WE ARE NOT SHAMED TO GO IN THERE.”

### 1.3 More engaging programs, supports and activities that young people want

Aboriginal young people want:

- More youth-led activities and programs, to increase their skills, self-confidence and connection to community and country
- To have more leadership roles and decision-making power in the design and delivery of youth support and programs
- More places with good facilities for young people to hang out, that are well maintained, open after hours and safe
- More cultural camps and opportunities to engage in culture
- Funding for community-led early engagement and support programs, particularly for 7 - 14 and 18 - 28 year olds

Some suggestions from the young people that they want to do:

- More cultural programs
- Native gardens
- BMX tracks
- Outdoor activities
- Community events
- Mentoring programs
- Support services
- Basketball
- Skatepark
- Better parks
- Parks that don't have needles in them
- More swings
- Youth Groups

“...MORE ACTIVITIES FOR THE BOYS, AND PLACES TO HANG OUT, TO HANG OUT WITH EACH OTHER, AND GET YOU KNOW LIKE, JUST EVERYTHING. LIKE A POOL TABLE AND THAT. SO WE CAN ALL JUST CHILL. KICK BACK WITH NO ALCOHOL. YEAH, JUST MORE ACTIVITIES. GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE BOYS SO WE ARE NOT OUT THERE DOING CRIMES.”

“MORE THINGS TO KEEP US OCCUPIED. THERE'S NOTHING FOR KIDS TO DO IN THIS AREA EXCEPT GO TO HOYTS AND HANG AROUND THE SHOPS. MORE FREE ACTIVITIES—ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT WHEN WE ARE GETTING INTO TROUBLE!”

“WE WENT ON A CULTURAL CAMP AND THE BOYS CRIED BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY CAMP THEY'D BEEN TO WHERE THEY HADN'T BEEN SENT HOME.”

“THE STUFF WITH JR [JUST REINVEST] IS AWESOME BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT BUT YOU WANT TO DO IT, IT'S SOMETHING REALLY POSITIVE.”



## 1.4 Out of Home Care (OOHC)

What Aboriginal young people want from the OOHC system:

- Increase availability and improve culturally appropriate support for families
- Better support for families before a child is removed
- Ensure all available options are exhausted before a child is removed
- Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to work with representatives of the Mount Druitt community and Just Reinvest NSW to improve their processes and procedures for young people leaving OOHC, including:
  - Establish clear processes to create and monitor leaving care plans
  - Knowing what your rights are and what you're entitled to when you're in and leaving care
  - Establish clear processes to support young people to connect with their families and community

## 1.5 More housing options with real support

DCJ housing and services need to work more collaboratively to ensure:

- That no young person is sleeping on the streets
- There is an increase in the availability of Housing NSW stock and young people should be prioritised, especially coming out of care and custody
- Young people have access to more supported accommodation options including transitional accommodation and affordable housing
- Wrap around support is available for young people in housing to ensure that young people are not set up to fail

“A LOT MORE THEY COULDA DID SO HEAPS LIKE EVERYTHING MORE BUT THEY DIDN'T REALLY CARE ABOUT THE CULTURE AT ALL LIKE IF I EVER GOT CAUGHT TALKING ABOUT ANY BITS OF MY CULTURE THEY'D LIKE MAKE SLURS AND STUFF ABOUT IT. THEY DIDN'T REALLY LIKE TO HEAR IT, ANYTHING ABOUT THAT STUFF EVEN WHEN I WENT TO SCHOOL AND STUFF AND I CAME BACK ALL PROUD AND STUFF THEY DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO HEAR IT. EVEN VISITATION FROM FAMILY, THAT WAS CUT OFF COMPLETELY, IT WAS LIKE ONCE A MONTH FOR ME BUT I GOT TO SEE MY MUM LIKE THREE TIMES, FOUR TIMES A YEAR WHICH WAS LIKE SORRY IT WAS STUFFED. I DUNNO THEY COULDA DONE HEAPS MORE LIKE EVEN WITH PROGRAMS AND STUFF.”

