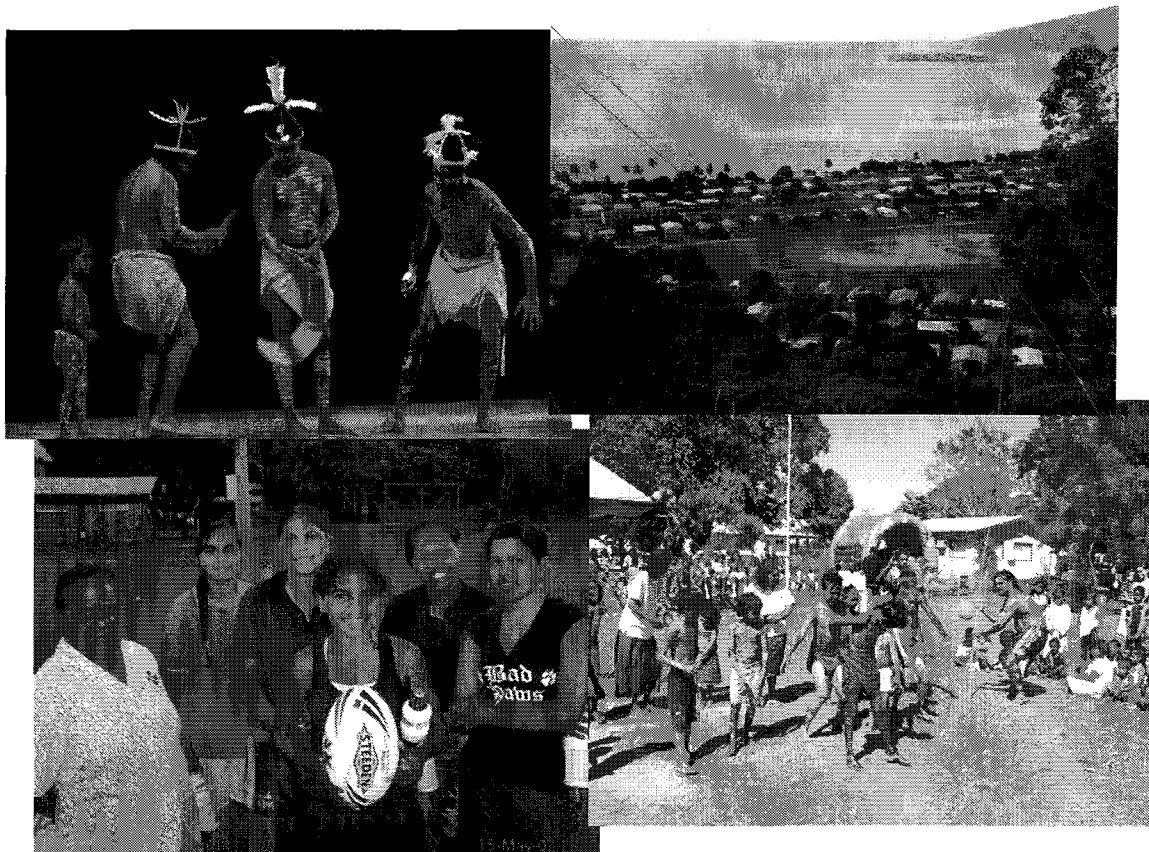


# Yarrabah Family Violence Report

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*“Yarrabah needs to change so that young people can grow culturally and spiritually and also have the same rights and opportunities as other young people” (vision statement of young Yarrabah people).*



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### **List of acronyms used in this report**

AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

CDEP – Community Development Employment Program

FWB – Family Wellbeing Program

JCU – James Cook University

NAIDOC – National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration

PAR – Participatory action research

YETI – Youth Empowerment Towards Independence

*“It is the youth who will make the difference in the next generation. If you change one kid, seven others will watch. Five will make a change and two will be unsure. We need to work with the current group and we want involvement in upstream factors” (Yarrabah Justice Group Coordinator).*

*“If we can break the barrier and get rid of shame, they’ll step out just like that” (Crime prevention project worker).*

This report describes the formative phase of a participatory action research (PAR) process which aimed to engage and support young Yarrabah people and their families to prevent violence through identifying and implementing empowerment strategies towards young people’s individual and community wellbeing. The research was embedded within, and added value to, a pre-existing community-driven crime prevention project, auspiced by the community controlled Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service (GYHS). Data for the report are based on a review of the relevant literature, focus groups with young Yarrabah people, discussions with community partners, local court statistics and project documents. The report highlights the importance of a) using a reflective approach such as PAR for assisting project workers and steering committee members find solutions to complex implementation issues, b) the importance of placing young people’s voice at the centre of the project and clearly defining their vision and values towards empowerment, and c) the importance of a phased and holistic approach to addressing long-term complex issues such as violence.

## **Introduction**

Family violence and sexual assault are reported to be at crisis levels in many Indigenous communities (Keel, 2004). Blagg (2000) reported that Indigenous people are 4.6 times more likely to be the victims of violent crime than non-Indigenous people. There are variations across states/territories and within individual communities. But Paul Memmott and colleagues suggested that “the statistics that do exist are sufficient to demonstrate that disproportionate occurrence of violence in the Indigenous communities of Australia and the traumatic impact on Indigenous people”. Further they suggest that “violence in Indigenous communities has dramatically increased in certain regions, at least since the 1980s and in many cases from the 1970s” (Memmott et al., 2001: 6). Indigenous women bear the brunt of family violence (being 12 times more likely to be the victims of assault than non-Indigenous women) and it is often perpetrated by women’s partners or husbands. In 1996 the Aboriginal Justice Council reported that in 69 per cent of cases, the offender was the spouse or partner of the victim (cited in Blagg, 2000).

Young people are also disproportionately affected by violence, as both offenders and victims. Across Queensland, regions with younger populations had higher rates of offences against the person (assault and sexual offences), but there was little difference for property offences. Of the young people subject to supervised youth justice orders between 2004-05 in Queensland (661 people) 32% had committed a violent offence (including murder, attempted murder, manslaughter and dangerous driving causing death, assault related offences, and robbery and extortion related offences). Forty four per cent of these violent offenders were Indigenous young people. The victim of young offenders

is usually also young. In its 2006-07 annual report, the Children's Court of Queensland (2007) reported "As in previous years, the majority of victims of juvenile offenders were aged under 20 years of age (61.7% of those where age was recorded). Assault victims accounted for 70.6% of all victims of juvenile offenders, with 29.7% of those victims aged between 10 and 14 years".

Pearce (1996) found that violence is a transient phase for the majority of juvenile perpetrators. However, a minority of juveniles commit the majority of juvenile crime. Homel and Lincoln summarise the risk factors for crime by Aboriginal Australians as: forced removals, dependence, institutionalised racism, cultural features and substance use. Protective factors include cultural resilience, personal controls and family control measures (Homel, Lincoln et al. 1999).

Weatherburn et al. (2006) examined the factors underlying interaction with the criminal justice system in the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistical Survey. The main result (illustrated in table 1) was that substance abuse and risky alcohol consumption were by far the most important predictors of crime. The authors hypothesise that substance and alcohol abuse are impairing individuals' judgments and creating a destructive social environment conducive to negative interactions with the criminal justice system.

**Table 1: Marginal effects of selected variables for ever being charged, 2002 NATSISS**

Variable	Marginal effect of change in variable (in percentage points)
Substance abuse	12.9
High risk alcohol consumption	11.4
Year 12 completion	-4.1
Welfare as principal income source	4.3
Unemployed	4.8
CDEP	1.8
Expected Probability for the Median Case	8.9

Source: Weatherburn et al. 2006.

