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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT: the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre and Community Justice Group initiatives on Groote Eylandt

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Acknowledgments

Catherine Holmes Consulting (CHC) acknowledges the Anindilyakwa People; the Traditional Owners of the land on which this evaluation was undertaken. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We are privileged to have visited your beautiful Archipelago and learn from, and work alongside, you. We are inspired by your resilience, passion and determination for social justice and cultural preservation.

We extend our gratitude to the many staff and stakeholders connected to the Justice reinvestment initiatives on Groote Eylandt, in particular the Anindilyakwa Land Council's (ALC's) Community Justice Group (CJG) and the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre, operated by Drug and Alcohol Services Australia (DASA), that shared their expertise and insight for the duration of this evaluation. We are also thankful to the people that reflected on their experiences in the Community Court.

CHC is appreciative of the support provided by the Paul Ramsay Foundation and the members of the Evaluation Reference Group. We would like to give a special mention to the ALC and their CJG team. For the duration of the evaluation they shared local knowledge, provided advice and communicated real-time contextual information and managed on-country logistics. Our team is also grateful to the staff at the ALC and DASA that gathered administrative data on their respective programs and to the Northern Territory Government Department of Attorney-General's Criminal Justice Research, Evaluation and Statistics Unit for the community profile they developed, maintained and shared.

Disclaimer

Catherine Holmes Consulting (CHC) has prepared this report for the Paul Ramsay Foundation (the Client). Due care and diligence have been taken in collecting, analysing and presenting the information in this report. The report has been prepared by CHC based on information provided by the Client and the stakeholders, the defined project scope and the agreed methodology. The report is provided in good faith.

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A message from the Anindilyakwa Land Council Chair

“Before the Anindilyakwa people had Local Decision Making Agreements, Traditional Owners had little ability to influence the systems that shaped our lives. Decisions were made for us, not by us. Today, through these agreements, we are following our vision, one where Anindilyakwa people have control over our own outcomes, and where our leadership is recognised and respected.

The Community Justice Group (CJG) and the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (AHC) are showing that when justice is led by community, it leads to better outcomes. Our Law and Justice Group members are respected leaders, guiding sentencing in Community Court and helping our people find pathways to healing. The work of our Peacemakers is reducing conflict and keeping families safe. These are not just good results, they are deeply felt by our community.

In the justice space, we are proud to say that the CJG and AHC are proving that the Local Decision Making model works. We now have a justice system that listens to our voices, values our culture, and supports our people. We are seeing fewer people reoffend, more people engage with rehabilitation, and stronger relationships between our community and the justice system.

These outcomes are the result of Anindilyakwa leadership, vision, and hard work. We are proud of what has been achieved, and we remain committed to building a future where our people continue to lead important reforms to make our lives better”.

Cherelle Wurrawilya
Chair

Anindilyakwa Land Council
26 August 2025

Executive summary

This report documents an evaluation undertaken by Catherine Holmes Consulting (CHC) for Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF). The evaluation focuses on two interconnected justice reinvestment initiatives linked to the Community Court on Groote Eylandt. They are: (i) the Alternative to Custody facility (the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre) (AHC); and (ii) the Community Justice Group (CJG) (inclusive of the *gazetted* Law and Justice Group members). Guided by Key Inquiry Questions (KIQs), the evaluation explored: the extent to which the initiatives had achieved their short-term objectives; what could be learnt about the model for wider systemic change; and what could be learnt about culturally appropriate community-led local justice initiatives.

Applying a theory-based mixed methodology, multiple data collection methods were used over thirteen months from June 2024 and to July 2025. In addition to ongoing document and administrative data collection, five periods of fieldwork were conducted in Groote Eylandt (July, August and October 2024, and March and July 2025). Eighty-six stakeholders participated in interviews/focus groups during the evaluation, some on multiple occasions, totalling over 150 hours of interview data. Participant observation occurred at the AHC over 8 days, at Community Court over 5 days (September, October and November 2024 and March and July 2025) and at Local Court over 1 day (October 2024). A further 83 stakeholders completed a perception survey relating to community safety.

The evaluation found that the work of the CJG in connection with court support, and in particular the Law and Justice Group (LJG) members in the Community Court, has progressed well. The LJG members are skilled, equipped and confident leaders and effectively perform their role and responsibilities. They are widely respected and are meeting the needs, priorities and expectations of the community. The CJG are also collaborating effectively with Police to improve justice responses. The work of Peacemakers, many of whom are CJG members, has led to the de-escalation of conflict in the community and contributed directly to a reduction in offending. Similarly, the offending rates post-Community Court sentencing remained low, with 3 people re-offending out of 32 sentences handed down between June 2024 and July 2025. To strengthen the work of the CJG members and staff, stakeholders identified training and professional development opportunities, which include mediation training, trauma-informed approaches and sentencing supervision.

Since commencement of the AHC operations, Drug and Alcohol Services Australia (DASA) has navigated many challenges. Starting as a day program, DASA developed (and continues to develop) an AHC program that focusses on changing offending behaviour. The program is based on best practice, evidence and Anindilyakwa cultural values. The design and delivery of the services at the AHC has involved Anindilyakwa leadership through the CJG and employs local Aboriginal staff. Clients that attended the AHC engaged well and placed value on their participation, with desirable changes observed by staff in client attitudes and behaviours. Moving forward, maintaining a meaningful contribution and involvement of the CJG in the AHC is essential and should remain a priority. Similarly, with the commencement of the residential program in June 2025 and its gradual expansion, DASA must reconfigure its staffing model to address significant health, safety and wellbeing

risks, and build/strengthen service quality. In addition, the evaluation found it timely for DASA to: clearly articulate its practice model; define program content and activities that are responsive to client goals and needs; establish a policy relating to the prioritisation of referrals linked to bed availability; and communicate these to stakeholders to maintain and build stakeholder relations and confidence in the AHC operating as an Alternative to Custody. Producing and monitoring a communications plan will be important for bringing a system level focus to the AHC's highly dynamic and challenging operational environment.

Housing stress was identified as an underlying risk for DASA (similar to other local service organisations as they get established) and, by extension, the initiatives. A further risk to improving justice outcomes on Groote Eylandt are proposed changes to local alcohol management. The CJG maintain that reforms that increase accessibility to alcohol in community will have adverse consequences for justice re-investment initiatives, particularly in connection with domestic, family and sexual violence. The CJG believe it important they be consulted by government and the Anindilyakwa Land Council on potential impacts and unintended consequences stemming from such reforms.

Recorded crime on Groote Eylandt almost halved over the past 5 years. While there are many factors that have likely contributed to this outcome, the justice re-investment initiatives have been important to the reduction. The initiatives are progressive and are underpinned by the core strengths of respected and active leadership, stakeholder goodwill, commitment and hope. The initiatives are further enhanced by the staff and leaders' engagement in critically reflective practice and by the legal and policy frameworks which empower LJC members to exercise their cultural authority. The initiatives have advanced the objectives of the Anindilyakwa people to determine service delivery models that work best for them. They have increased Anindilyakwa involvement and leadership in the justice system, with early indicators demonstrating success. If this trajectory is continued, the social justice outcomes for the Anindilyakwa look promising.

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List of acronyms

AER	Aboriginal Experience Report
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
AHC	Anindilyakwa Healing Centre
ALC	Anindilyakwa Land Council
ATC	Alternative to Custody
CCO	Community Corrections Order
CHC	Catherine Holmes Consulting
CJG	Community Justice Group
DASA	Drug and Alcohol Services Australia Ltd.
DOC	Department of Corrections
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
FIFO	Fly-in, fly-out
GLJRSC	Groote Archipelago Law Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee
GEMCO	Groote Eylandt Mining Company
KIQ	Key Inquiry Question
LDMA	Local Decision Making Agreement
LJG	Law and Justice Group
NTAJA	Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement
NTCC	Northern Territory Community Corrections
NTCS	Northern Territory Correctional Services
NTG	Northern Territory Government
PRF	Paul Ramsay Foundation

Chapter 1: Background

This report documents an evaluation undertaken by Catherine Holmes Consulting (CHC) for Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF). The evaluation focuses on two interconnected justice reinvestment initiatives linked to the Community Court on Groote Eylandt. They are: (i) the Alternative to Custody facility (the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre) (AHC); and (ii) the Community Justice Group (CJG) (inclusive of the *gazetted* Law and Justice Group members). The evaluation set out to explore: the extent to which the initiatives had achieved their short-term objectives; what could be learnt about the model for wider systemic change; and what could be learnt about culturally appropriate community-led local justice initiatives.

CHC was supported by an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG); a working group established to oversee the evaluation and provide support, feedback and advice on all aspects of the evaluation, including planning, implementation activities, project deliverables, cultural sensitivity and respect, access to project-relevant materials and emergent challenges.

Report structure

In this Chapter, a snapshot is provided of the policy, legislative and organisational frameworks that have underpinned the initiatives. An overview of the Community Court is also presented. In Chapter 2, the evaluation aims, scope, methodological approach and methods are outlined. Chapter 3 situates the implementation of the justice reinvestment initiatives within their contextual setting. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present findings in response to the Key Inquiry Questions (KIQs) that directed the evaluation. A conclusion is presented in Chapter 7.

A timeline of key events relating to the justice reinvestment initiatives on Groote Eylandt is provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Policy context: local decision making and the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement

The Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC) represents the Indigenous people across the Groote Archipelago. The ALC has responsibilities for the protection and management of lands and seas, including sacred sites, and ensuring the rights and interests of Traditional Owners are maintained into the future. It is also concerned with the protection and preservation of culture.

In 2018, the ALC and the Northern Territory Government (NTG) entered into a Local Decision Making Agreement (LDMA).¹ Among other topics such as housing, health and education, the Agreement covers law, justice and rehabilitation and commits to the Anindilyakwa people determining the service delivery models that work best for them, and increasing their involvement and leadership in the justice system. The Agreement makes specific reference to the establishment of “an Anindilyakwa owned and managed low security alternative to prison/custody facility in the Groote Archipelago... to include access for clients to rehabilitation services that assist and address factors causing or likely to cause criminal behaviour” (p.22).

¹ NTG and ALC, 2018, *Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement*, NTG at https://ldm.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/791317/groote-archipelago-ldm-agreement.pdf

By mid-2019, the ALC and the NTG had signed a Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Implementation Plan², progressing the LDMA through key strategies and actions. This included a 'Cultural Rehabilitation Centre' at Marble Point, providing a residential facility based on Anindilyakwa cultural values and leadership. The Implementation Plan states that the Centre will provide *"the courts and community with options for eligible Anindilyakwa male youth, aged 17-25 years, with an alternative to a term of imprisonment for eligible offenders, or persons identified as at-risk of offending or re-offending"* (p.5).

In addition to the Cultural Rehabilitation Centre, the Implementation Plan called for the establishment of a CJG to: advise on the development and operations of the Centre; work with NT Police to educate and positively engage members of the community; and work with the NTG Attorney-General's Department (AGD) to establish Community Courts.

Establishing Cultural Rehabilitation Centres and Law and Justice Groups are objectives of the 'Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement 2021-2027' (NTAJA); a bipartisan agreement made at Parliament House on 31 March, 2022, with the vision that *"Aboriginal Territorians live safe, fulfilling lives and are treated fairly, respectfully and without discrimination"* (p.8).³ The NTAJA has three aims, each with specified commitments and associated actions. Aims of the NTAJA with direct relevance to this evaluation have been reproduced in [Appendix 2](#).

The Community Justice Group

Following consultations with the community on the development of a CJG, on 19 November 2020 the ALC officially launched the CJG, comprised of community Elders and/or respected persons from Groote Eylandt. Aligned with the ALC's LDMA and Implementation Plan, in 2021 the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) was contracted by the ALC to establish the CJG to advise on the Alternative to Custody facility, participate in Community Courts and support safety initiatives. With limited resources and on-country operational support, oversight of the CJG transitioned from NAAJA to the ALC in late 2022. The ALC's CJG activities have been funded by the Federal and NT Governments, and are supported by a team of staff, including justice officers (male and female), a prevention and early intervention officer, an administration officer and a coordinator. At the commencement of this evaluation, broad activities of the CJG included:

- Peacemaking;⁴
- Case Management;
- Court support (at both the Local and Community Courts);
- Community development activities;
- Provision of advice relating to the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (i.e. the Cultural Rehabilitation Centre/Alternative to Custody referred to above); and
- For approved 'Law and Justice Group' members in the CJG, performing their functions in relation to Community Court (expanded on below).

Community Courts, Law and Justice Groups and Aboriginal Experience Reports

Amendments to legislation (the *Sentencing Act 1995 NT* and the *Youth Justice Act 2005*) in 2023 enabled Law and Justice Groups (LJGs) to be established in 'places' (in this instance

² NTG and ALC, 2019, *Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement. Schedule 3.3 - Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Implementation Plan*, https://ldm.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/791314/galdm-agreement-ljrip.pdf

³ Northern Territory Government 2021, *Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement 2021-2027*, Department of the Attorney General and Justice, Northern Territory Government.

⁴ Peacemaking activities had been facilitated by the ALC for several years prior to the establishment of a CJG.

Groote Eylandt), and ‘members’ with the character, skills and experience appropriate to be appointed to contribute to sentencing in the Community Court (see *Division 3A Community Court Sentencing Procedure*). The CEO (of the AGD) was empowered to approve LJG members by *Gazette* notice (i.e. the publication of government decisions, actions and information in which there is a statutory/legal requirement to have a notice published).

From February 2024, offenders from Groote Eylandt that (i) plead guilty to an offence in the Local Court, (ii) agreed with the prosecutor to the facts of the offence, and (iii) are Aboriginal, may apply to have sentencing determined through the Community Court. If the Court grants the application, before sentencing an offender, it must consider an Aboriginal Experience Report (AER) prepared by the LJG, as well as responses given to any questions asked by the Court of the members that prepared it.