“I GOT ACCOMMODATION AND THEN WASN'T GIVEN ANY SUPPORT. I DIDN'T HEAR FROM MY YOUTH WORKERS FOR A MONTH. THINGS HAD ALREADY FALLEN APART BY THEN.”

“IT WOULD OF BEEN GOOD TO HAVE STABLE ACCOMMODATION- GROWING UP NEVER HAD MY OWN BED, AND SUPPORT PEOPLE, THAT REALLY CARE.”

“IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HAVE AN APARTMENT COMPLEX WITH A YOUTH CENTRE THERE THAT HAD YOUTH WORKERS, EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER GOOD SERVICES.”

## **1.6 Mental health, alcohol and other drug (AOD) support**

Aboriginal young people want:

- More healing on country options and support connecting to culture
- More Aboriginal workers who understand what the young people are going through
- More cultural safety training for staff in mainstream services around Aboriginal young people's experiences of mental health, AOD and best practice
- Mental health and AOD workers who can meet young people where they feel comfortable and on their terms
- Funding for dual diagnosis services that can support young people experiencing mental health and AOD issues
- Funding for services to provide earlier and ongoing support for young people experiencing mental health and AOD issues
- Earlier diagnosis and treatment options for cognitive disabilities
- Better training for schools, police and service providers around mental health and AOD
- Develop culturally safe intake and assessment tools
- Young people should not have to continuously retell their trauma to access basic supports or every time they interact with a new worker/service
- More support and resourcing for young people to learn how to support other young people
- Flexible funding for young men and women's groups

**“WHAT WE NEED IS A SERVICE IN MOUNT DRUITT THAT'S MADE FOR YOUNG ABORIGINAL MEN AND WOMEN AND UNDERSTANDS OUR HISTORY, CULTURE AND TRAUMA. TO HELP US NOT GO INTO CUSTODY IN THE FIRST PLACE, BUT IF WE DO, THAT WE CAN ACCESS EVEN IF WE'RE IN CUSTODY TO KEEP THAT SUPPORT GOING WITH THE SAME SERVICE.”**

**“WE HAVE TO COME INTO CONTACT WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM TO GET ACCESS TO SUPPORT. EVEN THEN WE DON'T GET ALL THE HELP WE NEED.”**

**“LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AROUND CULTURE AND WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE COME FROM LEADS TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, ISSUES WITH BELONGING AND SELF-WORTH.”**



## 2. Justice

### 2.1 Policing

Aboriginal young people want to see change in:

#### Police practices:

- Stop the racial profiling of Aboriginal young people and the misuse of police powers, especially in relation to the “special powers” that police have:
  - » Strike Force Raptor should not police young people, or at least not proactively
  - » Don't allow Firearms Prohibition Orders (FPOs) to be issued if the young person has never been in possession of a firearm or charged with a firearms related offence
  - » Stop using the Firearms Act search powers to target young people
  - » Stop the overuse of move on directions
  - » Stop using Suspect Target Management Plans (STMP) on young people, STMP III is not a solution
  - » Stop searching young people just because they are known to police or have a criminal history
- Stop arresting young people for:
  - » Offensive language and behaviour
  - » Breach of bail
- Stop doing bail compliance checks if there is no court ordered enforcement condition in place:
  - » Even if an enforcement order is in place, police should be mindful of the impact these checks have on family and other children in the house