Recognising the importance of tertiary prevention, Her Honour Judge Julie Dick SC, President of the Children's Court of Queensland (2007) said "When a juvenile commits a heinous crime, there is a real inclination to demonise the child, to take the view that the fact that the child has exhibited this sort of behaviour at an early age is evidence of irretrievably depraved character on the part of the child. It overlooks the fact that the child is still struggling to find it's identity and is subject to the particularly vulnerabilities which are that children have a stronger preference for risk, tend to be more impulsive and more concerned with short term rather than long term consequences and are more susceptible to peer pressure. The fact that the child is subject to these vulnerabilities means that a greater possibility exists that a juvenile's character deficiency will be reformed with the passage of time".

Internationally, there has been a proliferation of prevention research concerning child abuse, youth violence and domestic violence (Guterman 2004). Evaluation research has the potential to provide specific, tailored feedback to programs to enhance service delivery, inform a broader audience about the results of an intervention and encourage the spreading of local intervention successes to other locations. But there are methodological challenges in seeking to develop useful and rigorous knowledge from empirical research. These have included the difficulty of studying preventive effects given that the intervention's aims are to avert behaviours that have not yet occurred; conceptual and measurement issues in defining "violence"; difficulties in designing research that advances capacity to assess for risk and predict future violence; and challenges in applying research to forge advances in intervention practices to prevent violence (Guterman, 2004)

Guterman claims that although descriptive research is well advanced, the process of translating such knowledge into an intervention design and piloting new prevention intervention models has until recently remained a highly undeveloped and underreported activity (Guterman, 2004:312). This report describes the formative design and pilot testing phases of one preventive intervention with young Aboriginal people in the rural north Queensland community of Yarrabah.

### **Background to the project**

Yarrabah is a "stolen generation" Aboriginal community of about 3000 people. The traditional owners are the Kungganji and Yindinji peoples but 80 percent of community residents are the descendants of Aboriginal people "removed" to Yarrabah during the mission era (1892 – 1960) as a result of the Queensland government assimilation policy. Despite being only 54 km from Cairns, it was ranked as Queensland's most disadvantaged area [and Australia's third most disadvantaged area] in a recently released report that compares the social and economic conditions (income, job status, occupation, personal qualifications, service availability and housing conditions) of local government areas across the state (ABS, 2008).

The three year crime prevention project (January 2006 - December 2008) grew out of a concern by Yarrabah's Yaba Bimbie Men's Group about the issues facing young people. Men's Group workers had been using a Participatory Action Research process with the support of researchers at James Cook University since 2001 to support members of the group identify issues and address concerns as part of their aim towards taking greater control and responsibility for the factors influencing their health and wellbeing.

Men identified ongoing concerns about Yarrabah boys growing up without encouragement to find their own abilities, sense of achievement or identity; and the consequent anti-social behaviour by many boys. They were also worried about the high rates of marijuana use among young teenagers and related issues such as high rates of school absenteeism and lack of respect for authority. They were concerned that significant number of teenagers came from single-parent households and lacked a father as a role model. They were also aware that some parents expressed difficulty in asserting their authority and some young people were growing up without boundaries or

supervision. Men were also concerned that peer pressure shamed young people for being good or successful, and encouraged them to support older siblings or cousins who could be doing break and enters, drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana. They felt that the lack of security in key public premises in Yarrabah further encouraged young people to break and enter premises. Men's group leaders felt that in their roles as fathers, uncles, grandfathers and mentors, Yarrabah men could influence young people's development.

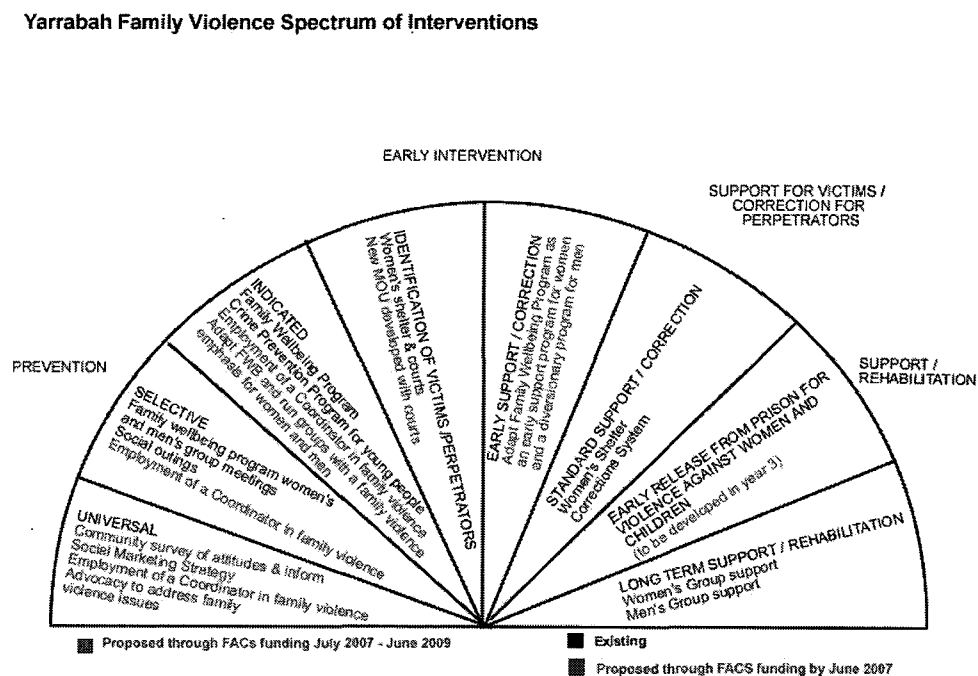
Late in 2004, men's group leaders presented their concerns to key community agencies at a Local Managers Forum meeting. They suggested that the teenage years should be a time to explore and, in traditional Aboriginal life, a time for young people to be initiated. They proposed taking young people out into the bush and teaching traditional activities including hunting, fishing, camping, dance, song, medicine and initiation rites. Community stakeholders were supportive of the concepts and said they were happy to provide assistance.

In 2005, the Men's Group and Justice Group successfully submitted for National Community Crime Prevention Project funding to address "the needs of young people at-risk and their families for a strong cultural and spiritual identity/belonging that promotes a healthy, pro-social development". The project aimed to redress the separation of "stolen generation" community members from their spiritual and cultural roots by empowering young people and men as fathers and role models. A three-year grant was obtained from December 2005. Two community-based project workers were employed from January 2006 (a woman and a man). As part of the longer term relationship with Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service and the Men's Group, James Cook University (JCU) agreed to extend the PAR framework to the crime prevention project. A project steering committee was formed comprising members of Yarrabah's key community service agencies.

The Yarrabah women's group (also based at Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service) had also been concerned about family violence and its effects on women in the community. Late in 2005, the Men's Group and Women's Group (with assistance from researchers from James Cook University) had applied for Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services to develop and evaluate an empowerment-based whole of community model for addressing and reducing family violence. The submission proposed to build on the social, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing work of the Yarrabah women's and men's group's, adopting a phased approach to researching, implementing and evaluating a spectrum of family violence interventions (see Figure 1 below). The steps included:

- a comprehensive mapping of the spectrum of existing interventions being undertaken by women's and men's groups and other Yarrabah community agencies (across prevention, early intervention, support/correction, and rehabilitation), highlighting the gaps and strengthening the existing ad hoc family violence activities;
- implementation of community-driven prevention and early intervention activities;
- a social marketing strategy based on a community survey of attitudes;

- adaptation of the family wellbeing empowerment program as an early support program for women identified as victims of violence and as a diversionary program for men mandated by the courts to attend men's group;
- adaptation of a prisoner release intervention for men convicted for crimes of violence against women and/or children (as identified by the community as a key area to target); and
- advocacy throughout the project.



**Figure 1**

This funding submission was unsuccessful, but the whole of community approach including the partnership between Yarrabah men's and women's group was carried through into the implementation of the crime prevention program. When seed funding became available through the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in late 2006, these collaborations also informed the family violence research process.