AERs for Community Court may contain information about an offender and offence, such as: the offender’s personal circumstances, family relationships and connection with the community; the offender’s employment and health status; the impact to the victim and community; steps taken by the offender towards rehabilitation or restoration; and general information or research about criminogenic factors. AERs must be prepared in a manner or form approved by the Chief Judge.

The Community Court on Groote Eylandt considered its first application in March 2024 (with the case being adjourned until the next session in June 2024). At that time, there were three approved LJG members in the CJG. By July 2025, there were seven LJG members and 33 applications for Community Court had been made, with 32 sentences handed down.

The Anindilyakwa Healing Centre: an alternative to custody

Aligned with the Groote Eylandt LDMA and the Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Implementation Plan (and echoed in the NTAJA), the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (AHC) was officially opened on 2 February 2024. With resources from the ALC, the NT and Commonwealth Governments and PRF, a purpose-built residential rehabilitation facility was constructed at Marble Point in the northern part of Groote Eylandt. The aim of the AHC is to provide culturally appropriate, community-based rehabilitation as an alternative to imprisonment.

At the commencement of the evaluation in June 2024 the facility was partially constructed and Drug and Alcohol Service Australia Ltd. (DASA) was awaiting formal occupancy certificates for 16 single rooms (2 pods each containing 8 rooms) and ablutions blocks, a covered outdoor area, a commercial kitchen and a multipurpose room with an office, caretaker’s accommodation and a security/storage room. Staff toilets and the remaining rooms (a further 2 pods) and ablution blocks were completed by December 2024.

DASA was awarded a one-year contract in late 2023 by the then NTG’s Department of Attorney-General and Justice, to:

...develop and establish an Alternative to Custody in Groote Eylandt where clients have access to tailored rehabilitation services that target the risk factors that contribute to contact with the justice system in a culturally led and responsive environment.⁵

The immediate contractual priorities for DASA were to “collaborate with the CJG and the Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee to design and develop a client-focussed, therapeutic community model of operation and program delivery that is principled

⁵ NTG Dept. of Attorney-general and Justice, 2023, Excerpt of DASA’s contract deliverables with the NTG for the Groote Eylandt Alternative to Custody, unpublished.

on an appropriate Groote Eylandt cultural framework”.⁴ DASA was granted a one-year contract extension by the current NT AGD in late 2024.

The Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee

The ‘Groote Archipelago Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee’ (Steering Committee) was established in 2021⁶ with membership comprised of senior delegates from the CJG, ALC, the NTG Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet (CM&C), the then NTG Department of Attorney-General and Justice, NT Police and DASA. Its objectives are to provide support and/or oversight to:

- the initial implementation of the CJG and the AHC to ensure their respective models achieve the stated aims of the Implementation Plan;
- the construction of the AHC;
- the evaluation and monitoring of the CJG, AHC and Community Court initiatives, particularly in the first 1-2 years of operation;
- the integration of Community Courts into the Groote Archipelago, ensuring operations are culturally appropriate and utilise existing CJG; and
- other justice and rehabilitation related projects in the Groote Archipelago.⁷

⁶ Warren Jackson, NTG Attorney General's Department, 2024, personal communication.

⁷ NTG, 2023, Draft: Groote Archipelago Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Group Terms of Reference, unpublished document.

Chapter 2: Evaluation methodology and methods

Aims, scope and Key Inquiry Questions (KIQs)

The aim of the evaluation was to explore and respond to the KIQs developed collaboratively by the NTG's Aboriginal Justice Unit and PRF for the: Community Justice Group (CJG); Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (AHC) (as an alternative to custody); and the broader justice ecosystem. The areas of inquiry, together with the KIQs, are presented in the Tables below. ([Appendix 3](#) outlines the KIQs together with associated data collection methods). In addition, where practicable, CHC aimed to develop capacity within the Groote Eylandt community through evaluation activities.

Table 1: Community Justice Group inquiry areas and questions

A. Processes
1. Are CJGs able to address the law and justice priorities identified by community?
2. Are CJG members skilled and equipped to perform their roles and responsibilities?
3. Do Aboriginal people gain paid employment and have opportunities to enhance their skills?
4. Are community members satisfied with the CJGs and Community Courts? Do they have increased confidence in the justice system?
B. Leadership
1. Are Community Justice Group members seen as role models and mentors in their communities?
2. Do community members have a say in how victims, offenders and their families are supported in their interactions with the justice system?
3. Is the Cultural authority of Aboriginal Elders and respected persons recognised through Community Court sentencing processes?
C. Safety
1. How has the CJG contributed to changing patterns of offending?

Table 2: Anindilyakwa Healing Centre inquiry areas and questions

A. Community
1. Do community members have a say in how victims, offenders and their families are supported in their interactions with the justice system?
2. Are Aboriginal people recognised through paid employment and opportunities to enhance their skills?
B. Referrals
1. Are the judiciary, government agencies, non-government organisations and Aboriginal Territorians aware of the referral pathways to alternatives to custody?

2. Have there been opportunities for employment and training?
3. Are appropriate community-based alternatives to custody the default consideration when sentencing Aboriginal offenders?
C. Completion and cultural (re)engagement
1. How many people complete the ATC program?
2. What are the main barriers to completion?
3. What supports help people to complete (e.g. alcohol services)?
4. Are ATC participants engaging or re-engaging with culture, via the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre, and via other programs and organisations?
D. Safety
1. Is Groote Eylandt experiencing an increase in safety?
2. How has offending and imprisonment of Groote Eylandters altered?
3. What are the longitudinal experiences of people who offend post-ATC (employment/education, housing, re-offending)?

Table 3: The broader justice ecosystem inquiry areas and questions

A. Broader justice ecosystem
1. To what extent did collaboration improve among NT Government, NGOs and Aboriginal Territorians to develop and deliver services and programs to Aboriginal people?
2. What emerges when considering this issue via an Aboriginal social justice lens?

A theory-based mixed methodology

The evaluation applied a theory-based mixed methodology informed by:

- theory of change (captured in the respective program logics provided by the NTG's Aboriginal Justice Unit – see [Appendix 4](#));
- ethnography;
- action research; and
- quasi-experimental design.

The evaluation was formative and summative. It examined the development of the justice initiatives through gathering and analysing data during the early stages of initiative implementation, and identifying strengths, limitations, challenges and opportunities to improve their quality and effectiveness.

The evaluation approach was designed to address the aims, scope and KIQA, and:

- be ethically informed to promote cultural appropriateness and safety and applied a 'both-ways' approach during data collection;
- be rigorous;

- be practical and responsive to a dynamic evaluation context;
- be trauma-informed and strengths-based;
- be iterative and developmental; and
- foster critical reflection and capacity development, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and learning.

The timeframe for the evaluation allowed for the CHC team to work iteratively with the stakeholders. It enabled trusting relationships to form and a confidence by service leaders and practitioners to critically reflect on practice, and to make changes based on emergent evaluation findings.

The CJG had the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation design and ethics protocol (see [Appendix 5](#)). Similarly, the Groote Archipelago Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee (Steering Committee) and the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) were invited to contribute to the evaluation design before it was finalised.

Data collection methods

Multiple data collection methods were used to strengthen data reliability and validity (i.e. data triangulation) and included:

- Document analysis relating to the CJG and the AHC initiatives and Community Court (i.e. reports, funding agreements, operational and policy documents, including referral information, assessment tools and quality systems etc.);
- Administrative data analysis (i.e. quantitative data from the NTG AGD, the AHC⁸ and CJG⁸);
- Semi-structured conversational style interviews with key stakeholders (supported by guiding questions);
- Focus group discussions with key stakeholders (supported by guiding questions);
- Informal unstructured interviews with key stakeholders (on an opportunistic basis);
- Community safety surveys⁹; and
- Participant observation (at the Local Court, Community Court and the AHC).

Key stakeholders to participate in this evaluation included:

- AHC staff and clients;
- ALC CJG staff and members (including LJG members);
- General community members;
- Members of the Steering Committee and/or the ERG;
- Local organisations (non-government organisations and private/community enterprises, government organisations, including NT Community Corrections and NT Police); and
- Judicial officers, lawyers, court officers and others involved in the Community Court.

Data collection commenced early June 2024 and continued until July 2025. In addition to the ongoing collection of documents and administrative data, five periods of fieldwork have been conducted in Groote Eylandt (July, August and October 2024, and March and July 2025). Eighty-six stakeholders participated in interviews/focus groups during the evaluation,

⁸ CHC supported the ALC's CJG and DASA to develop administrative data collection tools for the AHC and the CJG activities, including Community Court. The tools provide a basis for ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts for the respective organisations.

⁹ The ALC Data Unit designed and administered a Community Safety Survey, with support from the CJG.

some of them on multiple occasions, totalling over 150 hours of interview data. Participant observation occurred at the AHC over 8 days, at Community Court over 5 days (September, October and November 2024 and March and July 2025) and at Local Court over 1 day (October 2024). A further 83 stakeholders completed a perception survey relating to community safety in June and November, 2024.

Data analysis

Data were analysed within and across data sets. Qualitative data sourced through interviews (including focus groups) and participant observation was analysed for themes and trends. These data were verified at the time of collection with participants, with emergent themes explored and tested through subsequent interviews. Data collection continued until saturation and a rich contextual picture was reached, i.e. the point at which no new themes or value-added insights emerged.

Quantitative data (including data relating to offending on Groote Eylandt, surveys and administrative data in connection with the AHC, the CJG and Community Court) were analysed for trends.

Evaluation guiding notes and limitations

Offending data

Offending and crime data reported in this evaluation (in [Chapter 3](#) and [Appendix 6](#)) relates to offending and crimes in Groote Eylandt and off Groote Eylandt (i.e. other places) by people from Groote Eylandt.

Data on adults on bail, with or without supervision from the Northern Territory Correctional Services (NTCS), includes people that were: bailed from the Alyangula Local Court (regardless of where resident); or are from the Groote Archipelago and bailed from any court in the NT; or bailed from any court in the NT specifically to the Groote Archipelago. The location of the offending that led to a bail application in the NT is not reported. Similarly, data relating to Community Based Corrections (CBC) orders includes people with Groote Eylandt as their last known address. As such, the location of the offending is not reported and CBC orders may be managed anywhere in the NT.

Recidivism and longitudinal outcomes of participants post-AHC

Given the limited sample size and duration of the initiatives, changes to patterns of offending since the introduction of the initiatives have been analysed, rather than attempting to calculate recidivism. Similarly, capturing data on the longitudinal outcomes of people who offend post-AHC was not possible due to the time frame and scope of the project and the timing of commencement of the AHC operations.

Administrative data

Administrative data collection tools were developed by CHC for the CJG, the AHC and the Community Court in consultation with the ALC and DASA and populated by key personnel from these organisations. In some instances, data had to be extrapolated from existing organisational information and required a 'best estimate' approach, for example, data on the CJG members and hours they spent on activity type. CHC collaborated with key personnel on an ongoing basis to offer support and build organisational and community capacity in data capture to promote consistency, enhance data quality, and strengthen ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Fieldwork logistics

CHC did not have access to a vehicle for the majority of fieldwork. This was due to an absence of car hire services coupled with a shortage of vehicles available for loan. Early fieldwork was also impacted by fuel rationing. The team was heavily reliant on the support of the ALC CJG team for transport between Alyangula, Angurugu, Umbakumba and the AHC and therefore needed for fieldwork plans to be highly flexible and adaptable. The limitations of semi-autonomous movement were far outweighed by the advantages of receiving logistical support, which included receipt of real-time intelligence and advice about socio-cultural issues and other events across the Archipelago and the opportunity to build relationships with CJG staff and gain a more comprehensive contextual understanding.

The Community Safety Survey

Community Researchers from the ALC's Data Unit designed a Community Safety Survey (CSS) in consultation with Elders. The CSS was then administered by the Community Researchers and CJG staff and members in June and November 2024 (i.e. the data set was collected over two periods). A review of the administration process and an analysis of the initial survey responses indicated respondents had trouble interpreting some questions. Given this, the CSS findings are indicative only and should be treated with caution. Further, the survey was repeated mid 2025 with the aim of measuring for changes in perception, however insufficient data were gathered at that time to draw any reliable conclusions. As such, the initial survey findings provide a baseline.

References to the Community Justice Group and the Law and Justice Group

In this report, references to the CJG refer to the broad group that engages in CJG activities through the ALC. Within the CJG there are Law and Justice Group (LJG) members. References to the LJG refer specifically to those members that have been formally *gazetted* in law to perform the role of an LJG member.

Ethical practice

The evaluation design and conduct were ethically-informed. An ethics protocol, along with supporting documentation, was developed to align with the standards and principles set out in the AIATSIS '*Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*', the National Health and Medical Research Council '*Ethical Considerations in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Activities*' and the Australasian Evaluation Society's '*Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*'.

The ALC CJG, the Steering Committee and the ERG were invited to contribute to the evaluation design and ethics protocol prior to finalisation, and again, through a mid-project review.

Chapter 3: The justice reinvestment context

This Chapter situates the implementation of the justice reinvestment initiatives within their contextual setting. In doing so, this Chapter discusses:

- the profile of the population on Groote Eylandt;
- ALC governance, leadership and organisational change;
- a change of government in the NT; and
- offending on Groote Eylandt.