**“ I WANT TO WALK AROUND MOUNTY WITHOUT BEING WORRIED ABOUT BEING HARASSED.”**

**“ ONE PERSON'S HARASSMENT IS ANOTHER PERSON'S PROACTIVE POLICING.”**

**“ WE NEED MORE POLICE WHO CARE, THAT THE JOB ISN'T A POWER TRIP, WHERE THEY ACTUALLY WANT TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS AND LISTEN AND RESPOND TO WHAT COMMUNITY WANTS. THEY NEED TO STOP ASSUMING WE ARE ALL THE SAME AND THAT THEY KNOW US AND OUR SITUATIONS. IF WE HAVE MORE COPPERS LIKE THAT, THAT ARE NOT JUST THERE TO GET A PAYCHECK, AND ARE NOT THERE TO JUST HARASS AND PICK ON YOUNG PEOPLE, OR JUST COPPERS THAT DON'T, AS SOON AS THEY PUT THEIR GUN ON OR THEIR BADGE ON, IT'S NOT A POWER TRIP FOR THEM. IT'S ACTUALLY A COMMUNITY SERVICE JOB FOR THEM. THEY COME AND THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO HELP AND PROTECT THE COMMUNITY. BUT EVERY COMMUNITY THEY GO IN THEY'RE NOT WANTED. EVERYONE HATES THEM AND ALWAYS GOT BAD EXPERIENCES.”**

**“ POLICE INVESTIGATE POLICE, WE ALL KNOW THAT. WE NEED SOMETHING MORE INDEPENDENT.”**

### **Better training for police:**

- Western Sydney Watch Committee (WSWC) to provide localised cultural safety training for police in Mount Druitt Police Area Command
- More training around how and when to engage with young people, learning from the experts - young people and their trusted supports
- All police in the Mount Druitt Police Area Command to watch the Mouny Yarns film and be provided with this resource

### **More community oversight of policing:**

- There needs to be an earlier, independent police complaint investigations process with oversight and action led by community - stop letting police investigate police
- The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) needs to be more accountable to young people and community - currently LECC does not have community trust as an independent and responsive accountability mechanism
- Develop a streamlined process for formal police complaints, including better communication between community, police, lawyers and external accountability mechanisms
- Police commit to meeting with the WSWC every two months and as requested informally
- WSWC, JR Mount Druitt and other relevant community organisations to have access to Mount Druitt police station data

### **Earlier support for young people:**

- Funding for community members to support young people in police cells and for follow up support after being in custody:
  - » Young people have earlier access to and more options for support that aren't associated with a PCYC

“BUT IT COULD HELP IF WE KNEW WHAT THEY THINK AND WHAT THEY'RE COMING FROM WHEN THEY SEE US RUNNING, AND THEY COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT WE THINK AND WHAT WE SEE AND HOW WE FEEL WHEN THEY COME, HOW WE FEEL WHEN OUR LIVES ARE IN DANGER, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?”

“[POLICE NEED TO] LEARN TO WORK DIRECT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND JUST THE WAY, YEAH JUST THE WAY THEY VIEW US YOUNG BLACK PEOPLE... LIKE HOW THEY LIKE APPROACH US. LIKE HOW THEY ACT WITH YOUNG KOORI PEOPLE, BECAUSE YOU CAN TELL IT'S DIFFERENT TO HOW THEY ACT WITH THE POLYNESIANS AND THE WHITES OR ANY OTHER RACE. IT'S CLEAR AS DAY IN MOUNT DRUITT ANYWAY. IT'S CLEAR AS. I GUESS YOU KNOW STOP BEING A DICKHEAD AND JUST GROW UP. LIKE RACISM IS TAUGHT, IT'S NOT LEARNED. YOU CAN'T BE BORN RACIST. SO OBVIOUSLY THEY WERE TAUGHT DIFFERENT WAYS TO HOW WE WERE TAUGHT. HOPEFULLY THEY CAN CHANGE THE WAYS THEY INTERACT WITH US.”

“IT NEEDS TO START AT THE ACADEMY INSTEAD OF TRAINING THEM TO BE CHARGE FOCUSED. TRAINING THEM ON HOW TO WORK WITH PEOPLE, IN PARTICULAR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND YOUNG PEOPLE.”