A community meeting was held in Yarrabah in August 2006 to inform this family violence research project. Participants included members of Gurriny Yealamucka management team, the men's group, women's group, crime prevention program, and Gindaja Alcohol Rehabilitation Service, as well as AIATSIS and JCU researchers. Participants reiterated the need for a comprehensive approach to family violence. They described a broad spectrum of needs including:

- the need for a more structured and consistent strategic approach to family violence (since jail does not offer an exit from the domestic violence cycle),
- the need to address violence and bullying at school,



- the need to develop prevention strategies for students who are not engaged in school,
- the need to enhance the role of fathers as role models and making men more resilient (fathers for the family, the community and the land),
- the need to restore traditional structures and help kids make better choices,
- the need to get feedback from men about their understandings of violence,
- the need to establish community awareness strategies to change social norms – led by men (including qualities or values which would contribute to achieving the vision),
- the need to explore the link between men (as role models) and young people,
- the value of leadership programs, and
- the need to explore how standards for social cohesion, caring and nurturing can be built.

Given the lack of funding support for a comprehensive community model, participants at this meeting decided that the AIATSIS funding should be used to support the crime prevention program's efforts to empower young people to address issues of family violence and other crime, and to evaluate the intervention. AIATSIS provided \$20,000 to Gurriny Yealamucka Health service for a one-year implementation and research process from January 2007. Of this, \$15,000 was used to enhance crime prevention program activities for young people and to top up the (previously Community development Employment program or CDEP top-up) workers wages, and \$5,000 was provided to JCU for the evaluation process. The aim of the research process was to understand and support the prevention of youth violence through empowerment towards individual and community wellbeing.

Individual and (particularly) community empowerment are gradual development processes and take considerable time (Laverack and Labonte 2000). In recognition of the short timeframe for this research process (and the seed-funding nature of the AIATSIS grant), it was decided that the focus should be placed on documenting the formative process of the crime prevention project's work with young people to design and develop a violence prevention program. With funding support, this process could then inform a further implementation phase with a longer term focus.

## **The literature – what works and why**

### **Definitions**

Youth violence incorporates a range of behaviours. At the more serious end, it includes serious violent and delinquent acts such as aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and homicide, committed by and against youth. In its less severe forms, it incorporates aggressive behaviors such as verbal abuse, bullying, hitting, slapping, or fist-fighting. The young person can be the victim, the perpetrator, or both. (Webster's New World Medical Dictionary, accessed 20 January 2008).

Prevention is the aversion of violent events before they occur (Guterman, 2004).

The terms "violence", "abuse" and "battering" are frequently used interchangeably. The World Health Organisation described four modes in which violence may be inflicted:

physical, sexual, and psychological attack; and deprivation (WHO 2002). In the Australian context, Hegarty et al provide a slightly different classification of abuse as:

- *Physical abuse*, causing pain and injury, denial of sleep, warmth or nutrition; denial of needed medical care; sexual assault; violence to property or animals; disablement; and murder;
- *Verbal abuse*, in private or in public, designed to humiliate, degrade, demean, intimidate, subjugate, including the threat of physical violence;
- *Economic abuse*, including deprivation of basic necessities, seizure of income or assets, unreasonable denial of the means necessary for participation in social life; and
- *Social abuse*, through isolation, control of all social activity, deprivation of liberty, or the deliberate creation of unreasonable dependence (Hegarty et al., 2000).

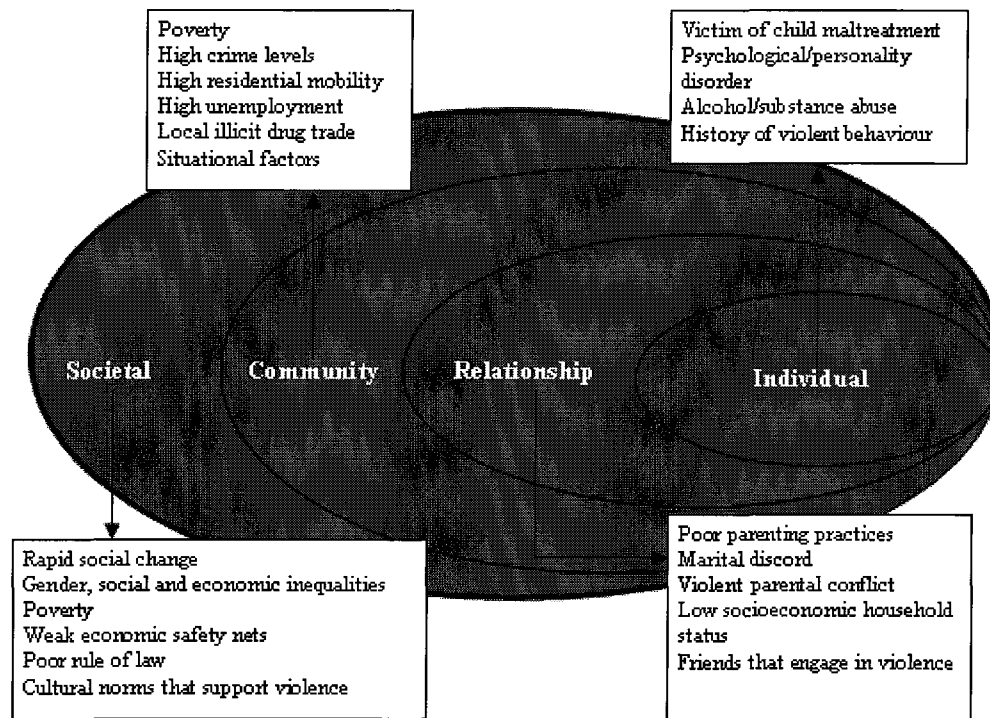
Indigenous peoples often prefer the term family violence to reflect their experiences of the damaging effects imposed by colonisation and dispossession on their relationships with their kin, their lands, and their communities (PADV 2001). Family violence involves any use of force, be it physical or non physical, which is aimed at controlling another family or community member and which undermines that person's wellbeing. It can be directed towards an individual, family, community or particular group. Family violence is not limited to physical forms of abuse and also includes cultural and spiritual abuse. There are interconnecting and trans-generational experiences of violence with Indigenous families and communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2006).

Homel and Lincoln summarise the risk factors for crime by Aboriginal Australians as: forced removals, dependence, institutionalised racism, cultural features and substance use. A further issue relates to the needs of the children of Indigenous prisoners, especially those from country areas, as a high risk group (Dodson & Hunter, 2006). Protective factors include cultural resilience, personal controls and family control measures (Homel, Lincoln et al., 1999).

#### Prevention frameworks, approaches and principles

An ecological framework views interpersonal violence as the outcome of the interaction among many factors at four levels—the individual, the relationship, the community, and the society. These are described in figure 1. The interaction between factors at the different levels is equally as important as the influence of factors within a single level.

**Figure 2: The ecological framework: examples of risk factors at each level**



World Health Organization 2002.

There is no standard model for violence or other crime prevention programs and few crime prevention programs designed specifically for Indigenous young people (Cunneen 2002). The literature suggests a range of approaches to programs with evidence that multi-strategic approaches are more likely to be effective. Examples include:

- intensive case-work with at-risk youth and their families;
- school based strategies including those that reinforce positive social values through school-based work and 'early intervention strategies of a therapeutic nature during school years; (Thompson, 1999, Rivers, 1995);
- the role of 'physical activity ... in the development of life skills which include attendance at school and no participation in domestic violence and substance abuse' (Sellwood 2004);
- cultural programs that emphasise the value for young people of growing up in their Aboriginal families, learning their Aboriginal identity early in life and regularly visiting their traditional country (Howells, Day et al. 1999),
- local media and community awareness activities (Poelina and Perdrisat, 2004);
- developing a creative "vision for the future" and helping people discover unrecognised local capacities, escalating self-esteem and demonstrating the strength to be gained by those who work supportively together (Hazlehurst, 1997); and

- empowerment programs that build the capacity of Indigenous young people to make decisions by increasing their knowledge, skills and understanding (Manns, 2006; Rees, Tsey et al., 2004).