Population profile

In a 2022 report on social indicators and data governance to support local decision making in the Groote Archipelago, the authors estimated the usual resident population in the Archipelago to be approximately 1,550 people. This population increases to 2,100 people when a wider diaspora service population is included (i.e. usual residents plus Traditional Owners that live elsewhere, as well as others that spend time in the region and use the services to the extent that they have been issued with an ALC ID card).¹⁰

The Groote Archipelago's population growth has remained stable for the last decade. With birth rates falling and death rates increasing, there has been zero population growth (excluding migration). Yet the age structure has changed and in 2021 there were far more older people than in 2001, with fewer children and youth, and young adults a more prominent group. For the group of older people over 55 years, there was an increase by 62.4% across the two decades. Simultaneously, the percentage of the Indigenous population of prime working age (i.e. age 15 – 54) grew at a steady rate to constitute around 70% of the whole population in 2021.¹⁰

Changes to the age structure of the Indigenous population across the Archipelago have contributed to changes in the median age at death; from 2001 – 2010 it was age 40 - 49 and from 2011 – 2020 it was age 50 - 59. A high burden of mortality continues to exist, especially for young and middle-aged adults. It is estimated that by 2036, the size of the population will continue to remain stable, with little or no growth, and that the age structure will change further, with an increase of the prime-working group age by around one quarter and an almost doubling of the older age group.¹⁰

The premature death of Aboriginal Australians continues to have a profound socio-cultural and economic impact that reverberates through whole communities. Groote Eylandt is no exception. The consequences to stem from the loss of leadership and the impact on the transfer of cultural knowledge have been well documented. For example, at the end of June 2024 (coinciding with the commencement of the evaluation), the former ALC Board Chair (2003-2024), Mr. T Wurramarrba, passed away. He was a highly respected leader and dedicated spokesperson who worked tirelessly to return political decision-making back to the Anindilyakwa people. In 2018, he signed the historic *Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement* (referred to in Chapter 1) which handed back control over local education, justice, health and governance to the people of the Groote Archipelago. The loss of this prominent leader was felt greatly by the Anindilyakwa. The ALC and other services in

¹⁰ First Nations Portfolio Australian National University, 2022, *Social Indicators and Data Governance to Support Local Decision Making in the Groote Archipelago*, <https://anindilyakwa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Social-Indicators-and-Data-Governance-to-Support-Local-Decision-Making-in-the-Groote-Archipelago.pdf>

Groote Eylandt were closed out of respect for the family and until ceremonial events were completed. Additionally, the scheduled circuit court hearings for July were cancelled.

With high levels of premature death and an aging population, there were often day-long closures for ceremonial events related to deaths, the repatriation of bodies and funerals while community members mourned and fulfilled their cultural responsibilities. The cumulative and compounding effects of grief and loss for the people of Groote Eylandt are a poignant reality of everyday life.

ALC governance, leadership and organisational change

In March 2024, Tropical Cyclone Megan passed through the Gulf of Carpentaria causing substantial damage across the Archipelago, including significant damage to the GEMCO wharf and export infrastructure. By April 2024, it was confirmed that there would be no manganese exports from Groote Eylandt until sometime between January to March 2025 while repairs were underway. As a result, the ALC expected to receive no, or substantially reduced, royalty payments during that period.

After commencement of the evaluation in June 2024, the ALC experienced significant challenges relating to leadership in the organisation which involved the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the National Anti-Corruption Commission. These challenges, which were widely reported in the media, related to governance, leadership and financial management concerns (and led to the appointment of a new CEO in April 2025).

By August 2024, the reduced income at the ALC was reflected in an internal restructure, with various departments shrinking to a skeletal scale. Staff who were made redundant had no option but to leave Groote Eylandt due to the loss of their housing. Many of the cultural preservation programs were severely compromised through this process as they had been funded through royalty payments.

The ALC's challenges and changes had implications for organisational morale and operations. The CJG staff were especially uncertain about their future organisational arrangements and employment conditions. The East Arnhem Regional Council had been going through a de-amalgamation process which resulted in the establishment of the Groote Archipelago Regional Council following an election in March 2025. There were discussions about the CJG shifting out of the ALC and being delivered through the newly formed Council, however there was limited information about how and when this would occur and what the implications would be for staff and operations.

The justice reinvestment initiatives were operating in an environment of reportedly high staff attrition rates and key personnel changes. In addition to changes in the ALC leadership, during the first six months of the evaluation, two executive officers and the CJG Coordinator from the ALC had resigned, along with the Service Manager of the AHC. Further, the Judge that had presided over Community Court in 2024 was replaced by a new Judge in 2025.

These organisational, staffing and leadership changes raised challenges for stakeholders involved in the delivery of the initiatives. Strategies and systems to maintain program momentum and fidelity, to capitalise on the good will, practice approaches and learning ethos that permeated the AHC, CJG and Community Court, were required.

A change of government in the NT

The Northern Territory general election took place in August 2024 and saw a change of government; one whose discourse is 'reducing crime'. Over its first few months, the new Country Liberal Party (CLP) government had progressed its mandate to reduce crime by: introducing tougher bail laws ('Declan's Law'); providing police with new powers to address

knife crime; lowering the age of criminal responsibility to 10 years; creating new ram raid and post and boast offences; introducing strict sentencing requirements (including mandatory minimum sentences in some circumstances) for assaulting frontline workers; and passing new nuisance public drinking laws. By February 2025, the government announced it would be discontinuing the treaty process in favour of restoring local control to remote community councils and moving away from 'local decision-making agreements'.

At the time these measures were introduced, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) adults were one of the most imprisoned people in the world (by percentage of all ATSI Australians) and in June 2024 accounted for 36% of all Australian prisoners.^{11,12} As of December 2024, nation-wide, ATSI adults were incarcerated at a rate of 2,733 prisoners per 100,000 people, and in the NT, their imprisonment rate was 3,252 per 100,000 adult ATSI people.¹³ By October 2024, the number of people in NT prisons in the NT had reached a record high (n=2370), of which around half were on remand (being people that have been charged but have not been found guilty of an offence through the court). By 7 January 2025, the number had surged to 2,613 prisoners¹⁴ and by 3 February there were 2,702 prisoners.¹⁵ With prisons severely overcrowded, more than 150 sentenced prisoners were being held in police watch houses and the government enacted emergency measures to address the 'extraordinary risks' posed by overcrowding. This included the transfer of people from watch houses to already overcrowded correctional facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs.^{16,17}

With an already swollen prison population and further demand for jail beds anticipated as a result of the legislative reforms aimed at reducing crime, the CLP government has signalled its intention to increase the NT's prison/work camp capacity by 37% (up to 1,000 beds) over the next 4 years. This will reportedly include new work camps in Darwin and Katherine, new youth justice boot camps and bail facilities in Katherine and Tennant Creek and new women's prisons in Darwin and Alice Springs.¹⁸

At the time of writing this evaluation report, DASA was operating the only two Alternatives to Custody facilities in the NT; a women's facility in Alice Springs and the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre for men on Groote Eylandt. The government was considering concepts for proposed additional facilities, however there were no firm commitments to their advancement.

¹¹ Anthony, T & Wilson K. 2024. First Nations imprisonment is already at a record high. Unless government policy changes, it will only get worse. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/first-nations-imprisonment-is-already-at-a-record-high-unless-government-policy-changes-it-will-only-get-worse-226612>

¹² See also <https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sentencing-statistics/international-imprisonment-rates>

¹³ ABS. 2024. *Prisoners in Australia*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release#aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-prisoners>

¹⁴ Archibald-Binge, E. 2025. *More than 1% of Northern Territory population imprisoned as record jail numbers predicted to climb*. The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/09/northern-territory-prison-population-watch-houses>

¹⁵ ABC News, 2025, *NT government set to allow private prison guards, interstate officers to staff prisons, amid corrections crisis*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-07/nt-government-legislation-to-appoint-private-prison-guards/104910060>

¹⁶ ABC Stateline, 2024, *'The system is at breaking point': People on remand in NT prison endure record wait times*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-22/record-remand-times-nt-prisons-courts-struggling-backlogged/104401642>

¹⁷ ABC News, 2024, *NT Government transfers dozens of prisoners under 'emergency' plans to cope with record numbers*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-27/nt-government-announces-emergency-prison-plan/104523486>

¹⁸ ABC News, 2024, *Alice Springs youths to be relocated to Darwin as part of NT government's 'emergency' prisons plan*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-21/nt-government-reveals-emergency-plan-for-overcrowded-prisons/104496702>

Offending on Groote Eylandt

As noted, the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement with the NTG was signed in 2018 and the Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Implementation Plan in 2019. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, there has been a distinct downward trend in overall crime committed on Groote Eylandt by Aboriginal people, from a total of 861 to 448 crimes recorded, respectively, as depicted in [Figure 1](#). (The number of youth charged with offences across this period has similarly fallen, and from the second quarter of 2023, there have been fewer than 3 youth charged for offences in each quarter: in Groote Eylandt by youth from Groote Eylandt; in Groote Eylandt by youth from elsewhere; and by youth from Groote Eylandt offending elsewhere). While there are fewer crimes in total, some offence types have trended upwards over the past 5 years, including offences related to 'burglary' and 'weapons and explosives', while 'assault' and 'drug' offences have both tracked downwards (see [Figure 7](#), [Appendix 6](#)). The offending pattern by people from Groote Eylandt in places other than Groote Eylandt differs, most notably for 'assault' charges. Over the same period, 'assault' charges committed by people off Groote Eylandt have tracked upwards, and in 2024/25 there were 36 Aboriginal people charged with assault on the Eylandt and more than double (n=84) with the same offence committed off Eylandt (see also [Figure 8](#), [Appendix 6](#)).

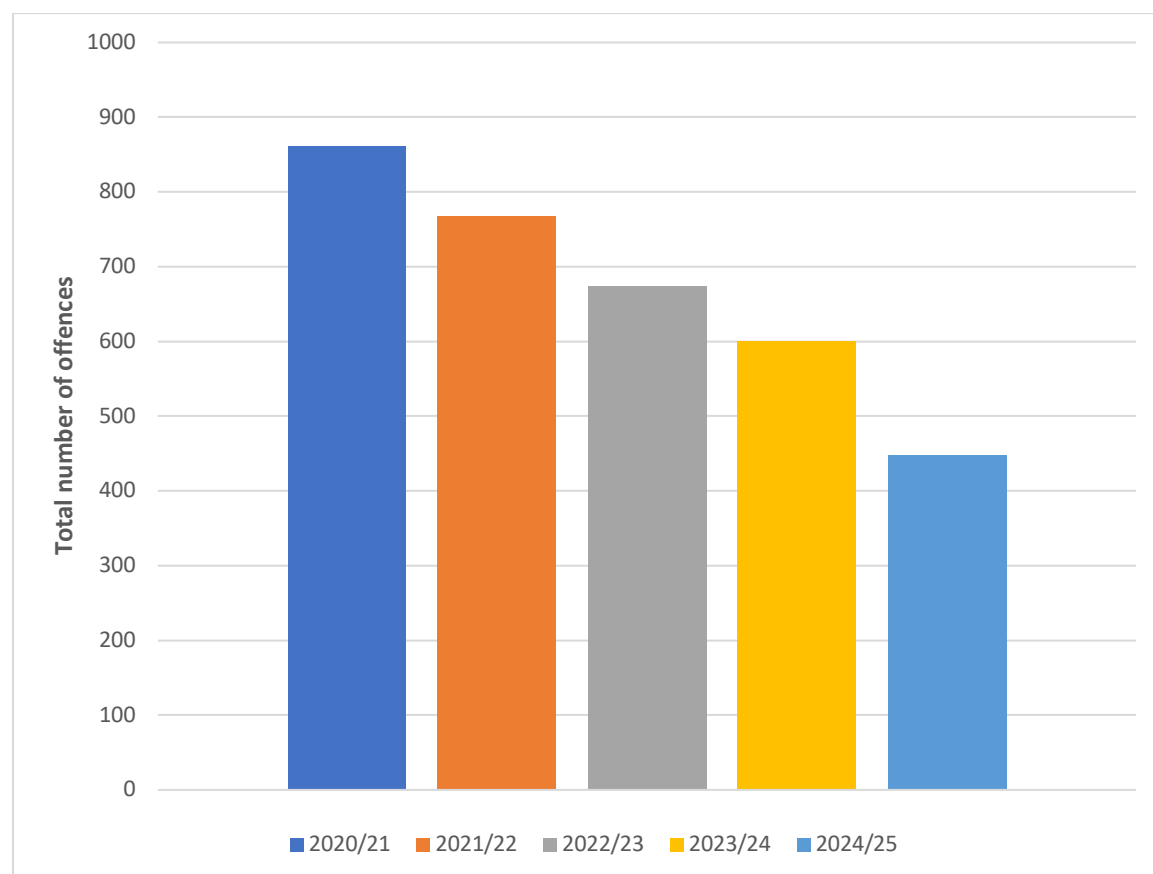


Figure 1: Recorded crime in Groote Eylandt, 2020/21 - 2024/25 (financial years), by total of all offences

Notes:

1. Data extracted from SerPro on 16 July 2025.
2. Values for the 2024/25 will continue to increase over the next months as final data entry in SerPro occurs.
3. The implementation of SerPro on 27 November 2023 created a break in the time series of the NT crime statistics. The data from the March quarter 2024 may not be fully comparable to data prior

to the March quarter 2024.

4. The chart counts the number of recorded offences in the community, not the number of victims or alleged offenders.
5. Not all offences have an alleged offender identified, and not all alleged offenders go to court.

Adult prisoners

While the number of Aboriginal women from Groote Eylandt imprisoned between 2020 and 2025 has remained low (4 or less each quarter), the number of Aboriginal men has increased from 42 in March 2020 to 67 in June 2025. Similarly, the number of prisoners on remand (whose last known address was in the Groote Archipelago) has increased by more than double from 16 people in 2020 to 38 people by the end of June 2025. From 2020, the number of sentenced adults has generally been between 30 and 40 people, sitting at 33 by the end of June 2025. (See [Figure 9, Appendix 6](#)).

