

Reviewing PRF's Justice Reinvestment grants

In May 2025 we undertook a review of our justice reinvestment grants – 15 partnerships supporting 34 communities across five jurisdictions and totalling \$53.1 million of investments, mostly awarded since 2021-2022. The size and scope of this investment, strategically targeted across a broad range of approaches and in differing contexts, provides us with a unique vantage point to draw insights.



Tiraapendi Wodli, Port Adelaide (South Australia)

What is justice reinvestment?

Justice reinvestment is a community-led approach that seeks to redirect funds from the criminal justice system, particularly prisons, towards place-based initiatives aimed at preventing crime and addressing its underlying causes. Justice reinvestment recognises that people who experience disadvantage are more likely to end up in prison, and that imprisonment will further compound their disadvantage. The aims of justice reinvestment, therefore, are to both reduce contact with the justice system and improve outcomes for people and their communities.

Why and how we conducted this review

After three years of funding various initiatives, we sought to capture a holistic view of our investments to better understand what progress has been made as well as the ongoing challenges. At the time of the review, our partnerships were typically halfway through their grant terms and associated evaluations were still in early stages, so the review was intended to act as a baseline for future analysis and learning, and to help inform future investments.

The review draws on baseline and outcome targets agreed with grant partners and qualitative learnings from the PRF team.



“Sometimes the best thing has been just being surrounded by the brothers, having a safe space to yarn.”

Participant of Oz Tag program run by Just Reinvest NSW Mount Druitt.

Key findings

1. Fewer young people are being imprisoned in the communities we support

At least 114 (of 480) children and young people who have had previous contact with police or courts and received intensive support from our partners have avoided further contact. We estimate that 73 of these young people would likely have returned to detention if it were not for the work of our partners. This represents 10.3% of the number of children and young people in detention (709 in total) on an average night in Australia.

2. Each diversion demonstrates cost-effectiveness when compared to the cost of incarceration

Justice reinvestment is not only more effective at reducing reoffending, but also cheaper than youth detention, which costs Australian taxpayers more than \$1.2m per child or young person per year. However, for governments to maximise savings, enough children and young people must be diverted to enable the closure of existing prisons for more effective models.

One of PRF's working hypotheses is that if we can divert 10% of young people from prison, we can create a 'tipping point' to begin to generate a downward trend that would influence government budget and prison construction projections.

3. Projects built with community consensus have a stronger chance of engaging with children and young people

In the communities we support, community-led and designed projects have proven to be more effective. Just Reinvest NSW Mount Druitt's Mounty Yarns project is a standout example of a consultation process resulting in a range of effective interventions.

4. Sector data capability and access to localised data has improved

Partners have better data capability and there are more First Nations community data experts. First Nations community members are being upskilled in data capture and curating community stories. Evaluation toolkits have been developed to help communities understand, communicate and measure what's happening in their communities and for their young people. Local data dashboards exist for several sites. [See, for example, the Palimaa Interactive Platform of Maranguka in Bourke NSW.](#)

5. Place-based, First Nations-led grant partners are attracting government funding that previously flowed to non-First Nations organisations

Governments have increased resourcing to justice reinvestment approaches and are beginning to recognise the importance of culturally safe, culturally appropriate, community-based interventions.

6. Government readiness needs to match community readiness

While we talk a lot about community readiness for justice reinvestment, government readiness is also critical. Governments now have a better understanding of what works, but law and order politics continue to dominate some electoral cycles. While we are seeing governments investing in evidence-based initiatives, we also continue to see the passing of laws that lead to more incarceration. For the justice reinvestment approach to reap long term benefits, governments need to work more effectively across agencies, better align policy with evidence-based practice, shift resources away from courts, police and prisons towards community-led prevention and diversion approaches and avoid regressive law reform.

7. Justice Reinvestment is a long-term project

From analysing the aggregate data across each initiative, we learnt that more diversions were seen in site-based projects after their third year. This is consistent with research from the United States, where outcomes such as sustained reductions in reoffending or improvements in public safety have typically taken five to 10 years or more to fully emerge. Stakeholders need to stay the course to help realise the impact of this work.