Pearce argues that ‘the aim should be for juvenile crime prevention to form part of an integrated youth or social justice policy that fosters the positive social development of youth and counters negative images of young people. ‘Responsibility for delinquency prevention is not considered to rest solely with the criminal justice agencies but is seen as lying with ‘the family, the community, peer groups, schools, vocational training and the world of work, as well as (through) voluntary organizations’ (Pearce, 1996). Ultimately intervention should be normalized in a wide range of informal settings not traditionally conceived as crime response related.

The literature suggests the following principles for effective community-level violence prevention programs for/by Aboriginal young people:

- Actively engage with Indigenous people. ‘Research reveals that structures which do not take account of ‘Aboriginal social relations’ in a particular locality, with its culturally specific forms of reciprocity and collectivity, will tend to underachieve. Those initiatives which have emerged from within Indigenous communities and meet aspirations tend to perform better’ (Blagg, 1999);
- Young people have an active role and partnership in delinquency prevention measures and should be seen as part of the solution rather than simply being considered “mere objects of socialization or control” (Pearce, 1996);
- Involve families (Hazlehurst, 1997);
- Attempt to ‘change behaviour while maintaining family relations’ (Blagg, 1999);
- Culminate in community responses to healing families, rather than in isolating and/or holding individual offenders accountable’ (Keel, 2004);
- Provide self-affirming experiences for high-risk youth and opportunities for jobs as well as the addition of basic education and skills training (Steele, 1987);
- Address the transgenerational nature of crime (Pearce, 1996);
- Consider violence within a broader social context. Prevent the inadequate social development of young people, where involvement in crime is only one aspect of delinquent behaviour and is placed in the context of the total life experiences and life chances of young people and the wellbeing of the community (Pearce, 1996; WHO, 2002);
- Incorporate consideration of structural issues, such as advocacy to government to build and maintain adequate welfare and social justice infrastructure, better coordinate state-level department efforts, and establish compatible data bases that yield measure outcomes. No matter how well intentioned, there are dangers evident in making crime the focus of interventions in the lives of young people rather than redressing fundamental structural issues associated with youth alienation such as high unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, family separation, and family violence and their relative lack of power (Pearce, 1996, 1996; Steele, 1987);

### **The Yarrabah crime prevention project intervention strategies**

In keeping with Yarrabah men's group's stated objective of empowerment, the broader crime prevention project was informed by the theoretical position of empowerment. Empowerment is a cross-disciplinary concept used to describe a process by which individuals, groups and communities gain increased control over their lives (Wallerstein, 1992). Based on the findings of a preliminary literature review and Yarrabah community concerns and resources, the crime prevention project implemented a range of empowerment strategies. These attempted to address young Yarrabah people's verbalized need to "find out where we came from and where we are going". The project initiated:

- regular girls group and boys group meetings where invited speakers, sessions of the Family Wellbeing Program, traditional craft and artifact production activities, and informal yarnning sessions were implemented;
- ancillary social and sporting activities, including a season of touch football for girls, dance (both cultural dance and hip hop), and NAIDOC activities;
- some young people attended dance motivation and choreography workshops with David Hudson and a Bangarra Dance performance;
- young people were taken out camping with activities such as story telling with Elders, hunting, gathering bush tucker and singing provided;
- project workers took groups of boys and girls to selected men's group and women's group meetings respectively, where they were well received;
- recognizing the importance of assisting young people to embrace other cultures in Australia, two Yarrabah boys traveled to Sydney for a week-long visit to the North Shore Anglican Boys College. – *"Yarrabah people see white people as a threat, but there are a lot of good people and they can help kids to get out of Yarrabah and look in from the outside – see how we are killing ourselves. There's more to life than breaking and entering"* (Justice Group Coordinator).

The Family Wellbeing empowerment program had previously been provided to Yarrabah adults by the Men's and Women's Groups. The crime prevention program attempted to extend this delivery to young people. The Program had been developed by "stolen generation" Aboriginal people in Adelaide in the early 1990s and is based on the idea that a holistic approach encompassing the material, emotional, mental and spiritual, leads to self empowerment and ultimately gives people the communication, conflict resolution and other qualities and skills necessary to take greater control and responsibility for family, work and community life. Personal development workshops provide opportunities for participants to build trusting relationships, think about their individual needs and aspirations, and develop life skills, strategies and support mechanisms to help each other meet those needs. Specific topics include group agreements, leadership, basic human needs, relationships, life journey, conflict resolution, emotions, crises, beliefs and attitudes, and sensitivity as a leader.

Project workers were trained in the delivery of the program. They delivered sessions in an ad hoc way through boys and girls groups and at camps, but found that it was inappropriate and impractical to deliver the program as a structured course to young people.

A range of other possible activities to engage young people were canvassed by the project workers and steering committee. These include web site development and developing a music band, but these strategies were not progressed.

In addition, the project developed partnerships with other key Yarrabah and external stakeholders. Project workers also organized community awareness activities such as NAIDOC “youth in the park” events. Finally, a Crime Prevention Officer and JCU researcher collaboratively presented at the Australian Institute of Criminology national conference in Townsville in October 2007.

### **Family Violence Research methodology**

The Family Violence Research utilized the empowerment related methodology of Participatory Action Research based on the principle that ‘ordinary’ people become researchers in their own right and generate relevant knowledge in order to address the issues that are of priority concern to them. External JCU researcher assumed a role as peer facilitators to generate broader systemic frameworks for project workers understanding given situations, then questioning the situation and identifying alternate courses of action. From here the process spirals, as knowledge and understanding inform strategy development, followed by action, reflection and new understanding. The goal is ongoing change and improvement (Tsey et al., 2002).

The benefit of the PAR evaluation methodology is that evaluation results can be directly fed back during the course of the project, so that the project becomes informed by the evaluation process, and vice versa. It helps the community to define its own problems and strategies and can work at two levels (workers and young people).

The evaluation questions were:

1. What does this formative research tell us about potential pathways (risk and protective factors) for preventing youth violence through empowerment towards individual and community wellbeing?
2. What possible strategies and interventions could reduce the harm associated with youth violence in Yarrabah?
3. What are the concerns and priorities of the local community?

To answer these questions, we collected a range of evaluation data. These included:

- A literature review to provide a context for this project. It examined violence prevention interventions targeting young Aboriginal people at individual, family, community and government levels.
- Documentation of regular PAR reflective planning and evaluation sessions between the external researchers and the crime prevention officers and men’s group workers during the course of the project. We used a basic reflective tool which helped to highlight and celebrate small successes and achievements, prioritise activities, address conflicts and

misunderstandings, by asking questions such as “*What are the main things we have been doing? What have been the highlights or good things? What has been hard? How could the hard things be overcome? What have we learnt?*” The rationale was to frame problems as challenges for which there are always solutions.

- Focus groups of young boys and girls to answer a series of questions about the crime prevention project and violence prevention. Three focus groups were run at various stages throughout the project – the first (2005) consisted of seven boys and canvassed young people’s perceptions of the causes of crime and possible responses. The second focus group (November 2006) consisted of 15 young people (13 boys and 2 girls). Young people developed a vision statement for Yarrabah and set of values (Do’s and Don’ts) which described values or actions towards the vision. The results of this workshop were confirmed with small groups of young people in early 2007. In the final focus group (March 2008) information was obtained from 8 young people (6 boys and 2 girls) about their perceptions of violence in Yarrabah and their suggestions about strategies to prevent it. Critical aspects of the project (the vision statement and Do’s and Don’ts; and the analysis of the Yarrabah court statistics) were fed back to young people during the last focus group for their response.