## 2.2 Stop issuing fines

Aboriginal young people want:

- Free public transport for all young people
- No fines to children under the age of 18
- Free opal cards for young people and adults (U26) who have interactions with youth justice or child protection systems
- More use of discretion to not fine young people
- Have Youth Justice case workers travel to Mount Druitt for reporting, instead of making young people travel to Penrith or Blacktown and risk a fare evasion fine
- Transit officers and transport police should be trained on:
  - » How and when to engage with young people
  - » The impact they have on young Aboriginal people because of their experiences of over policing and excessive use of force

“THE YOUTH JUSTICE OFFICE IS IN PENRITH. IF YOU HAVE NO TRAIN FARE, YOU WILL GET BREACHED. YOU WILL GET A FINE TO GO TO PENRITH SO THAT YOU CAN CHECK IN FOR YOUTH JUSTICE AND THEN A FINE WHEN YOU GO HOME. THERE ARE PLENTY OF BUILDINGS IN MOUNT DRUITT THAT COULD HOST IT, BUT YOU EITHER HAVE TO GO TO BLACKTOWN OR PENRITH.” – WORKER

“SIMPLE ANSWER IS, DON'T BE ARSEHOLES... YOU KNOW, APPROACH US HOW THEY EXPECT TO BE TREATED, YOU KNOW? HAVE AN OPEN MIND, YOU KNOW? NOT ALL OF US ARE CRIMINALS, JUST BECAUSE WE ALL HANG OUT... THE FINES, I KNOW IT'S ONLY A LITTLE THING, BUT THEY DO TEND TO PISS US OFF A LOT. IF THEY CAN DO ANYTHING TO MAKE IT BETTER, YEAH, I SUPPOSE IT'S THAT.”

## 2.3 Courts

What Aboriginal young people want from the court system:

- More opportunities for young Aboriginal people to be part of the Youth Koori Court
- More realistic bail conditions that don't set young people up to fail
- Optional community-based support is offered to young people, regardless if they have been found guilty or pleaded guilty

**[WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCES IN COURT]: THEY'RE ALRIGHT. KOORI COURT DEFINITELY MADE IT EASIER... THEY ACTUALLY GIVE YOU A CHANCE."**

**[WHAT WAS IT ABOUT KOORI COURT THAT WORKED WELL]: THEY LISTEN MORE, THEY LISTEN TO US, WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY AND HOW WE FEEL."**

**[ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT COURT]: JUST, DON'T TAKE KOORI COURT OUT. KOORI COURT IS REALLY HELPFUL, YEAH. KEEP IT THERE FOR OUR YOUNGER PEOPLE WHO ARE GROWING UP AND GOING THROUGH THE SYSTEM."**

**[WHAT WOULD MAKE NORMAL COURT BETTER]: JUST LISTEN MORE TO US, NOT TO THE COPPERS AND PROSECUTORS. BECAUSE THEY ARE TALKING SHIT ALL THE TIME."**

**THEY GIVE YOU REALLY STRICT BAIL CONDITIONS THAT YOU CAN'T FOLLOW. I ONCE HAD BAIL CONDITIONS TO REPORT TO MT DRUITT POLICE BUT WAS LIVING IN PARRAMATTA."**

**I'VE NEVER GOTTEN BAIL AT THE POLICE STATION...BUT THEN I GET BAIL FROM THE COURTROOM, THE JUDGE ALWAYS SAYS I SHOULD OF GOTTEN BAIL."**

## 2.4 Custody

Aboriginal young people want to see change in:

### Complaints in custody:

- Establish an independent committee led by Aboriginal young people who have been affected by the criminal justice system to advocate around:
  - » Individual complaints in custody
  - » Systemic issues
- Have independent community members monitoring youth justice systems, including being granted access to check on young people - not to expect young people to speak up, especially if they are in a custodial setting

### Behaviour control in custody:

- Stop using segregation powers for behaviour management
- Detainee Risk Management Plans need better safeguards:
  - » Young people should have a mandatory minimum of six hours out of their cell every day
  - » Young people should not be forced to eat alone in their cell with their hands
  - » Youth Justice to investigate safe cutlery alternatives and review meal options to make sure they are nutritious

“BETTER TO HAVE MOB COMING AND TALK TO BOYS WHO THEY TRUST. WE DO NEED A ROLE OF AN INDEPENDENT RESPECTED COMMUNITY PERSON – WHO’S NOT TIED TO GOVERNMENT. EVEN THE OMBUDSMAN IS SEEN AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT.”

“FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY, NEED TO HAVE SOMEONE REACHING OUT RATHER THAN EXPECT THEM TO REPORT COMPLAINTS.”

“IT’D BE GOOD TO HAVE AN OV\* FROM EACH CULTURE – AN ABORIGINAL ONE, AN ISLANDER ONE, A LEBANESE ONE, IT WOULD BE BETTER.”

“CRIMINAL RECORDS ARE A BARRIER. IT’S HARD TO FIGHT THAT BARRIER. IT SHOULD BE ABOUT THE BEST FIT FOR THE JOB – AND THAT INCLUDES CULTURE. IF WE THINK ABOUT OVERREPRESENTATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE YOU NEED MENTORS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES TO CUT THROUGH THAT. MOB DON’T BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN GET OVER THAT BARRIER.”

“IF THERE IS CONSISTENT BLACKFULLAS COMING IN AND OUT EVERY WEEK – KIDS ATTITUDES CHANGE”

“I THINK THE BOYS WOULD TRUST ME HAVING COME OUT RECENTLY AND KNOWING WHERE THEY COME FROM. TO TELL ME WHAT’S GOING ON FOR THEM.”



### **Connection to Aboriginal workers, culture and community while in custody:**

- More cultural programs and access to Elders
- More Aboriginal case workers
- Advocate for more young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to be mentors for other young people in custody:
  - » Children's Guardian and Youth Justice to trial different processes around risk assessments and fast tracking Working with Children's Checks (WWCC)
- More Aboriginal community members supported to have access and provide ongoing engagement to young people both in custody and when they leave

### **Health and mental health:**

- Better and culturally safe screening of young people on entry to custody for health and disability related needs
- Have more options for therapeutic responses for young Aboriginal people in custody other than cognitive behavioural therapy
- Young people shouldn't be punished if they aren't ready to see a psychologist - a custodial setting is not always the best or safest place to talk about trauma

**“NO ONE IS EVER GOING TO TALK TO A WORKER ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS... AN ABORIGINAL PERSON, A MENTOR OR SOMETHING YEAH. IF WE HAVE ONE OF THEM IN THERE, 100% THE BOYS WILL TRUST THAT WORKER, 100%. SOME OF THE BOYS WILL TRUST SOMEONE WHO WILL JUST GIVE THEM A BIT OF TIME, BUT THEY WILL NEVER TRUST THAT THE OFFICERS ARE LOOKING AFTER THEM. EVER... SO I GUARANTEE THAT SOMEONE THAT'S BEEN THROUGH IT, AND HAS LIKE, BEEN IN THERE, A SIMILAR SITUATION, AND HAS COME OUT, AND IS DOING BETTER THAN WHAT HE IS, WILL BE A BIG HELP, LIKE YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.”**