Bail data

The total number of adults on bail from Groote Eylandt since March 2020 had more than doubled from 25 to 59 by December 2023, prior to starting on a downward trend. By December 2024, there were 26 adults on bail before the trend reversed. By June 2025, there were 47 adults on bail, 15 of which had supervision orders with the Department of Corrections. From March 2020 to June 2025, there were fewer than 22 adults in any quarter on bail where supervision was required (see [Figure 10, Appendix 6](#)). Almost all people bailed from 2020 to 2025 were Aboriginal, with the largest proportion being male. (See [Figure 11, Appendix 6](#)).

Community Based Corrections (CBC) Orders managed on Groote Eylandt

In December 2020, there were 24 adults on probation. By June 2025, this number had tripled to 76 adults, with the majority being Aboriginal males. Across the 5 year period, fewer than 10 adults were on Community Work Orders, Parole or Community Custody Orders during each quarter. The total number of adults on CBC orders included people with offences that occurred anywhere in the NT, with orders being managed by NT Department of Corrections on Groote Eylandt. (See [Figure 12, Appendix 6](#)).

Chapter 4: Community Justice Group findings

This chapter provides a response to the KIQs (see [Appendix 3](#)) and discusses evaluation findings relating to the Community Justice Group (CJG) processes, leadership and safety.

The CJG addressing the community's law and justice priorities

Before it was really bad here. Now the CJG is helping the kids – picking them up, being with them 'til the court is over... Instead of going to jail, they end up working here and staying here. It's really good.

The Groote Archipelago LDMA between the ALC and the NTG and the associated Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Implementation Plan document the law and justice priorities of the community. The Implementation Plan was ratified on the basis that the ALC had *“undertaken the necessary consultations with Anindilyakwa Traditional Owners to obtain their consent to enter into the Implementation Plan, and engaged with other Anindilyakwa organisations and groups to take account of their views”* (p.3.). The desired outcome of the LDMA is for there to be fewer Anindilyakwa in the justice system through the increased involvement and leadership of the Anindilyakwa people, including access to rehabilitative services and ensuring culture is respected.

To advance the LDMA outcomes, the Implementation Plan outlined two key priorities, touched on earlier in this report. The first was the construction and establishment of a residential rehabilitation centre at Marble Point on Groote Eylandt. The centre, known as the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre, was partially completed for occupation mid-2024 and DASA developed and commenced a day program (3 days per week) in late August 2024, with plans to transition to a 7 day a week residential program in early 2025.

The second priority was the establishment of a CJG for the Archipelago to: (i) advise on the development and operations of the rehabilitation centre to ensure it is guided by Anindilyakwa cultural values and leadership; (ii) work with NT Police to educate and positively engage members of the community in ways that aim to reduce the rate of offending on Groote Eylandt; and (iii) work with NTG Department of Attorney-General and Justice to establish Community Courts.

In relation to working with the police, this has been advanced primarily through the appointment of a dedicated police officer to work with the CJG and through CJG-led peacemaking activities (where CJG members mediate conflicts that emerge in the community) which often involved collaborating with police. Regarding the establishment of Community Court, in March 2024 the court was officially opened and had sentenced 32 distinct people through 12 days of hearings from March 2024 to July 2025. These outcomes demonstrate that significant progress towards advancing the law and justice priorities of the community has been made through the pivotal role played by the CJG. Their work is expanded on below.

The CJG: their role, outcomes and impact

Members, representation and recruitment

For the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, there were 8 active CJG members, 7 of whom had been appointed as Law and Justice Group (LJG) members. The majority of members were from Angurugu and Umbakumba and were widely regarded as respected people and leaders in the community, with community members particularly deferential towards the LJG

members. For LJG members, their high standing was reflected in, and reinforced by, their role and responsibilities linked to Community Court. Community members and other stakeholders consistently praised the work of the CJG and LJG members in advancing the justice needs and priorities of the community.

Within the CJG, three reference groups had been created; one for Angurugu, Umbakumba and Milyakburra (Bickerton Island). The recruitment of additional members was ongoing to ensure justice supports were accessible by more community members across the Archipelago, including Milyakburra, noting that for socio-cultural reasons, members can engage in CJG activities with some community members and not others. Often existing members identified people suitable for CJG membership, and given the average age of the existing pool (56 years), there was a strategic focus on recruiting and building the capacity of younger members.

Key activities of the CJG

Community members were informed about the nature of supports available through the CJG and how to access them. At the time of the evaluation, key activities of the CJG members included:

- Peacemaking;
- Court support (at both the Local and Community Court, including provision of information, transport and logistics, translation, referrals, case management and social and emotional support etc.);
- Police support (such as sharing information, providing advice, registering concerns and facilitating the safe arrest of individuals);
- Participation on an AHC referral committee;
- Participation at stakeholder and other meetings facilitated by the Judge;
- Preparation of Aboriginal Experience Reports (AERs) (by *gazetted* Law and Justice Group members);
- Participation in Community Court proceedings (by *gazetted* Law and Justice Group members);
- Provision of direction to, and supervision of, offenders sentenced through Community Court (by *gazetted* Law and Justice Group members);
- Participation in meetings relating to CJG activities and priorities;
- Information sharing events (BBQs to improve the profile of, and access, to the CJG, facilitation of open days and special events at the AHC through transport and participant recruitment etc.); and
- Community development activities (including peacemaking training and recognising and addressing the impact of trauma).

The ALC's 'spotters program' (known locally as the 'blue shirts') had previously operated to patrol the community and monitor safety issues, however it was not operational at the time of the evaluation. The CJG was continuing to advocate for the recommencement of the patrols, and by July 2025, had secured vehicles and had commenced recruitment to the program. Community members were keen for a safety patrol to recommence, noting that a wide range of stakeholders reported the Night Patrol program (that had been managed by the East Arnhem Regional Council) to be ineffectual, with no accountability and no outcomes.

Figure 2 presents the time allocated to key activities undertaken by CJG and other community members from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. Across the period, more than 3,871 hours of work in connection with justice reinvestment activities was undertaken across the Groote Archipelago.

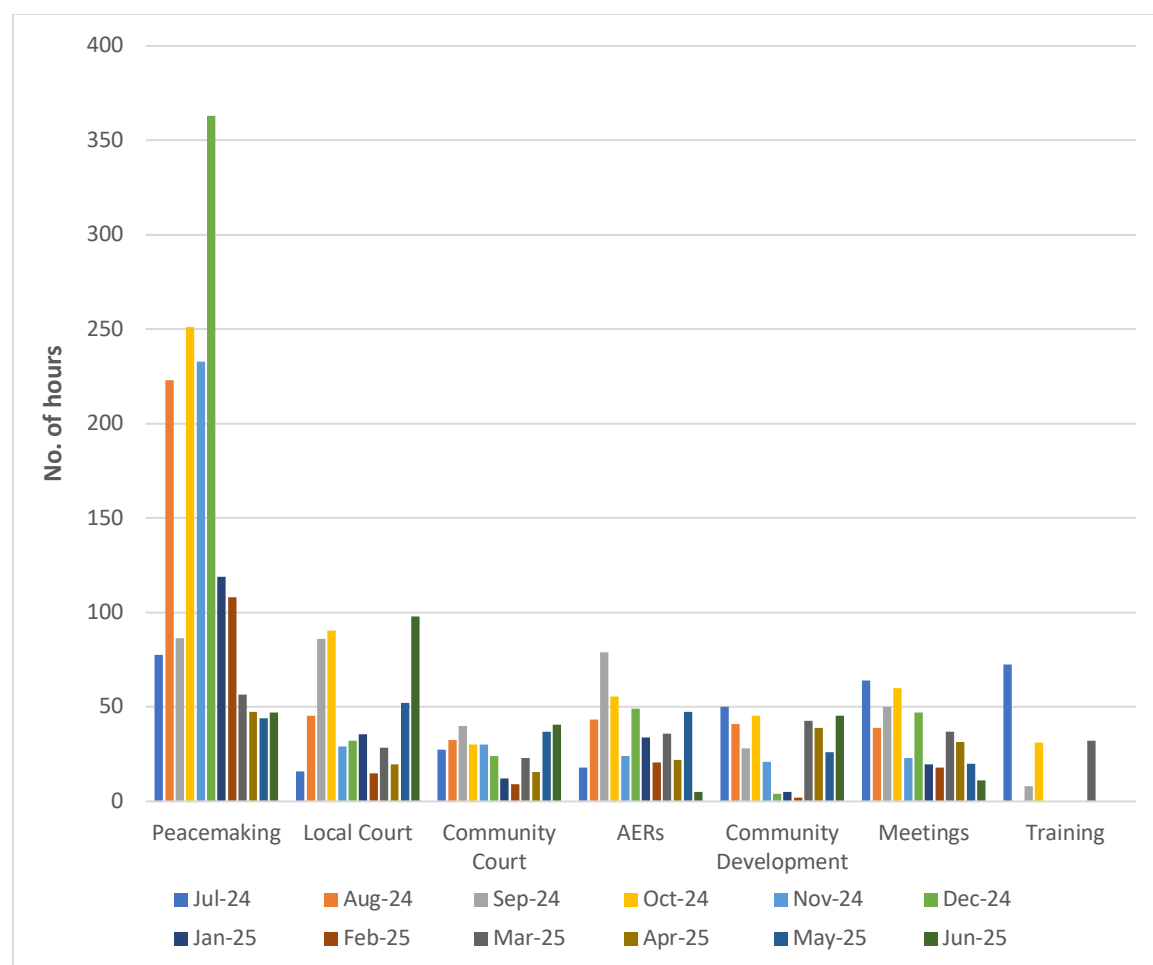


Figure 2: Hours spent by CJG members on various activities, Jul 2024 to Jun 2025

Note:

1. Peacemaking activities were undertaken by CJG (32%, n=535 hours) and by other community members (68%, n=1121 hours).
2. Half of the total hours spent on training (n=142.5) was delivered to CJG members
3. 32% of community development activities (125 hours) were undertaken by non-CJG community members.

The police and CJG working together

[The] community didn't like it when the police were kicking down doors, barging in and dragging people out. The community said, 'this is not okay'. The CJG told them that they can help and get in between... Police started coming to the CJG for help with warrants and locating people. [The CJG] are able to approach key people to address practices that are unacceptable to the community. Peacemakers and police are both important in dealing with fights.

They [the CJG] had a big meeting with the cops in Alyangula, to talk about cops working side by side with CJG. [They are] starting to work together... They need to work side by side... and Aboriginal people, we should be helping the cops too.

The CJG and the Police were actively strengthening their relationship and collaborating to improve justice outcomes for the community; a shift that was both desired and observed by many participants in the evaluation. Police also reported placing value on, and holding respect for, the work and impact of the CJG. There was a greater willingness to support the

peacemakers in their efforts to de-escalate community conflict to prevent offending behaviour and subsequent arrests and charges. Police were identified as being notably more active in seeking advice from the CJG on crime and incidents in the community, for executing arrest warrants and for gathering information on property and other offences. To progress the relationship, a Memorandum of Understanding between the parties was reportedly being explored.

In addition to employing an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Police also appointed a fulltime community police officer to work with the CJG, focussing on de-escalation and crime prevention by proactively breaking down barriers between police and the community through engagement in positive activities. Local police leadership was also cognisant of the importance of cultivating and sustaining an organisational culture that is respectful, understanding and supportive of the community and was committed to building the cultural competencies of the workforce.

Despite the many concrete examples demonstrating a commitment to forging mutually respectful relations and collaborations between police and the CJG, ongoing vigilance and leadership is needed to strengthen relationships. Some stakeholders observed interactions between police and LJG members that they described as exceedingly disrespectful and diminishing, reflecting an “*astounding lack of understanding of, and disregard for, the standing, roles and responsibilities*” of LJG members in the community. One stakeholder recounted an interaction between a LJG member and a police officer at Community Court:

They [the police officer] undermined the courts authority by disrespecting the very people that should participate in this process, that belong to the community, that are there to represent. If you treat them with disrespect, you risk undermining the authority of the court.

There were also incidents that CJG members themselves expressed frustration over (such as policing they believed was heavy-handed and unnecessary, inflamed situations or was racially discriminating).

Peacemaking

Peacemakers sometimes say, ‘we want to deal with this’. Police officer goes with, supports, stands back, meanwhile the Peacemaker does their cultural intervention. If it is considered to be a police response, they will call on police to come too. But it is about supporting peacemakers to address and deal with things first and also to build relationships and credibility between community and police.

Peacemakers were regarded by Police as having good judgement and decision-making under pressure. Similarly, community members were reportedly very responsive to their involvement in managing conflict. Stakeholders generally agreed that the Peacemakers’ work in the de-escalation of conflict has been impactful and has made a direct contribution to reducing rates of offending on Groote Eylandt. While the impact cannot be quantified in terms of reduced offending, from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 there were 1,656 hours spent on peacemaking across the Groote Archipelago. Of this, 1121 hours (or 68%) were undertaken by non-CJG members. The ALC were considering a registration process for Peacemakers working in the community, including eligibility criteria, to enhance quality and manage resources. (See [Figure 2](#)).

Over the course of the evaluation, the CJG continued to explore new initiatives to improve social justice outcomes and expand their services, including establishing a junior Peacemaker program.

The Law and Justice Group (LJG) and Aboriginal Experience Reports (AERs)

AERs are really important. They allow for a connection to culture and country and are a powerful rehabilitative tool. They move away from Indigeneity as a deficit-based discourse and shift the discourse to be strengths-based.

The LJG members have demonstrated an important and pivotal role in advancing the community's justice priorities through their work prior to, at and following both Local and Community Court. They have consulted with the relevant people (including the offender and their family, the victim/s and their family, support services, NT Community Corrections, defence lawyers etc.) to prepare AERs for offenders. Lawyers accessed the LJG for information, advice, updates and support in connection with clients. Lawyers were unanimous in the view that the LJG's work enabled them to be better informed to provide more culturally appropriate legal services. Lawyers and other stakeholders also observed the sentencing suggestions developed through a negotiated process included in the AERs were more workable and effective, including cost effective. They noted that without the AERs and the involvement of the LJG members, there was a risk of lawyers "*inadvertently setting clients up to fail*" by advocating for sentences that involve contexts that are not fully appreciated.