Participants	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3
Purpose	Perceptions of the causes of crime	Visions and values	Perceptions of violence and prevention strategies
Males 10-12 years	2	4	2
Males 13-18 years	5	9	4
Females 10-12 years	0	1	0
Females 13-18 years	0	1	2

- Project documentation including the funding submissions, steering committee minutes, and reports to funding bodies. Ethical issues were canvassed with steering committee members at the start of the research project. These included the priority of the research; commitment to capacity building of project staff (eg in PAR processes); commitment to respect for community traditions, potential harm eg was there a need to ensure access to a counselor; ownership, control and access to data, research results and publication, and accountability to the community eg levels of consent.
- Qualitative data was complemented by community level quantitative data such as court statistics, Juvenile Justice Orders, and school attendance rates. The analysis of court cases heard in the Yarrabah court between January 2002-February 2006 was particularly relevant and was fed back to

young people during the third focus group. The data came from the Courts Database of the Office of Economic & Statistical Research, Queensland Treasury. It was provided with the permission of the Queensland Department of Justice.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report the themes from the data from community level statistics, young Yarrabah people, and community members (represented by the steering committee). Within the timeframe, we were not able to obtain data from parents (except in their roles as steering committee members). We used interpretive phenomenological approach to understand people's everyday experience of reality in order to get an understanding of the opportunities, challenges and outcomes from the project (McLeod, 2001 in Braun and Clarke, 2006). The datasets were read repeatedly, searching for meanings and patterns. With the research question in mind, the data was then coded systematically. The codes were then sorted into potential themes. These were mapped, defined and refined to produce this final report (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **Findings**

#### **Young people**

In the first focus group [January 2005], seven boys identified the causes of "getting into trouble" as *"boredom/ nothing to do"*, *kids "thinking they're men"*, *"thinking it's fun"*, *"experiencing life by getting in trouble with the law"*, *"seeing other people doing it and think they've got to try it out"*, *"no food in the house"*, and *"no attention from parents"*.

#### **The visioning exercise and Do's and Don'ts**

In the second focus group (November 2006), 15 young people (13 boys and 2 girls) were asked to develop a vision statement for Yarrabah youth and a list of "Do's and Don'ts" (or qualities or values which would contribute to achieving the vision). This process was successfully used by Men's Group in 2001. Young people identified their vision as:

***"Yarrabah needs to change so that young people can grow culturally and spiritually and also have the same rights and opportunities as other young people."***

Young people stated a strong sense of identity/belonging with Yarrabah but said they would like Yarrabah to change to a healthier, more supportive environment. Young people also voiced a desire to take greater responsibility, but felt constrained or powerless to do so. They raised a range of issues related to violence within personal and property contexts. These included "swearing", "fighting", "screaming", "break house quiet", "smashing street lights", "slashing tyres of cars and trucks with glass", "drugs", "parents not having control over kids", and "biting dogs".

The young people identified a range of "do's and don't's" that related to achieving their vision. Some of these were things that young people, themselves, could do. Others were things that young people felt should be actioned by families or community organizations. They were:



***What should young people change to achieve their vision?***

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for Elders, parents, guardians, others and themselves</li> <li>• More kids going to school, getting an education, finish school</li> <li>• Being an example to other young people</li> <li>• Fitness – sport including football</li> <li>• Be with and listen to family</li> <li>• Help people out when struggling</li> <li>• Grow culturally and spiritually</li> <li>• Know right and what's wrong</li> <li>• Still be in Yarrabah in 20 years, I like a good job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young age drinking</li> <li>• No breaking</li> <li>• Be violent - stop swearing and be happy</li> <li>• No fighting and screaming – just be friend and being nice to each other</li> <li>• Stop smashing street lights, breaking in, slashing tyres of cars and trucks with glass.</li> <li>• Need to get drugs out of here – young people need to stop</li> </ul>

***What should parents or families change so their kids can achieve the vision?***

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be with family, listen to family</li> <li>• Parents having control over their kids</li> <li>• Get some of our families back in schools and get a good job when they've finished</li> <li>• Keep family networks</li> <li>• Take care of family and community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father and mother swearing too much – father and mother to stop</li> <li>• No break house quiet</li> </ul>

***What should Yarrabah organizations/community change so young people can achieve the vision?***

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yarrabah to be clean and peaceful</li> <li>• Like old days – respect Elders and youngers</li> <li>• Famous, a smart place</li> <li>• Peaceful hunting, gathering, good corroboree</li> <li>• Water more clean</li> <li>• Better education - school to grade 12</li> <li>• People sort out problems with land</li> <li>• More houses in the plans, own homes</li> <li>• More fun things to do especially at holiday time</li> <li>• Young people active - sports, health and fitness</li> <li>• Everyone coming together - kind words</li> <li>• Our people controlling the community</li> <li>• More jobs</li> <li>• People with good cars – come and go to Cairns</li> <li>• More shops, pools, bank, a newsagent, vet, good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young age drinking</li> <li>• No breaking</li> <li>• Be violent - stop swearing and be happy</li> <li>• No fighting and screaming</li> <li>• Stop smashing street lights, breaking in, slashing tyres of cars and trucks with glass.</li> <li>• Need to get drugs out of here – young people need to stop</li> </ul>

<p>policeman, a new bakery, healthy store with fruit and vegetables, bigger hospital.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roads done, putting down mangy dogs (and they bite too).</li> <li>• Outside people coming in - lawyers, Justice Group, teachers. Take part in 3 ways culture.</li> </ul>	
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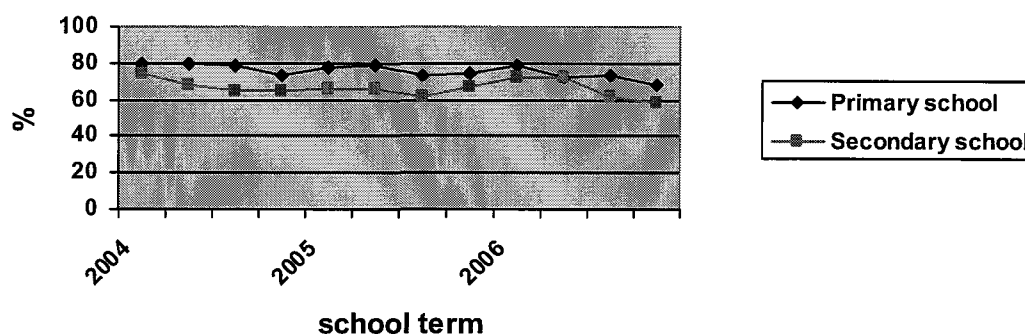
### Community level indicators of violence and antisocial behaviour

Statistical indicators of the level and characteristics of violence and other anti-social behaviour in Yarrabah were collected, analysed and fed back to young people at the third focus group. The three data sources analysed were school attendance, juvenile justice orders, and adult court statistics.

### School attendance

There is a high rate of intermittent school absenteeism with an overall attendance rate of 66.5% at the Yarrabah State High School in 2006 (years 8-10) compared to state target of 91%. The significant number of students attending school less than 75% of the school year has a negative impact on student's educational achievements (Johnson, 2007).