**“ABORIGINAL WORKERS... LIKE I'VE ONLY MET A HANDFUL OF ABORIGINAL WORKERS, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. LIKE THE ONLY ABORIGINAL PERSON I'VE SEEN IN A POSITION OF POWER IN A YOUTH JUSTICE CENTRE WAS AT FRANK BAXTER AND HE WAS LIKE THE CENTRE HEAD, BUT OTHER THAN THAT YEAH LIKE I SAID. IF WE KNOW THEY'RE KOORI, WE'LL RESPECT THEM. IT'S NOT JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE BLACK, WE AUTOMATICALLY RESPECT THEM BECAUSE NO DOUBT THEY'LL HAVE SIMILAR SITUATIONS TO OURS AND IT MAKES IT EASIER TO RELATE TO US MORE THAN THEY CAN, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. THAT'S WHY I THINK IT WOULD BE BETTER TO HAVE SOMEONE IN THERE WHO IS NOT A PART OF A UNIT OR A PART OF THE DEPARTMENT. EVEN IF THEY ARE PART OF THE DEPARTMENT IT WILL BE BETTER THAN IT WAS. LIKE, THAT WILL GO A LONG WAY.”**

## 2.5 Throughcare - pre and post release support

Aboriginal young people want:

- An Aboriginal controlled, community-based pre and post release support in Mount Druitt
- More engagement from community and services to meet with young people in custody prior to their release
- Better access to cultural activities outside of custody, no young person should have to go into custody to access cultural support
- Better transition planning for young people leaving custody, such as having photo ID
- Better coordination of NDIS plans for young people leaving custody

**“ALL KIDS WANT CULTURAL PROGRAMS AND ABORIGINAL WORKERS INSIDE – BUT WE WANT IT ON THE OUTSIDE TOO.”**

**“THERE’S NO THROUGH CARE IN MOUNT DRUITT. IT WOULD OF BEEN GOOD HAVING SUPPORT GETTING, A JOB, CAR, LICENCE, HOUSING, THINGS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER AND YOU’RE ACHIEVING GOALS IN YOUR LIFE.”**

### 3. Education and Learning

Aboriginal young people want:

#### More culture in education:

- Provide more opportunities for Aboriginal students to engage with Elders and cultural learning at school
- Schools to create more opportunities for Aboriginal family members and community members to participate in school activities
- Engage community members and young people in decision-making around how to better engage young Aboriginal people in education

#### Suspension as a last resort:

- Shorten suspension periods or develop alternative approaches to suspensions
- Provide more options for in-school suspensions

#### Better cultural training for teachers and staff:

- Increase cultural safety training for staff on Aboriginal culture, history and the continuing impact of colonisation
- Improve training for staff to be able to respond to behaviours in a trauma-informed, strengths-based and culturally appropriate way
- Ensure that trusted school staff such as Aboriginal Engagement Officers and visiting Elders, have more influence over responses and support for Aboriginal students, as well as influence over responses to racism and sharing of culture within schools

“HAVING ELDERS AND LIKE HAVING PROGRAMS AND STUFF, DURING SCHOOL HOURS. LEARNING ABOUT CULTURE IS WHAT I WAS INTO. THAT’S WHAT MADE ME WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL, DOING PROGRAMS.”

“MORE CULTURAL MENTORS IN SCHOOL.”

“TEACHERS NEED BETTER TRAINING TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS.”

“WE NEED TO HELP TEACHERS TO UNDERSTAND WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE COMING FROM AND TO SPEND THE TIME TO DO THAT. TEACHERS NEED TO BE MORE OPEN MINDED OF PEOPLE’S UPBRINGING AND BACKGROUND.”

“WE NEED MORE ABORIGINAL TEACHERS AND ELDERS – WHO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OUR BACKGROUND.”

“THEY NEED TO BE MORE LENIENT TOWARD SUSPENSIONS – GIVE THE KIDS A CHANCE– SUSPENSIONS SHOULD BE A LAST OPTION.”

“SCHOOLS SHOULD DO MORE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS – SUSPENSIONS AREN’T A PUNISHMENT – YOU GET TO HANG OUT WITH YOUR FRIENDS THAT’S WHEN YOU GET INTO TROUBLE.”

“THEY NEED TO BE MORE LENIENT TOWARD SUSPENSIONS – GIVE THE KIDS A CHANCE– SUSPENSIONS SHOULD BE A LAST OPTION.”