With inherent logistical challenges in preparing the AERs (such as an offender that may be on remand in Darwin), AERs typically took up to 5 days to complete before being shared with the judiciary and other key stakeholders (i.e. Community Corrections, the prosecution and defence lawyer etc). Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, the LJG spent 434 hours preparing AERs. They explored and reported on a range of topics. They outlined the background of offenders, their family relationships and employment and health status. They reported the impact of the offending on the victim/s and the community. They described the relationship between the offender and the community (including social and cultural connections and responsibilities), and steps taken by an offender towards rehabilitation or restoration. They included general information about criminogenic factors that contributed to offending behaviours and detailed the potential and attributes of offenders. They carefully crafted sentence suggestions for the Judge aimed at effective punishment together with on-country rehabilitation, including some 'out of the box' sentences, such as making a short video for social media about the impact to the community when the shop is broken into or attending the Men's Shed to teach younger men/boys to carve ceremonial spears. During the evaluation period, the AERs became more streamlined and shorter, while reportedly simultaneously maintaining their quality, intent and authenticity.

While some victims attended Community Court to support their partners, the LJG members recognised barriers to engaging other victims (particularly women) in a meaningful and safe way in the Community Court through a victim impact statement (in the AER) and/or their participation in proceedings. They negotiated with police to deploy a strategy aimed at increasing their inclusion, with the CJG taking the lead role in inviting victims to engage. The CJG framed participation in a positive light and provided information and support, enabling victims to make a more informed decision about participation. Ensuring appropriate support is provided to all victims prior, during and following Community Court (as well as Local Court) remains an important challenge. Further, developing the knowledge of the CJG members on the various forms of domestic, family and sexual violence, and the mechanisms by which violence is normalised and reproduced, are critical to strengthening their capacity to support victims and increase their participation at Community Court. Similarly, developing strategies that mitigate the potential for vicarious trauma and maintain self-care are important.

Community Court: recognising and empowering the Anindilyakwa leaders

The CJG members feel more confident in their position of authority and able to speak directly to defendants in language. They are good leaders, seen as role models and mentors in the community. They have the best information, local intelligence, everyone talks to them.

Community Court is predominantly held in Angurugu (noting Local Court is held in Alyangula in a setting that typifies a mainstream courtroom and its associated protocols). The courtroom was set up with tables and chairs in a rectangle formation, all at the same level, with chairs around the perimeter of the room for community members, family and service organisations. The Judge, flanked by the LJG members, sat along one side. Generally, the police prosecutor and Community Corrections occupied another side and the offender, translator, defence lawyer and family support sat opposite the Judge and LJG members on the third side. The court officers sat removed from the central seating arrangement in the background.¹⁹

The Judge commenced and facilitated proceedings. The statement of facts was read by the Judge and then translated. The Judge encouraged and stressed the importance of speaking in Anindilyakwa as the primary means of communication.

Observation of court proceedings and stakeholder interviews confirmed a mutual respect between the Judge and the LJG members, with the Judge recognising their cultural authority, knowledge, expertise and leadership in the community. The LJG members actively participated in court proceedings. The Judge deferred to the members for advice and information, invited their contribution, and in almost all instances, handed down sentences that aligned with the recommendations members had articulated in AERs. The actualisation of the community's aspirations concerning Anindilyakwa involvement in the justice system was described by Anindilyakwa stakeholders as feeling surreal. Feeling empowered and valued and recognising their achievements, the LJG simultaneously carried a great sense of responsibility.

The Community Court process was observed to reinforce the cultural authority of the LJG members within the community. It consistently demonstrated the judicial system both respected and shared power with Aboriginal leaders to make decisions about justice outcomes. While LJG members formulated sentencing options for consideration by the Judge, which may have included both punitive and rehabilitative measures, there were instances in which the Judge also required an offender to follow all reasonable directions of the LJG.

The Judge suggested the police prosecutors and defence lawyers talk less and support offenders to talk more using a question-and-answer method, adjusting the way in which lawyers typically advocated for their clients. (By contrast, in Local Court lawyers typically speak on behalf of offenders). Initially this approach created discomfort for “risk-averse” lawyers, requiring them to take a “leap of faith” that better justice outcomes would prevail, which outweighed the risks associated with their clients speaking.

In stark contrast to the Local Court, where offenders were often passive, rarely spoke and did not always understand what was being said, offenders in the Community Court process were encouraged and supported to participate. The Judge, lawyers, police prosecutors and LJG members routinely and directly addressed offenders during court proceedings, increasing their accountability for their offending behaviour and their understanding of its

¹⁹ During the evaluation there were 2 different Judges. Findings reported were consistent for both Judges.

impacts. While few victims contributed to the AERs and were present at Community Court, the Community Court model in Groote Eylandt, included elements of both restorative and retributive justice. Aided by the AERs, the opportunity for dialogue was created before and during Court proceedings to respond to the harm caused by offenders, re-set relations and move towards healing, with benefits for victims, offenders and the wider community.

Community satisfaction with the CJG, Community Courts and the justice system

The role of LJG members in the Community Court involves preparing AERs, including the tailoring of sentencing suggestions for offenders that plead guilty, and being engaged in the respective Court proceedings. The evaluation determined that for this aspect of the justice system, the community had much greater agency and satisfaction compared to the time before the establishment of the LJG and Community Court and during Local Court processes.

Over the evaluation period, the community's awareness of the Community Court's purpose and processes, along with role of the LJG members, grew. With no more than four hearings scheduled for a court sitting day, there was sufficient time for meaningful discussions to be had about an offender's behaviour, its impacts, being accountable and rehabilitative options – all of which involved the offender. While some offenders reportedly felt nervous about the process, they were well supported by family, the CJG members and staff, interpreters and legal counsel, as well as the Judge and LJG members, during the process. In contrast to Local Court, offenders before Community Court were much better supported and were involved in, and understood, what was happening. This approach has been an important factor in the justice system being perceived as fairer and more impactful.

There were occasional references made about the Community Court being a place of 'cultural shaming'. This framing was not necessarily negative or a barrier to progressing a referral for sentencing, but rather an acknowledgement that there was a change in the justice system, with the embedding of cultural accountability. Overwhelmingly, the experience of community members at Community Court was positive with LJG members reporting increased requests for referrals.

CJG skills, training and employment

In peacemaking you must have the knowledge and the family connection and the right person to intervene. You must have de-escalation skills. Many people on Groote Eylandt have had these skills and had to use them their whole lives. They just don't always have the confidence.

Many Peacemakers had developed conflict resolution skills through life experiences. Others had received additional formal mediation training and attended workshops and other forums as both participants and presenters, sharing knowledge and expertise. One CJG member routinely delivered mediation training workshops based on Anindilyakwa cultural values and protocols, targeting younger men. Some CJG members had attended conferences and presented their work in various forums, such as the Reintegration Puzzle Conference; an annual conference bringing together people with lived expertise of the justice system, practitioners and researchers. They had also reportedly visited Yuendumu to exchange practice approaches with Peacemakers.

The LJG members received training once they were appointed through the NTG AGD. The training explored roles and responsibilities, preparing AERs, the Community Court processes and proceedings and managing conflicts of interest. Stakeholders were united in their views that the LJG members had the skills and standing in the community to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities.

While the LJG members were the authors of the AERs, they received support from the ALC CJG staff to capture the information gathered by members into written form (i.e. the CJG staff were scribes), supporting their access to, and participation in, the justice system. CJG staff provided a range of other critical supports, including: logistical services; facilitation of referrals and case management; transportation of offenders and families to/from court; creation of a safe and comfortable environment outside the courthouse to ease tensions; informing and consulting stakeholders (including the LJG); delivery/facilitation of professional development activities for CJG; and monitoring sentenced offenders and providing supports to facilitate compliance with any legal requirements.

During the evaluation, between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, four CJG members participated in a total of 71 hours professional development and training delivered in-house and by external providers. Training included mental health first aid and 4-wheel driving. Other professional development activities had been planned for late 2025 relating to accidental counselling and social and emotional wellbeing.

The evaluation found the CJG members/staff had, or acquired, the skills and knowledge to perform their activities. Further opportunities to strengthen their practices and enhance their impact in the community are presented in [Appendix 7](#), together with a rationale for each.

For most of the evaluation period, the CJG (including the LJG) and community members were paid on a casual basis by the ALC for work undertaken in relation to justice activities. By July 2025, three CJG/LJG members had transitioned from casual to permanent part-time employment. The CJG was also reportedly expanding its footprint to place a greater focus on youth. Together with the re-establishment of a safety patrol, the CJG anticipated recruiting several new staff members, creating employment opportunities for local Anindilyakwa.

The impact of CJG activities on offending

The data cannot be definitive on the impact of the CJG's activities on offending and re-offending due to many other variables. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the CJG's cumulative contribution has had a positive impact. For example, peacemaking and the de-escalation and mediation of conflict and working collaboratively with Police, have led directly to a reduction in community members being charged with offences; a finding echoed by local Police. Similarly, the 'through care' approach, whereby LJG members and ALC CJG staff work with offenders prior to, during and following Community Court, has been a critical factor in reducing re-offending on Groote Eylandt. The role of the LJG members in the Community Court has increased community accessibility to, and influence over, the justice system and offenders have increased understanding about the justice system and are being held accountable in a meaningful way. The ALC CJG staff and the LJG members' work with offenders in connection with Local Court has also been pivotal to reducing re-offending.

Between March 2024 and July 2025, the Community Court had considered applications and sentenced 32 unique individuals (5 females and 27 males). (One person – female - had not yet been sentenced and their matter adjourned). Almost half of the applications (n=15) were for offending that had occurred off Groote Eylandt by Anindilyakwa or Aboriginal people with strong cultural ties to Groote Eylandt. Data gathered through the evaluation found that following the handing down of their sentences, 29 people of the 32 individuals had not reoffended by July 2025. Three individuals, all male, had been charged with new offences; one within approximately 4 months of attending Community Court and two within approximately 3 months (see Person 2, 8 and 10 in [Figure 3](#)). One had attended the AHC on 3 occasions and the other two had never attended. Person 23 attended Community Court in May 2025 and was charged later that same month for prior offending that allegedly occurred in January 2025. This person had never attended the AHC.

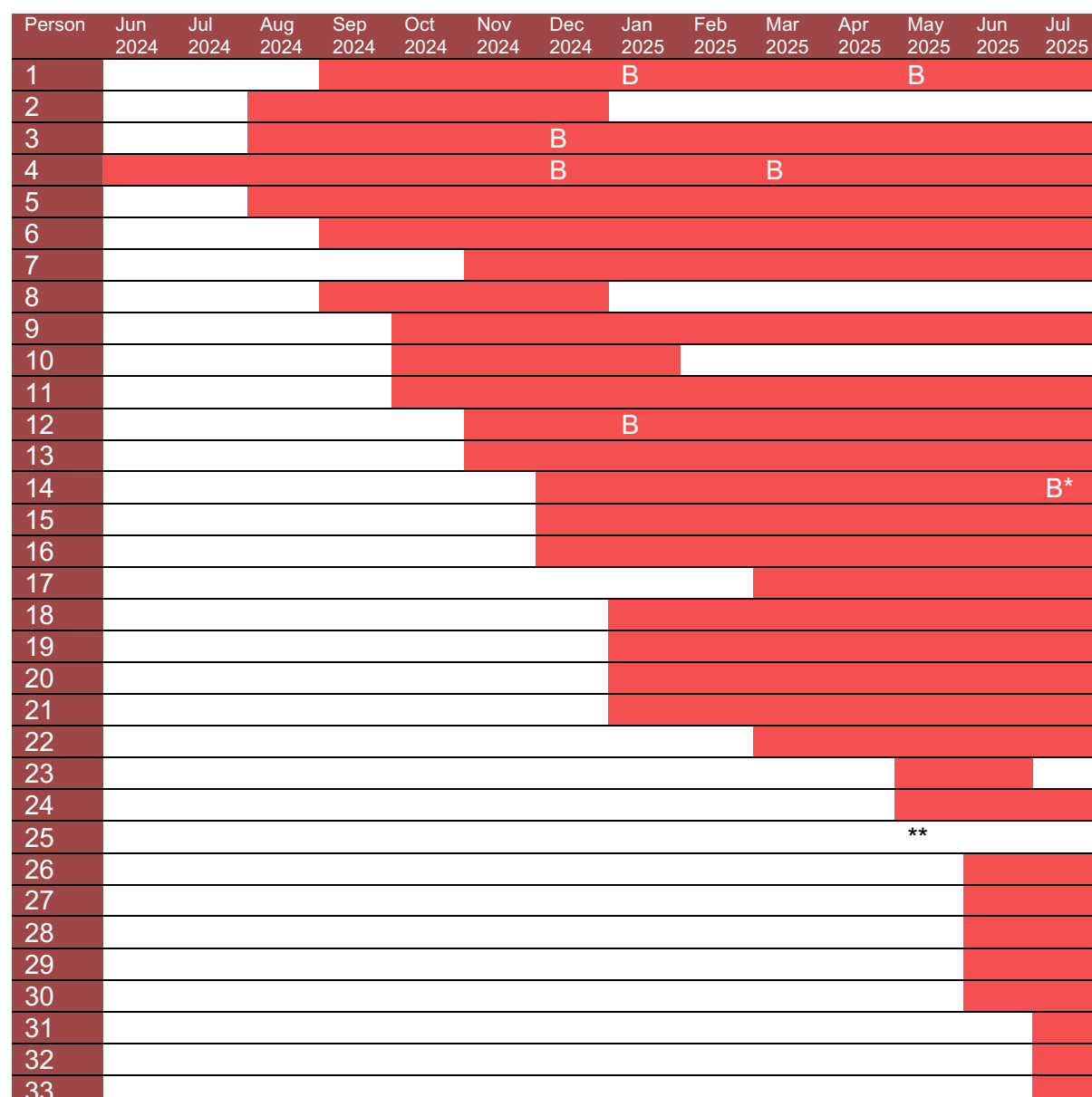


Figure 3: Period of non-offending and offending since sentence handed down at Community Court, June 2024 to July 2025

Note:

1. The red indicates the month a person was sentenced at Community Court. The line turns white if/when a person re-offends.
2. The first applications to Community Court were considered in March 2024 and were adjourned to a later date.
3. *The date of the breach notice issued to Person 14 is not known.
4. Figure 3 provides information relating to the month a person's case was heard and sentencing handed down by the Judge. It does not capture prior adjournments, with the exception of Person 25**. This person attended court in May, and at the time of writing, the matter had not been finalised.
5. B = breach notice issued.