**Yarrabah primary and secondary school  
average attendance per school term**



Source: Johnson, 2007

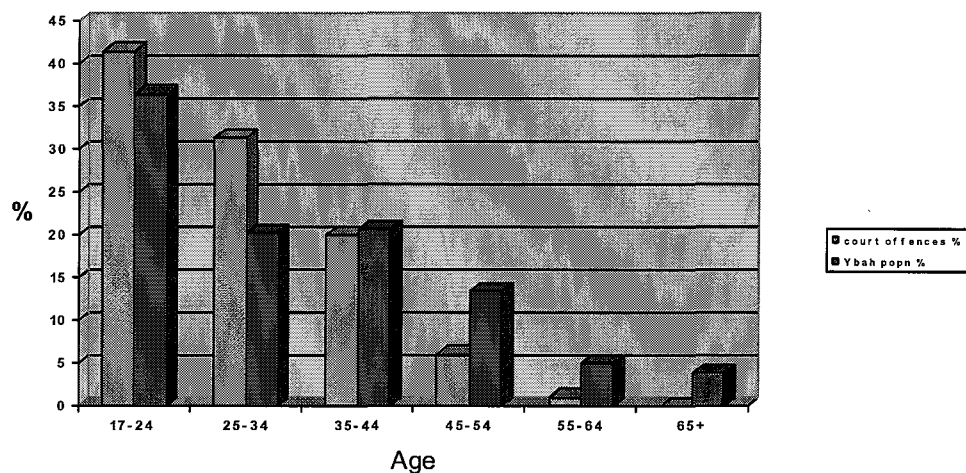
### Juvenile Justice Orders

The number of young people in Yarrabah on orders declined from approx 30-35 during 2006 to approx 12- 20 during 2007 (pers comm. Gurriny Yealamucka Social Health Programs Manager and previously Justice Group Coordinator). About 90% of these young people were boys, with the majority being break and enters. With few opportunities for employment or further education, Yarrabah's community agencies estimate that up to 80% of Yarrabah's 400 young people (10-17 years of age) could be considered "at risk" of being both perpetrators and victims of crime (including violence, alcohol use, sexual activity, sexual violence and other crime).

### Court statistics

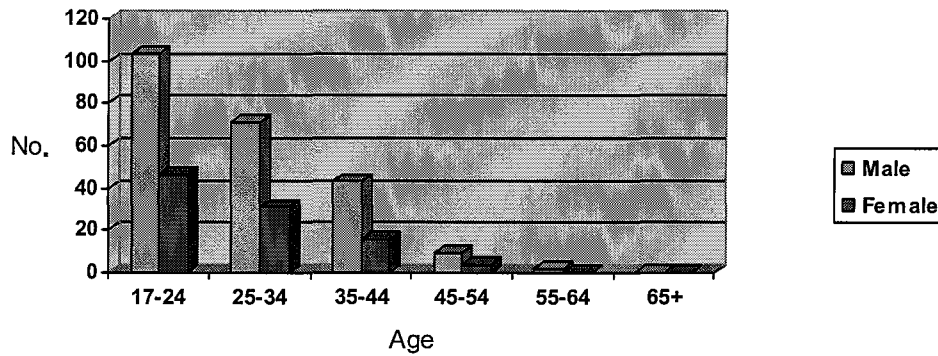
The stated aim of the crime prevention project was to prevent young people from entering the adult criminal justice system. To determine levels of adult crime (particularly violence) in Yarrabah, we analysed the 1660 (1142 males, 518 females) adult offences heard in the Yarrabah court between January 2002-February 2006. Adults are defined as people 17 years or older. Like other Queensland communities, young people commit a disproportionate amount of crime in Yarrabah. Graph 1 shows that for age groups 17-24 and 25-34, there was a higher rate of expected offending compared to the proportion of that age group in the Yarrabah population. Although results show that the 17-24 year age group had the highest rate of offences, they were less likely than other age groups to be convicted. This is likely to be because they are more likely to be first offenders.

**Graph 1: Yarrabah offences by age 2002-06**



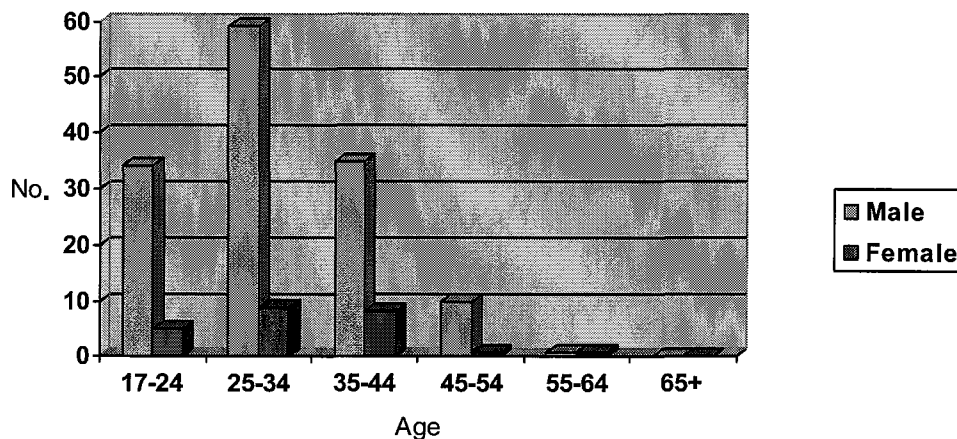
Offences involving violence included act intended to cause injury, sexual assault, going armed to cause fear, and threatening behaviour. Violent offences were more likely to be committed by individuals in the 17-24 age group (21.7% of all offences committed by this age group) and became progressively less likely as people became older (see graph 2). Males had more than twice as many violent offences as females, but there were still more than 100 violent offences by females over the four year period.

**Graph 2: Yarrabah - Violent offences by age and gender  
2002-06**

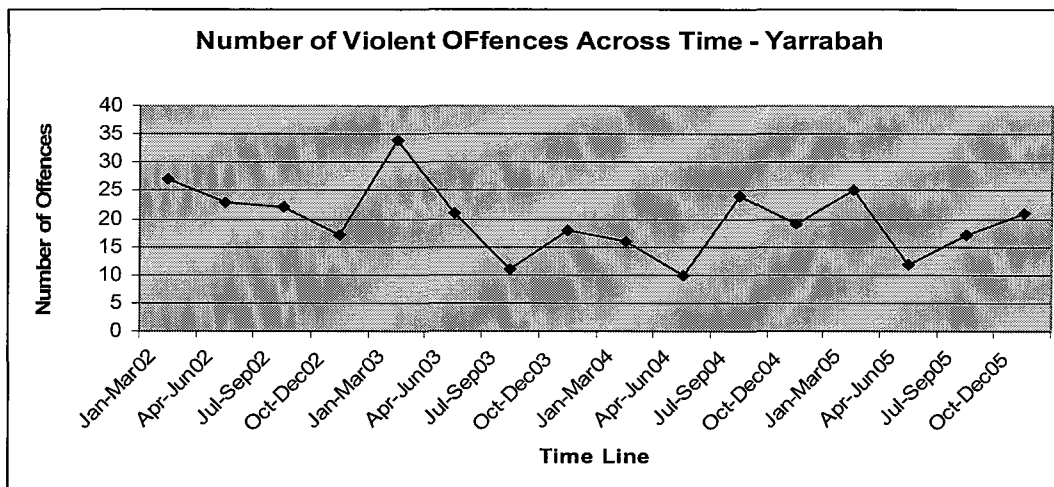


Breaches of Domestic Violence orders accounted for 534 (5.5%) of the total number of Yarrabah offences committed between Jan 2002 and Feb 2006. Most of the people who breached this order (84.3% of breaches) were men. Individuals between the ages of 25 and 54 were most likely to be charged with a breach of a domestic violence order (see graph 3).

**Graph 3: Breaches of DV orders by age and gender**



Graph 4: Demonstrates changes in the number of Yarrabah violent offences over time. Peaks in violent offending tend to correlate with the North Queensland wet season



### Feedback from the third focus group

The vision statement and Do's and Don'ts, and the analysis of court statistics were fed back to eight young people (six boys and two girls) during the third focus group. Young participants said that violence was a concern and priority for young people and they see violence "all the time, whenever people get drunk". They said "fighting is a problem".