### **Improved support for Aboriginal students in education:**

- Better holistic support to keep them engaged and wanting to learn:
  - » More activities and interests that young people want to do
  - » More support in class, both learning and emotional
  - » More after class support to be available
  - » Financial support and how to access it
- Better diagnosis options and follow up support for young people with a disability - Mount Druitt is in the city, there should not be as many issues with access and follow up as there are

### **Alternative schools:**

- Increase access to alternative schools that still have a focus on numeracy and literacy

### **More work experience options and learning pathways for Aboriginal students:**

- Provide more work experience programs and employment pathway opportunities within school
- Have better pathways for young people who want to leave school, not be forced to stay when they are not engaged
- More opportunities to learn about starting up small businesses

“THE MONEY IS GOING TO THE WRONG PLACES – IT IS GOING INTO TEACHERS WHEN IT’S THE AUNTIES THAT ARE THE ONES THAT KIDS LISTEN TO AND RESPECT.”

“SCHOOLS SHOWING THEY VALUE AND RESPECT ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND HISTORY.”

“THAT’S WHY SOME KIDS JUST LEAVE – BECAUSE THEY STRESS OUT AND NEED HELP”

“BETTER CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING FOR STAFF – MORE RESPECT FOR ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF OUR HISTORY”

“MORE LEARNING OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY AND CULTURE – AND NOT JUST ABOUT CAPTAIN COOK – SEE IT THROUGH OUR EYES”

“SCHOOLS NEED TO APPLY MORE INCENTIVES THAT THE KIDS ACTUALLY WANT – THOSE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES SHOULDN’T COST MONEY – LOTS OF KIDS CAN’T AFFORD IT. THEY ARE SOMETIMES THE THINGS THAT KEEP KIDS AT SCHOOL, LIKE FOOTY AND GALA DAYS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.”

“HAVE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME. NOT JUST AT SCHOOL – BUT HAVE THAT SUPPORT AFTER HOURS.”

“IT WOULD BE BETTER IF WE COULD HAVE MORE TEACHER AIDS – SOMETIMES THERE IS ONLY 1 IN A CLASS AND THEY HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL WITH ONE YOUNG PERSON.”

# What you can do right now

- **Back our young people to advocate for change in Mount Druitt:**
  - » Donate to support our advocacy strategy
  - » Share your skills, knowledge or networks
  - » Volunteer
  - » Share this Mouny Yarns document and the Official Film: Mouny Yarns - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bni2BDutOgo&t=736s>
- **Help to establish an Aboriginal controlled youth service:**
  - » We are asking government, corporates, and philanthropy to collaborate to resource our youth service
  - » If you're interested in joining our working group to make this happen - contact [mtdruittinfo@justreinvest.org.au](mailto:mtdruittinfo@justreinvest.org.au)

## What government and services can do:

- Work in partnership with Aboriginal young people from Mount Druitt to respond to the ideas and pathways for change young people have identified
- Share data on what services, programs, projects are currently funded in Mount Druitt and what they are funded to deliver (investment mapping) and hold services accountable for delivering what young people need:
  - » Government and NGOs to provide data on what is being funded and for what
  - » Provide data to track and understand what is working, and what isn't working, and to track progress
  - » Police, Education, Health, Housing and other government services to improve their relationships with community and work with community to achieve better outcomes

# THANKS TO

The biggest thanks goes to all the young people who have been involved in Mouny Yarns. We value and appreciate your knowledge, guidance and strength to advocate for your community and the next generation coming through. This initiative wouldn't have been possible without the trust you shared with each other and that you extended to the Mouny Yarns team.

- The Mental Health Commission
- The Koorie Youth Council
- Dusseldorp Forum
- VivCourt Trading
- The Paul Ramsay Foundation
- Kowa
- Youth Koori Court
- The Native Son's OzTag team
- Kimberwalli
- Jesuit Social Services
- Julie Williams
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