During the same period, there were 5 people, all male, that had breached their sentencing orders, with 2 of these people issued two breach notices. The reason for the breach, the

time between attending Community Court and receiving a breach notice and participation at the AHC are detailed below.

Person 1: Drinking alcohol, did not complete required work hours

- Breach notice issued approximately 4 months post Community Court in January 2025
- Second breach issued approximately 2 months later in May 2025 for leaving Groote Eylandt
- Attended the AHC for 2 days

Person 3: Not contacting NTCS

- Breach notice issued approximately 4 months post Community Court
- Attended the AHC for 26.5 days

Person 4: Not contacting NTCS

- Breach notice issued approximately 6 months post Community Court
- Second breach notice issued approximately 3 months later in connection with a non-contact DVO
- Attended the AHC for 25.5 days

Person 12: Not contacting NTCS, drinking alcohol

- Breach notice issued approximately 2 months post Community Court
- Attended the AHC for 0 days

Person 14: Did not complete required hours relating to a Community Work Order

- Breach notice issued (date unknown, although hours had been completed and the matter resolved)
- Attended the AHC for 0 days

Four people received breach notices for issues which occurred over the Christmas and New Year period; an observation made by the CJG. The CJG noted the importance of ramping up their support at this time for people under supervision following Community Court, particularly as many other supports and services shut down or have limited their operations.

The rate and duration of non-offending following the Community Court process and sentencing is a strong indicator of the success of the justice reinvestment initiatives on Groote Eylandt.

Chapter 5: Anindilyakwa Healing Centre findings

In this Chapter, evaluation findings relating to the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (AHC) are discussed, with a focus on KIQs (see [Appendix 3](#)) linked to community, referrals, completion and cultural re-engagement and safety.

Overview

The AHC was purpose-built for the delivery of a residential rehabilitation program based on Anindilyakwa cultural values and leadership. The AHC was conceived as a 'therapeutic community' for Anindilyakwa men (or those with a cultural connection to Groote Eylandt) who are at risk of offending or who have offended. The facility is located in a remote area of Groote Eylandt at Marble Point and was partially completed in mid 2024. Drug and Alcohol Services Australia (DASA) commenced delivery of a 3 day per week 'day' program in late August 2024, by a team that included a Service Manager, 3 Case Managers and 2 Support Workers. Since day services commenced, DASA has: fitted out the office and accommodation; recruited staff and undertaken capacity development activities; managed complex logistics; developed, tested and strengthened program content and delivery; established operational processes, policies and procedures (including relating to safety); explored and established relationships with local organisations; and prepared to transition the service to a 24-hour residential facility, coinciding with the completion of construction at the site.

Access to the AHC was by referral (including self-referral). Eligibility criteria included being: male; over 18 years; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; resident of the NT; culturally connected to Groote Eylandt; and being involved, or at risk of involvement, with the justice system.

Lessons from the pre-service phase of the AHC

As with any new service, there have been a multitude of challenges for DASA to navigate which have been amplified, largely due to the very remote island location of the AHC, as well as other contextual factors discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

In the early stages of service establishment, stakeholders overwhelmingly lacked clarity around the AHC program design, content and purpose and raised quality concerns. Many had made assumptions around what the service would look like and how it would be delivered. Some expected the AHC to operate as a prison for prisoners, and others anticipated it to be a health-oriented healing space. Without knowledge of the program content beyond the headlines, stakeholders were hesitant to refer clients to the AHC because they did not feel confident that the service and programs would be responsive to the needs or obligations of their clients. The program content ambiguities were exacerbated by inadequate communication with stakeholders by DASA and the AHC, which compromised the establishment of productive and mutually respectful relationships and collaborations.

A suite of interconnected safety concerns were also raised in the early stages about the AHC, including:

- inadequate surveillance systems and security at the site;
- a lack of context-specific safety plans, policies and procedures for staff, visitor and client safety;
- inadequate consideration for clinical oversight relating to health, medical and therapeutic services and protocols;
- underdeveloped natural disaster and evacuation procedures (cyclones and

- bushfires);
- clients potentially being re-traumatised and fatigued through the duplication of assessment processes and assessment processes that rely on self-reported health status;
- staff driver fatigue;
- the site being potentially dangerous for clients due to magic/sorcery;²⁰
- increased risk to the safety of women and children when men initially engage in DVFS and behaviour change programs; and
- the potential for escalation of violence amongst participants (noting that the AHC, as an 'alternative to custody', will include participants that would have otherwise been in prison for violent offences).

In addition to safety concerns, the evaluation identified that it was necessary for DASA to finalise its practice framework to support the day program model of care. They were developing a culturally responsive model of care for their Alice Springs Alternative to Custody which they had planned to adapt for implementation at the Groote Eylandt AHC. The model reportedly places emphasis on evidence-based best practice modalities for Aboriginal Australians and explores core practice principles, quality of care standards, partnerships and networks, evidence-based programs and practices and workforce capability requirements. The model of care remained in-house and had not been reviewed as part of the evaluation and therefore an assessment of its alignment with DASA's therapeutic approaches has not been made.

Establishing the day program

Escalation of the issues outlined above were a catalyst for change at the AHC. Prior to the commencement of the day program, DASA had intensified its on-the-ground leadership. They recruited a therapeutic lead to strengthen program quality, with a particular focus on activities that target offending behaviour, with the aim of incorporating evidence, best practice and the cumulative expertise within DASA. The day program allowed for DASA's systems, operations and programs to be tested and relationships to be established, re-set or strengthened with stakeholders and the broader community.

Implementation of the day program also affirmed for DASA that their 'therapeutic community model' of care, which is core to their Alice Springs residential program, was not applicable to a day program context. On recognising this, and in preparation for the residential program, DASA provided opportunities for AHC staff to strengthen their understanding and application of the therapeutic community model by shadowing case managers at their Alice Springs facility.

The evaluation identified that DASA's staff commitment to critical reflection is a notable program strength. DASA staff critiqued the program design and elements, monitored client participation on an ongoing basis and invited feedback and made adjustments to program structure, content and delivery modes on the basis of their findings. Their early learnings identified the importance of flexibility and adaptability to the service delivery, particularly in relation to the day program where different participants attended each day and the group numbers fluctuated. Similarly, the on-the-ground delivery experiences of Case Managers

²⁰ Sorcery and black magic are pervasive in the belief systems of many Aboriginal communities in the NT, including Groote Eylandt. In addition, 'cursing' contributes directly to the stress of everyday life for the Anindilyakwa and is believed to contribute to premature morbidity and mortality. A curse can be put on a person, thing or place, making them 'out of bounds' or restricted to those with the right authority. Curses have been traditionally used to seek justice. Today, however curses are sometimes used for personal gain or out of anger and are regarded as an abuse of traditional law.

and Community Support Workers have contributed to the development of culturally appropriate and/or led programs and activities, such as yarning circles and the creation of artefacts. Staff also reflected on the skills and knowledge they needed to strengthen their practice and service quality. They related to:

- case management best practice;
- domestic, family and sexual violence;
- trauma-informed care approaches;
- narrative therapy; and
- mediation practice.

The evaluation found that AHC's program outcomes will be strengthened by establishing clear links between client goals and needs (which are responsive to offending behaviours) with program content/activities and case management practice (including referrals). Similarly, monitoring progress towards goal attainment, establishing feedback mechanisms from clients and facilitating exit interviews are important activities for ongoing quality monitoring.

Transitioning to a residential program: early learnings

By early 2025, DASA was preparing to transition from the day program to a 'modified therapeutic community' (MTC) residential program, with a greater focus on behaviour change to align with the needs of the clients. (It is 'modified' as clients are not necessarily attending the AHC out of their free will). DASA had reiterated their focus on quality and were working towards national accreditation of the AHC as a MTC program through the Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association.

DASA had planned for the AHC to transition to a residential program by mid-January 2025, however the transition was delayed due to the need to: recruit, accommodate and train additional staff; await the release of finances from the NTG to purchase vehicles; and finalise safety modifications and protocols (including minor modifications to create a safe room for staff and the establishment of safety patrols at the site). By late March these matters had progressed and DASA had commenced residential operations in early June 2025.

By July 2025, the AHC had 2 residential clients (one referred as part of bail conditions from Local Court and the other referred as part of their parole conditions), together with the *ad hoc* participation of day program clients. Both clients had attended for over a month and were very positive about their experiences. They valued the activities, including those that focussed on cultural engagement and identity, AOD and behaviour change. They felt safe and comfortable and appreciated the calm space and "no humbug" environment. Both had employment aspirations post-AHC.

DASA was attempting to run the day program concurrently with the residential program, however due to challenges with staffing and transport logistics, the maximum number of clients they could service through this program mode was four (out of 9 clients that were active in the day program at the start of June). Given this, although demand had not exceeded the available space, staff were no longer proactively encouraging client engagement in the day program.

Different interpretations about the duration of the residential program remained among key stakeholders and created barriers to the referral of clients. For example, there were clients that did not want the AHC to form part of their parole conditions or proposed sentencing order through Community Court because they believed they would likely serve more time if the duration was 6 months. While DASA had stressed the program duration is ideally intended to be 6 months, they also confirmed they would accept clients for a shorter or

longer period. DASA's flexible approach to accepting clients for variable periods has critical implications for addressing barriers in client referrals and must be clearly communicated to all key stakeholders.

A further barrier to client participation in the residential program was the payment of \$224 per week to attend the AHC, with some clients reportedly keen to attend but reluctant to pay. DASA was exploring options with the ALC, such as using royalty payments, to overcome the barrier.

The AHC's transition to the residential program highlighted important considerations for the staffing model into the future. DASA have found the role of Case Manager had expanded out of necessity to include a diverse range of tasks from working with clients to vehicle repairs and maintenance to addressing power outages, and everything in between. DASA had also reportedly been requested by the judiciary to have a staff member available at both Local and Community Court to respond to questions regarding clients' progress at the AHC and to undertake assessments. Noting that when all 32 beds are filled at the AHC and that it is unrealistic for Case Managers to continue to be "*a jack of all trades*", DASA was exploring the merits of a dedicated intake and assessment officer and recognised the need for a facilities manager.

In addition to the identified gaps in roles at the AHC, the staffing roster was untenable and created significant occupational health and safety risks. Staff were on 12-hour shifts, with a 15-minute hand-over between shifts. Due to the location of the AHC, this meant staff were generally driving, in the dark, at high speed on sealed and dirt roads, to and from work for around an hour each way on top of their 12-hour shift to access the site. It is neither reasonable nor safe for this practice to continue; a practice that also has implications for quality service provision.

The importance of engaging dedicated security at the AHC was reinforced by many stakeholders due to the operational context. Despite clients referred to the AHC undergoing an assessment to determine their specific needs and also their propensity to cause risk to staff and other clients, as an Alternative to Custody, Police have had long-held concerns about the inherent safety risks associated with clients that may use violence at the facility. While there were plans for the re-establishment of a safety patrol (which includes Peacemakers as part of patrol teams) to periodically visit the AHC, it was noted that if an issue emerged that required external support (i.e. from Police, safety patrols and/or Peacemakers), due to the remoteness of the AHC the fastest response time would be at least 30 minutes. The inclusion of security at the AHC was regarded by participating stakeholders as an important factor in gaining broader support in the community, from government and from other stakeholders.

With a graduated approach to increasing the available beds at the AHC, stakeholders identified critical information they deemed necessary for the referral process to the AHC. Stakeholders (including members of the Referral Committee) wanted up-to-date information relating to existing participants and the availability of beds on an ongoing basis. They also wanted clarity on the process for prioritising client referrals. In keeping with the premise that the AHC is an Alternative to Custody, there was a strong view among some stakeholders that clients on bail, parole or part of a sentencing order should be prioritised over other referrals.

DASA continued to focus on the employment of Anindilyakwa people and were exploring opportunities to create traineeships that supported their participation, and which did not inadvertently impact on operations. They were also aiming to engage Elders and other CJG members in service delivery, although accessing a dedicated budget for activities and

managing the expectations of their engagement (including payment) were ongoing challenges.

DASA were also conceptualising a ‘through care’ model to strengthen client outcomes at the AHC. This involved supporting clients when they exit prison in Darwin and enter the AHC, as well as at the conclusion of their residential period when they re-enter the community. With the widespread use of marijuana in the community, the difficulty in avoiding usage is omnipresent. In response they were exploring the potential of re-establishing a day program (at Pole 7 – a residential mining camp in Alyangula) to provide clients with a stress-free place to go and engage in activities that do not involve drugs and/or alcohol.

Community

Addressing community justice support needs

As discussed in **Chapter 4**, the CJG is an important mechanism for the community’s justice system support needs to be realised, including the design and delivery of services at the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre. CJG members were known and accessible to community members and they were comfortable to ask for the support they needed.