The young people affirmed the vision statement developed during the previous focus group and confirmed that the priority issues and concerns raised during the previous focus group were all important for young Yarrabah people. These six areas were:

#### 1. Violence/abuse including:

- No breaking
- Don't be violent - stop swearing and be happy
- No fighting and screaming – just be friend and being nice to each other
- Stop smashing street lights, breaking in, slashing tyres of cars and trucks with glass.
- Father and mother swearing too much – father and mother to stop
- No break house quiet

#### 2. Alcohol/drugs including:

- Young age drinking
- Need to get drugs out of here – young people need to stop

#### 3. Education/employment/income including:

- More kids going to school, getting an education, finish school
- Get some of our families back in schools and get a good job when they've finished
- (Yarrabah) Famous, a smart place
- Better education - school to grade 12
- More jobs
- Still be in Yarrabah in 20 years, I like a good job
- People with good cars – come and go to Cairns

**4. Sports/activities including:**

- Fitness – sport including football
- More fun things to do especially at holiday time
- Young people active - sports, health and fitness
- Peaceful hunting, gathering, good corroboree
- Pool competitions, dart competitions, social club, boxing, movie nights and sports

**5. Personal growth, leadership, and respect including:**

- Respect for Elders, parents, guardians, others and themselves
- Being an example to other young people
- Be with and listen to family
- Help people out when struggling
- Grow culturally and spiritually
- Know right and what's wrong
- Be with family, listen to family
- Parents having control over their kids
- Keep family networks
- Take care of family and community
- Like old days –respect Elders and youngers
- Everyone coming together - kind words
- Our people controlling the community
- Youthline
- Programs for parents and domestic violence programs

**6. The community environment including:**

- Yarrabah to be clean and peaceful
- Water more clean
- People sort out problems with land
- More houses in the plans, own homes
- More shops, pools, bank, a newsagent, vet, good policeman, a new bakery, healthy store with fruit and vegetables, bigger hospital.
- Roads done, putting down mangy dogs (and they bite too).
- Outside people coming in - lawyers, Justice Group, teachers. Take part in 3 ways culture.

When asked what could be done about violence, participants said that there should be more activities for young people. Suggestions included Youthline, pool competitions, dart competitions, social club, boxing, movie nights and sports. When asked what could be done for families, they suggested programs for parents and domestic violence programs. They were also asked what organisations could do, but did not have any suggestions.

**Steering committee concerns and suggestions**

The crime prevention project steering committee (representative of key community agencies such as the school, police, health service, justice group, council etc) felt that the

youth violence research was a priority. Steering committee members had varying views about the nature of “the problem”. They described a change in family values/ standards – *“government has taken discipline from homes and schools and people are scared to discipline their kids”*. They also addressed the issue of the changing roles for young Aboriginal people in contemporary culture *“Fifty years ago, 12-13 year olds went through law and became young men. The word “teenager” didn’t exist. Now people aged 13-19 don’t know if they’re men or kids”*. Elders represented on the steering committee lamented the impact of societal change on young people’s values *“all this that we going through is from lack of respect. Respect has gone through the window. We need to bring respect back with a capital R.”* Steering committee members commented that young people are confused about their identity and felt that it is trendier to identify (and dress) as an African American than as an Aboriginal Australian.

They defined some key principles for working with young people to build capacity and minimize potential harm. Firstly, it was agreed that the voice of young people should be placed at the centre of any strategies. It was decided that the project should focus on all young Yarrabah people rather than those at most risk, because *“it’s no good trying to separate the good and bad. You can turn around problems to positive things eg leadership skills, and provide appreciation and love, and recognize achievements”*. This whole of community approach was seen as the most effective way to ensure that the program was accessible, involved young people, and avoided stigmatizing those who participate. One suggested strategy was to try to alter the peer group pressure which shames young people for being good or successful. *“We need to change this and encourage positive interaction and standards, and confidence”*.

The project steering committee recognized that no agency alone could combat the problem of crime and anti-social behaviour and decided that the project should operate like a “missing link”, attempting to fill the gaps between other existing services/programs. The Yarrabah Police sergeant, for example, acknowledged that *“The Police alone can’t combat the problem. It needs to be tackled by all agencies”*. One of the gaps identified was the lack of engagement of a large proportion of Yarrabah’s teenagers in school (or any other structure). These teenagers are not (yet) involved in the criminal justice system, but hang out with those who are on orders. *“Kids are bringing in other kids (as young as 6 years old) to help with break and enters, creating a cycle of crime. Because of a lack of security, we’re criminalising the kids”* (Police Officer).

Through the PAR process, a range of challenges was identified throughout the project. These were raised in steering committee meetings, options canvassed and issues addressed. Examples included:

#### 1. Engaging young people

One of the practical challenges was how to involve young people in the project who were disengaged from school and other structures *“Wanted to focus on the hard head ones”* (Project worker). It was also challenging, at times, to motivate young people to participate. *“If we can break the barrier and get rid of shame, they’ll step out just like that”* (Project worker). The two crime prevention workers themselves were Yarrabah

residents and therefore had family links with many young people. One of the project workers was a young (22 year old) man who (among other things) was a member of the Yaba Bimbie Men's group, cultural dancer with the Yaba Bimbie Dance group and a musician in Yarrabah's "Black Curubian" band. The other project worker was the daughter of Elders from both of the two main clan groups of Kungganji traditional owners and therefore had access to the surviving traditional knowledges. Both project workers initially used their family connections and skills/interests to engage young people. Once involved, workers were surprised how open young people were about their personal issues. *"Girls are responding to the program and are really interested. 'I told them, if you want to dance, don't get pregnant'".* However, trying to encourage young people to try new things, for example, cultural dancing has been difficult as some saw it as a *"shame thing"*.

## 2. Family Wellbeing Program Training

The informal structure of the boys and girls groups meant that different participants were coming to different sessions of FWB and it was not possible to deliver a consistent 30 hour program. It became evident that a structured approach was not appropriate for these young people and that it was more effective to run discussion style groups about selected topics within the context of other activities eg at camps. The project still needs to address the issue of how best to deliver and monitor personal development training to young people as a more consistent way.

## 3. Lack of program resources

The funding grant from the National Community Crime Prevention Program allowed for the employment of two workers with top-up from the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), but with minimal allocations for program expenses. Changes to the CDEP during the course of the program meant that workers were no longer eligible for top-up. There were practical challenges such as how to provide training and support for the two workers, and develop the program within a very limited budget and absence of resources. Workers did not have transport and had to negotiate with other programs to use vehicles. Lack of space for meetings and for youth activities has also been a constraint. This led to some innovative strategies for obtaining resources, such as sending an email request to the staff of James Cook University to donate musical instruments and camping gear. Project workers also successfully applied for funds for girls' touch football training (and unsuccessfully for other activities). The AIATSIS funding also "topped up" wages and provided for program activity costs.

## 4. Local community project workers capacity and support

Both project workers had grade 10 level education and limited prior work experience, so needed significant hands-on support and guidance to develop a complex crime prevention program. At the time of the crime prevention project's commencement, auspicing agency, Gurriny Yealamucka was undergoing a major expansion and restructure of services in preparation for becoming Yarrabah's primary health service. The restructure promised to provide more appropriate health services to Yarrabah and opportunities for staff, but left project workers without adequate supervision. This also created difficulties for coordination of the project because the male project worker was located with the Men's



Group, and the female project worker with the Women's Group. The young male Crime Prevention Officer resigned from the project in mid 2007, but was subsequently re-employed in early 2008 in a related social health position at Gurriny Yealamucka. However, there was a four month lag before a replacement officer was appointed, and a subsequent down-time and need for new orientation and training (including Family Wellbeing Training). The female Crime Prevention Officer enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Indigenous Health Promotion at Sydney University – this study was relevant and valuable to the position but study leave consumed significant blocks of time. From October- December 2007, she took bereavement leave in response to a family tragedy.

Gurriny Men's and Women's group staff, and a range of other service providers, provided some support for the program. Late in 2007, Gurriny Yealamucka appointed a social health program manager to provide the necessary support to this and other projects. Notwithstanding the lack of supervision, and at times confusion between the roles of mentors, the workers ability to address these challenges has been impressive. One of the project workers, for example, told of how she learnt to facilitate groups – *"I'd never done it before - all eyes on you, and I learned to relax"*.