The AHC as a culturally-led rehabilitation service

The objective of the AHC is to deliver services in a “*culturally-led and responsive environment*” that is “*principled on a Groote Eylandt cultural framework*”. The CJG, through the Law, Justice and Rehabilitation Steering Committee (Steering Committee), was informed and/or consulted and/or had input into the location of the AHC, its naming and the service delivery model concept. After program commencement, CJG members became active on an AHC referrals committee and provided advice on whether (i) the referred person has cultural ties to Groote Eylandt, and (ii) if the person will likely create conflict if accepted into the AHC. Once DASA had established the day program, CJG members visited and engaged more in discussions about the purpose and potential of the AHC. Stakeholders observed that this engagement increased the capacity of the CJG to inform the service model.

The LJG members and the CJG support staff called for clear structures and resources to increase the CJG’s contribution to the AHC’s ongoing design and delivery. The CJG members identified that the cultural activities at the AHC have potential for enrichment, embedding other traditions, like dance, singing and telling the ‘whole story’, to improve the cultural knowledge of participants. As one member commented, “*we want them to learn more than just how to make a spear*”. Other CJG members also flagged their interest in facilitating a Christian fellowship for participants.

The importance of strengthening cultural knowledge and identity at the AHC was shared by clients who attended the AHC. They particularly valued the cultural activities and saw that the AHC had potential to create opportunities to spend quality time with Elders, noting that this was difficult to achieve during the usual distractions of everyday life in the community, coupled with the competing demands placed on Elders. Clients worried that they hadn’t yet acquired important knowledge yet had cultural responsibilities going forward; responsibilities that were reaffirmed for some by their Elders at Community Court. Clients were keen to learn and were cognisant that those with the knowledge were dying.

CJG members and staff and DASA’s AHC staff have identified that the cultural integrity of the AHC will continue to be strengthened through the ongoing investment in establishing/maintaining relationships and information exchange between the parties. In this dynamic operating environment, agility, creativity and low-level risk-taking by AHC

leadership are necessary to capitalise on opportunities when they exist and trial new/different service approaches/activities.

DASA had commenced exploration into potential local Aboriginal organisations with interest and capacity (or that could build capacity) to transfer control of the AHC to in the future. This is an ongoing activity.

Employment and skills development for First Nations people at the AHC

In 2024, DASA first employed Community Support Workers from the Groote Archipelago to work at the AHC on a casual and fulltime basis. They had been provided with on-the-job and professional development training. One worker completed a Certificate II in Mental Health while in the role. DASA anticipated additional employment opportunities for Anindilyakwa and other First Nations people as the AHC expands its service provision and reaches maximum capacity (i.e. all 32 beds are occupied). DASA had been active in its efforts to identify, recruit and retain suitable employees, including gauging the potential for AHC participants to transition to employment following their rehabilitation.

Clients developed work-ready skills at the AHC. They demonstrated an interest to develop new skills and gain knowledge that are useful in everyday life, getting job-ready and into employment settings, such as developing numeracy and literacy skills. Many of the AHC clients had been also actively engaged with the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Enterprises (GEBIE) Community Development Program (CDP) which reportedly offers a range of flexible activities that increase job seekers' skills and employability and which also benefit the communities. The AHC and GEBIE CDP had established a relationship that enabled the navigation of respective organisations' sometimes competing demands.

DASA had also been working with the ALC to create employment pathways through their business activities for clients at the AHC. These related to developing skills in aquaculture for sustainable food production and timber processing although were stagnant due to staff changes. These partnerships aim to develop the practical skills and knowledge of clients, create employment opportunities and contribute to building local industries.

Referrals

Referral pathways to the AHC

During the early stages of the evaluation, there was a widespread lack of clarity among stakeholders (the judiciary, government and non-government organisations and Aboriginal people, including CJG members) about key elements of the AHC service, including its purpose, program content, eligibility criteria, referral pathways and assessment processes, dates of operation, mode of participation and details concerning the transition from a day to a residential program. As noted, the imperative to define the program content was a particular priority for stakeholders. They expressed a professional and ethical duty to know that the service was tailored to respond to a person's issues if they were to make a referral. Without this information, they maintained that the risk of setting up people to fail was too high. Similarly, and in addition to program content, the judiciary lacked clarity about service commencement dates (following several delays in becoming operational), days of operation and details relating to the transition from the day to the residential program. This had implications for handing down sentences in the Community Court that included attendance at the AHC that were achievable and appropriate.

In response, DASA developed a newsletter, with the first issue circulated late October 2024. The newsletter reported on AHC activities and included referral contact details and links. In November 2024, a second newsletter followed building on the information in the first one, with an expanded distribution to include Community Corrections in Darwin, the Parole Board

of the NT and key NT legal services. Further newsletters were distributed monthly in 2025, and DASA had also presented to the Judges on the AHC. DASA has continued to build professional and community networks on Groote Eylandt, with MOUs and other agreements in place with organisations. Examples include: NTG Department of Health Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), health clinics and nutritionists; GEBIE (CDP); Connected Beginnings; Anglicare (financial counselling); and NTG Community Corrections (reporting/notification of breaches). Through clients sharing their experiences, 3 self-referrals occurred in February 2025 to the day program alone.

Clients referred to the AHC

There were 54 referrals received by the AHC for the day program between 11 October 2023 and 16 May 2025. Referrals were made by the following types of organisations:

- NTCS (including Community Court and the CJG) (n=21);
- AOD (n=12)
- Legal services (n=9)
- Local organisations (including CDP, Bush Fit Mob, ALC) (n=7)
- Self (n=5)

The approximate average age of the clients referred was 30 years. At the time of referral, 41 clients were unemployed; 11 were incarcerated; and 0 clients were noted as being employed. (The employment status of 2 clients was not reported). The reasons for referral were interconnected and almost all related to the need for behaviour change linked to AOD use, offending and adherence to NTCS Community Corrections Orders (CCOs). Referrals were also made to determine a person's suitability to attend as part of a parole application and for a person on remand with an impending court date.

Of the 54 referrals received by the AHC between October 2023 and May 2025, 24 had not been assessed due to the client: withdrawing their application; being incarcerated; being referred to a different organisation; not able to be located; or not being eligible to access the AHC. For the remaining 30 clients referred and assessed:

- 16 had been approved for entry;
- 9 had been assessed and the outcome was pending; and
- 5 had no assessment outcome recorded (1 was incarcerated, 1 had recently been released from prison and the there was no further information relating to 3 clients).

Since the opening of the AHC in late August 2024 until May 2025, the AHC had 16 active clients that collectively completed a total of 184 days. Each client participated an average of 11.5 days, with the median number of days being 6.5 days. Of the active clients, half had been referred by the Community Court, NTCS and/or the CJG, 4 from the Groote Eylandt NTG AOD service, 2 from legal services and 2 had self-referred. Individual participation is presented in [Figure 4](#).

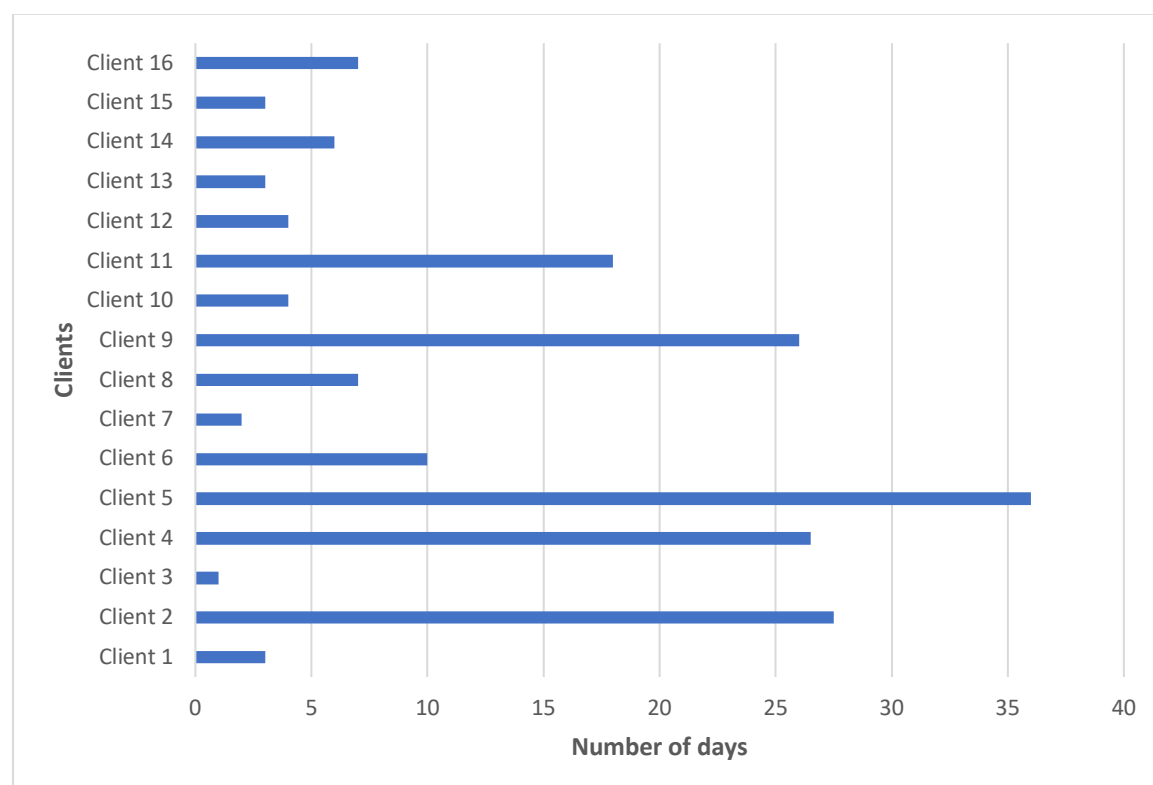


Figure 4: Number of days completed at the AHC by clients, August 2024 to May 2025

For the residential program, 17 referrals had been received by the AHC from 1 January to 20 June 2025, with 14 of these made since May 2025. They were predominantly from legal services, the CJG and NTCS. Of the referred clients, 12 were incarcerated (8 were being held on remand and 4 had sentences). The reason for referrals generally related to offending behaviour.

Of all residential referrals, 7 had been assessed and approved for entry and a further 7 had been assessed and were awaiting approval from the referral committee. One client had not yet been assessed and the status of another was not documented. One client had been declined following an assessment.

As noted, by mid-July, 2 clients had participated in the residential program for over a month and were reportedly engaging and doing well. Following Community Court in July 2025, a third client had entered the program.

Re-offending and CCO breaches by AHC clients

According to DASA's administrative data, within 3 months of commencing at the AHC, Client 1 and Client 6 had reoffended, and within 5 months of commencing, Client 4 had reoffended. Client 1, Client 2 and Client 4 had breached their CCOs (for failing to adhere to their NTCS reporting requirements).

Referrals from the AHC

The Case Managers at the AHC referred clients from the day program to external organisations for the following key reasons:

- health (including mental health first aid and AOD);
- financial management (including fines payments);
- employment opportunities;

- drivers' education and licensing;
- disability supports; and
- identification documents.

The AHC as a sentencing option for offenders

The LJG routinely considered the suitability of, and benefits for, every offender to rehabilitate at the AHC, although did not always suggest attendance as a sentencing recommendation. On occasion, the members determined different community-based alternatives, such as Community Work Orders or AOD programs, as being more appropriate for individuals. Their decision was influenced by the operational environment of the AHC, such as: program commencement; program content and structure; closures dates of the AHC as it transitioned from day program to a residential program; whether the inclusion of a new client/offender would create a conflict at the AHC; and following an assessment, whether the AHC would accept the client.

Data related to the Community Court affirmed that sentences handed down by the Judge predominantly aligned with the recommendations of the LJG, captured in AERs. From March 2024 to July 2025, one third (n=9) of sentences handed down to male offenders at Community Court specified attendance at the AHC. This does not include offenders that attend as part of following the reasonable directives of the NTCS. All stakeholders anticipate the number of referrals to the AHC to increase once the residential program is well established and functioning as an alternative to a custody that also places emphases on rehabilitation through therapeutic approaches.

As the service expands, DASA will need to clearly convey to the community that the AHC, as an Alternative to Custody, provides a person-centred and healing approach to address offending behaviours and rehabilitate clients. This will be important for community members that are victims of crime, who want to be confident that: offenders have proper consequences for their behaviour and the harm they cause; and that they won't "*get off lightly and not change*".

Completion and cultural (re)engagement

For the day program, completion was determined by meeting the requirements of court directives. By July 2025, 1 client had attended 36 days and had met the obligations of their sentencing order (to attend a minimum of 30 days). For the residential program, as discussed earlier, DASA had confirmed that 6 months engagement typically constituted completion, noting this period being optimal for bringing about desired behaviour change. In instances where sentencing orders, bail applications and parole conditions dictate, clients will be accepted for a shorter or longer duration.

Barriers to participation/completion at the AHC

In addition to referral issues discussed above, other reported barriers to regular participation in the day program included:

- Marijuana use – clients staying up all night smoking and being tired during the day or withdrawing from marijuana and being 'strung-out' and overly-focussed on securing it;
- Competing demands of family – clients returning to their home/community to "*deal with humbug and weed problems*" after spending time during the day at the AHC;
- Fulfilling cultural responsibilities relating to funeral/sorry business; and
- Perceptions and rumours that the site is dangerous from a spiritual perspective.

The sporadic participation of day program clients created challenges for program planning, delivery and continuity.

Supports for people to participate and complete

We can see the change in the guys that have been going there [to the AHC]. They've come a long way. They like being busy. They like the structure out there.

I've learnt a lot about how to control myself. Change inside for the better. I am thinking there is more to life instead of being angry toward something... It's hard to think through some stuff here sometimes but I want to be able to take what I'm learning to my kids and family. I'm really finding that it [the AHC] helps make my mind open, know how to control myself, makes me feel good inside too.