#### 5. Community expectations of the project

Yarrabah community agencies identified a significant need for a reactive response to young people already in crisis. For example, a local research report developed during the course of this project (Johnson 2007) identified disengagement from school (and its links with substance abuse, gambling at a young age and anti-social behaviour) as a major concern for the Yarrabah community. Because there were no truancy officers in the community, the crime prevention officers were asked by the school to play a lead role in monitoring truancy by tracking down who was not at school and why. Project officers were concerned that taking on a policing/truancy officer role would compromise their relationships with young people.

Likewise, some steering committee members were keen that the project officers take a lead role in progressing the local Mayor's suggestion that the community implement a curfew to get young people off the streets after 9pm during week days and 11pm at weekends. Reservations included the community's lack of means to effectively enforce a curfew, the potential for further disadvantage for young people if parents were penalized, and that for some young people, the streets may be safer than their own homes due to alcohol abuse and associated violence.

Other potential roles for the project officers included assisting in the provision of a homework centre, involvement in providing security for the four main premises subjected to break and enters, and assisting with the provision of parenting programs and support. *"Kids have no boundaries or supervision. Parenting programs would provide support, and the community needs to assist parents who are looking for help"* (School Principal). However, the steering committee decided that while these issues were relevant, it was not appropriate for Project Workers to take a lead role in providing these services. The role of the crime prevention program should be to advocate for the appropriate delivery of such services rather than directly provide them. The steering committee clearly defined

the project as a prevention/early intervention project and that its role was to put programs in place.

#### 6. Broader determinants

Broader determinants such as alcohol play a major role in violence prevention. Issues related to drugs and alcohol (as well as violence) were identified as priorities by young people as part of the visioning exercise and Do's and Don'ts process. A current proposal by the Yarrabah Council to convert the Yarrabah Youth Leisure Centre into an alcohol canteen would have a direct impact on the availability of space for youth activities in Yarrabah (and a symbolic impact on their perceived value compared with the availability of alcohol). With support, the Crime Prevention Workers could play a role in supporting young people to have a stronger voice in decisions such as this.

#### 7. Monitoring and evaluation

There has been a lack of routinely collected data to monitor and evaluate activities.

### Conclusion

This paper has focused on the formative stages of a violence prevention program, implemented via a crime prevention project in the Yarrabah community. The development of the program occurred through the utilisation of a PAR approach with young people, project workers and the project steering committee. As an applied social research, PAR seeks explicitly to address and transform social inequalities. The approach, which integrates scientific investigation with skill development and political action, is widely acknowledged as an appropriate methodology in the context of Indigenous research, not least because of its potential to empower those participating in the research. As one Indigenous educator recently reflected, *'We (Indigenous people) can use research ourselves to gain accurate knowledge of our own realities, so that we are empowered to find our own solutions...'*. Participatory action research creates opportunities for these aspirations to be met.

Community empowerment begins with issues of concern to particular groups or individuals and regards some improvement in their overall power or capacity as the important health outcome (Laverack and Labonte, 2000). Community violence is a major concern to young Yarrabah people and stakeholders. Behaviours that are of concern include physical fighting, verbal abuse, vandalism and intimidating behaviour. The main situations of concern include house parties and street fighting.

In the context of the recent debate about violence in Aboriginal communities, it is timely to draw attention to efforts by Indigenous men to collaborate with women to address the disempowerment and lack of opportunity for men and boys in the community, and the perceived need for young people to find a stronger sense of their own identity. The successful initiation and development of this crime prevention project for young people has contributed to the capacity and confidence of the men's group to address their own concerns. Crime prevention and youth violence initiatives have become aspects of the sustainability and transferability of men's group activities. It is significant that at the end of this project (March 2008), Gurriny Yealamucka's entire social health team (which

incorporates men's group, women's group and the crime prevention programs among others) identified its primary vision to "empower people through education to reduce Yarrabah's high rates of abuse (in all its forms)".

As Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, concluded, solutions to family violence and abuse in Indigenous communities are complex, multifaceted and require long term focus and commitment (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2006). In this project, the first phase of a holistic violence prevention project was developed with young people and community stakeholders in Yarrabah. Young people have articulated their vision for a better Yarrabah, and identified six strategy areas as a focus changing the community so that young people can grow culturally and spiritually and also have the same rights and opportunities as other (Australian) young people. Documentation of these processes will be used by Gurriny Yealamucka Health service to negotiate funding resources towards a further implementation phase based on community engagement, the provision of activities for young people, Family Wellbeing training for parents and young people, school-based strategies and advocacy strategies. An important aspect of phase 2 would be to facilitate a local community steering committee and a youth group or youth council to give a stronger voice to young people and advocate for their concerns.

## **Recommendations**

### **Yarrabah Community**

1. That Gurriny Yealamucka Social Health team form and coordinate a Local Community Project Group consisting of Elders, Traditional Owners, community members (including young people), organisations and service providers to develop Yarrabah community solutions to local domestic and family violence problems. These should include healing the community and breaking the intergenerational effects of violence. An example of similar initiative is the Coen Safe Haven Initiative.
2. That Gurriny Yealamucka could facilitate the development of a Yarrabah youth group or youth council to give a stronger voice for young people to advocate for their concerns.
3. Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service could use the findings from this report to apply for further funding to implement phase 2 implementation of this project as a whole of community approach (with a focus on young people). This should focus particularly on early intervention strategies with families and young parents, school-based strategies, organised community activities for young people and advocacy.
4. In recognition of the significant role of violence in reducing school attendance, the Yarrabah State School could educate young people and their parents about the prevalence of domestic and family violence in the community, the repercussions of violence and alternative behaviours to violence. Examples of such school-based programs include the Coorparoo

Secondary College's Domestic and Family Violence Prevention awareness-raising initiative; the Woorabinda State School's use of Koora the hip-hop Kangaroo (developed by Ailsa Weazel from Gumbi Gunyah Women's Safe Place) to deliver messages of respect and non-violent behaviour through break-dancing and corroboree; and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts' Act Smart Be Safe website campaign to provide information and proactive strategies to schools.

5. The Yarrabah Police could provide domestic violence training for police to give them the tools to ensure a quality and consistent response when attending domestic violence incidents, with the ultimate aim of preventing such incidents from recurring. Examples are the Mackay District Police Domestic Violence Training Package, Queensland Police Service Party Safe initiative.

#### **State Government**

6. The changes to the Queensland Liquor Act to prohibit the supply of alcohol to minors and crack down on the secondary supply of alcohol to young people by adults, should incorporate a particular focus on community-based programs to engage youth in Aboriginal communities, particularly school non-attenders and school leavers, in the impact and effect of high risk drinking practices.
7. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, the Queensland Government's funding of a community education and social marketing campaign, could specifically target young Aboriginal people and their parents in purpose built and wide ranging flexible delivery formats, with a view to creating and maintaining a responsible drinking culture.
8. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, the Government's anti-violence advertising campaign could also focus on Aboriginal communities, highlighting the consequences of violence and the choices available to manage conflict without violence, and targeted specifically at Generation Y audience (ages 12-27) through emerging communication mediums.
9. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, the Department of Education Training and the Arts consider appropriate Aboriginal programs to build responsible student behaviour and social skills. An example is the adaption of the Family Wellbeing Program through the Cape York New Basics Curriculum.
10. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, that the youth engagement strategy could support a series of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Youth Forums for young people aged 15 - 17 yrs on issues affecting youth to inform Government of current trends and changes in indigenous youth culture and encourage empowerment, ownership and responsibility of young people.

11. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, that the Government could support appropriate early intervention and support for Aboriginal 'at risk' youth and families in crisis.
12. As per the recommendations of the Youth Violence Taskforce, that the Government could give further consideration of appropriate evidence based strategies for multiple risk Aboriginal children and youth.

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