Analysis of data identified factors that helped clients stay engaged with the AHC. Clients valued:

- cultural activities, including the involvement of Elders and sharing of cultural knowledge;
- fitness and life skills activities (including cooking); and
- behaviour change sessions, even where they were moved out of their comfort zones to participate in a meaningful way.

In addition to cultural learning, younger clients wanted to “*learn the things other young people are learning*”, such as English literacy and numeracy. They recognised the AHC had the potential to be a safe place to continue learning and growing. They suggested an hour or so a day of learning from a teacher would be beneficial and would help them to feel more confident to pursue further study in areas such as mechanics and rangers.

Learning self-control and changing behaviours were regarded by stakeholders as essential to the rehabilitation of clients, particularly if DFSV (and jealousy) was to be addressed. Stakeholders also noted that access to specialist family counsellors and psychological services were very limited and highlighted the value of victims having concurrent access to specialist DFSV support services. Similarly, access to AOD services, either at the AHC or through the NTG's Department of Health, were seen as critical to addressing offending behaviours and completing the AHC program. (The use of marijuana on Groote Eylandt was widespread, with well-informed stakeholders estimating that 90% of the adult population used it daily. They noted that children started smoking at a very young age and were often regular users by the age of 10 years). The evaluation found clients valued increasing their self-awareness of addictive behaviours and learning strategies to cope better when they are feeling stressed and wanting tobacco and marijuana.

The AHC staff model was raised by the community and clients in terms of the AHC being a safe place to sleep. They maintained it was important to have non-Indigenous people working at night when the risk of magic/sorcery was heightened, as they were known to be not involved. Whereas, for example, if an Aboriginal staff member was working and a client had a medical episode and died, that staff member may be attributed responsibility (through magic and/or failing to protect the client), leading to broader family conflict. In addition, the community wanted strong leaders, including women and preferably a strong husband/wife team, to supervise activities and behaviours during the day.

The residential program clients reported to feel safe and comfortable at the site. They generally pulled the mattress from the bed to the floor and opened the door to their rooms at night.

Other features that supported participation at the AHC included:

- clients on Community Work Orders and/or attending GEBIE's CDP were able to arrange to attend the AHC as part of fulfilling their obligations;
- translation support to facilitate and provide depth and context to information sessions, discussions and other learning activities;
- the trust established between the staff and the clients, enabling clients to talk freely about issues, worries and future events they think might be a risk to them;
- a service model that encourages peer support and participants to be leaders;
- the creation of a safe place for clients to talk about their feelings, the things they have done in the past and why they are at the AHC and to learn from one another;
- the opportunity to engage in interactive learning experiences;
- simply being physically present at the AHC was beneficial to mental health by being away from humbug and unhealthy social environments, being busy and *"having a place to go, where they don't get caught up in the hunt for weed"*;
- the preference of the LJG for sentences to be completed on country wherever possible to maintain the cultural connectedness of offenders and improve their access to important cultural events (such as funerals);
- access to healthy and nutritious food while learning to cook;
- being trusted to access the facilities/resources; and
- for residential clients, family members being able to visit on scheduled days.

Maintaining structure and a balance of activities will continue to be important for client engagement.

AHC participants (re)engaging with culture

Observations and stakeholder accounts identified client (re)engagement with culture both through the Community Court processes and at the AHC. In Community Court processes, offenders were being held accountable to their Elders in the LJG. At the AHC, a range of cultural activities occurred on country. Clients and other stakeholders agreed that sharing stories and practices on country improved cultural knowledge and strengthened identity, and allowed for behavioural change to be explored. Aboriginal-led healing programs, such as Kings Narrative and a peacemaking/trauma awareness program delivered by CJG members, also linked clients to culture.

Stakeholders' views reinforced observations that employment of local Aboriginal staff on the team has provided an important Indigenous lens to program content and delivery. In addition, and as noted, the imperative to include LJG and other CJG members in service design and delivery remains critical to ensure the cultural integrity of the AHC. CJG members wanted to increase their oversight of the AHC operations to ensure cultural appropriateness and that activities are responsive to the needs of offenders.

Safety

There were 83 community members to complete a community safety survey administered in June (n=12) and November (n=71) of 2024 which explored self-reported perceptions of safety while 'walking around at night'. The majority of participants were from Angurugu (n=63), and 16 were from Umbakumba, 2 from Milyakburra and 2 with an unknown address. Fifty-five women (66%) and 28 men (34%) participated.

Of all survey participants, 4 people (5%) reported feeling 'very unsafe' (all women) and 17 (20%) 'a little bit unsafe'. Twelve people (14%) reported feeling 'a little bit safe' and 36 (43%) felt 'very safe'. Fourteen participants (17%) answered 'not sure'. Perceptions of

safety among women and men are presented in Figure 5. No men reported to feel 'very unsafe'.

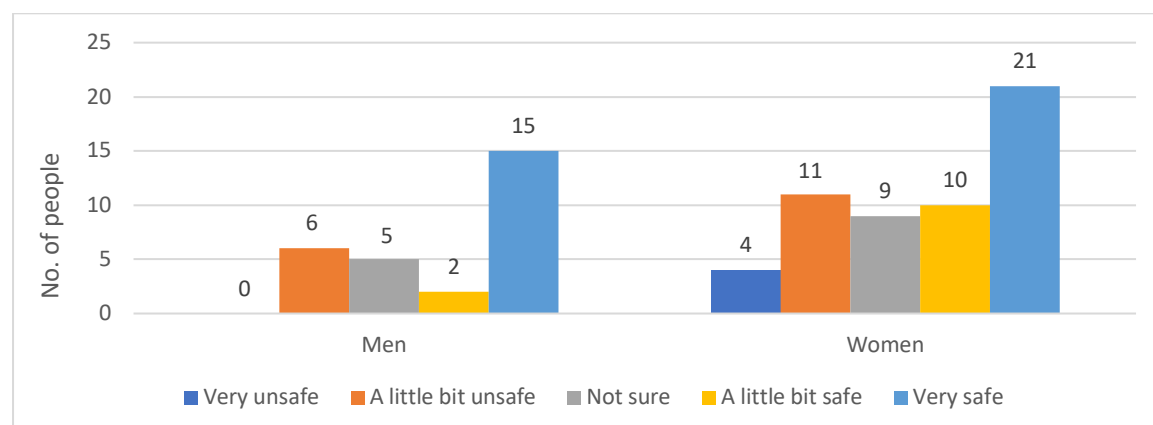


Figure 5: Community perceptions of safety walking around at night, by gender

The main reasons community members felt unsafe were due to 'big fights', 'black magic', 'man with a weapon' and 'dogs', as depicted in Figure 6. In the 'comments' part of the survey, 13 participants (16%) suggested better/more street lighting was needed and 3 people (4%) noted the value of, or need for more, Peacemakers.

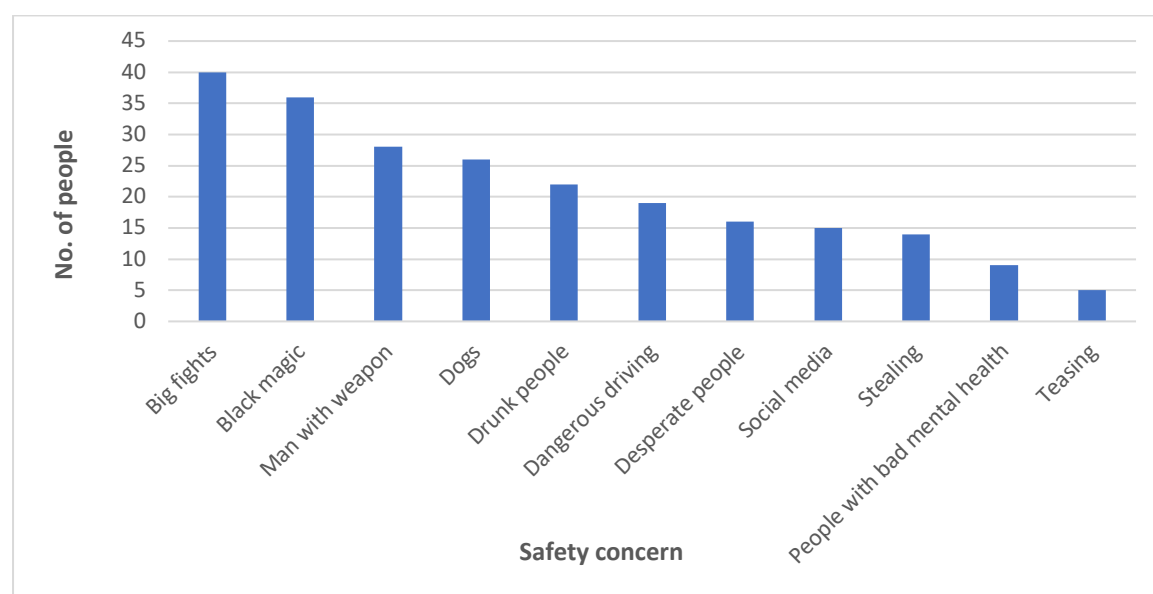


Figure 6: Safety concerns of community members

Chapter 6: Implications for the broader justice ecosystem

Three cross-cutting findings from this evaluation are relevant to implementation of justice reinvestment programs in other locations across the NT, and more broadly in Australia.

The first is the importance of goodwill, commitment and hope. Across the spectrum of stakeholders, the level of goodwill, hope and enthusiasm for the justice reinvestment initiatives to succeed was outstanding. Throughout the evaluation, these sentiments of program ambition were thoughtfully articulated by most stakeholders, and observable in their actions. For many, their willingness to adjust practices to support and strengthen the initiatives was evident. These conditions are not a given for replication in other sites.

The second relates to housing. There is a critical shortage of housing on Groote Eylandt. The ALC notes that the average property is home to 15 people and that some houses have 20 residents²¹, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census reported 37.4% of occupied dwellings (n=131) were overcrowded when taking into account the usual household size and composition together with the number of bedrooms.²² As part of the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement, a Housing Implementation Plan was signed in June 2019.²³ The plan aims to create a single, sustainable, diverse and culturally appropriate community housing system across the Groote Archipelago and marked the beginning of a 5 year housing program to significantly reduce overcrowding. In a joint investment by the NTG and the ALC, \$80 million was allocated to extend 74 existing houses and build 76 new houses between 2021-2026. While it was evident that progress had been made under the Housing Implementation Plan, housing stress remained and had a range of adverse impacts on families. In addition, the housing shortage had a domino effect throughout the community, creating challenges in the delivery of essential and other services. Housing stress impacted both the AHC and CJG, as will no doubt be the case in other remote community settings.

With limited housing options, some AHC staff had been accommodated in dongas in camp settings typically used by the FIFO workforce. The dongas were not intended to be a permanent living arrangement and exclude staff that would like to have family accompany them. Further, the arrangement creates risk factors that could potentially contribute to poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes of staff.

Throughout the evaluation, DASA explored housing solutions. By October 2024, it had secured the rental of a duplex, temporarily alleviating its housing issue. However, DASA's recruitment of a specialised workforce for the residential program has experienced challenges stemming from the dearth of available, appropriate and affordable housing. A

²¹ ALC, 2021, *Housing on Groote Eylandt*, <https://anindilyakwa.com.au/housing-on-groote-eylandt/>

²² Taylor, J., Gray, E., Houle, B., Lafferty, J., McDougall, J., & Morphy, F. 2022. Anindilyakwa Social Indicators and Data Governance to Support Local Decision Making in the Groote Archipelago, A Report to the Anindilyakwa Land Council, Groote Eylandt, <https://anindilyakwa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Social-Indicators-and-Data-Governance-to-Support-Local-Decision-Making-in-the-Groote-Archipelago.pdf>

²³ NTG and ALC, 2019, *Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement. Schedule 3.1 Housing Implementation Plan*, https://ldm.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/791316/galdm-agreement-hip.pdf

lack of access to housing limits and delays recruitment and impacts on retention. This remains a significant risk to the success of the AHC.

CJG staff at the ALC were similarly affected by the housing deficit. Unless positions are advertised with housing, it is typically only viable to recruit from the pool of people already resident on Groote Eylandt. There have also been challenges with retention. For instance, a CJG staff member's housing was a part of their partner's employment conditions. When the partner was made redundant, the CJG staff member was then without housing and had no option but to resign and leave Groote Eylandt.

The third cross-cutting finding relates to alcohol management in remote Aboriginal communities. Changes to alcohol management that make alcohol more available on Groote Eylandt, and the likelihood for a subsequent increase in the incidence of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV), emerged as an issue of considerable concern for the CJG. This concern is echoed in a report prepared for the ALC and the NTG titled *'Review of Groote Archipelago Alcohol Management'* by Crundell (2024), who observed "[i]t was evident... that profound and ongoing distress and trauma from the earlier impact of alcohol is still pervasive for many" (p.4). Following community consultations, Crundell (2024) advocated for a trial to extend the alcohol permit system to other areas of Groote Eylandt, which included the CJG having a key role in establishing guidelines to assess the suitability of applicants for a permit, as well as assessing applications.²⁴ Proposed changes that were being considered by the ALC at the time of the evaluation had reportedly widespread community opposition due to the potential adverse impacts and a failure to identify and resource harm reduction strategies. Even without the alcohol management reforms, the CJG noted there was a current gap in service provision and specialist expertise available to women and children escaping DFSV. If offending increases in relation to alcohol consumption, the CJG and the AHC will be at the frontline of justice and rehabilitative responses. Given this, the CJG believed it was important they be consulted by government and the ALC on the potential impacts and unintended consequences stemming from proposed reforms.

CJG and AHC collaborations

The evaluation documented numerous examples of improved collaboration over time between the CJG and the AHC, and where they intersect at Community Court. Yet in a dynamic environment, where key organisational stakeholders frequently change, maintaining and continuing to build relationships requires on-going focus. Structural and strategic measures to 'ride out' changes in personnel are critical for the ongoing effectiveness of programs and services, along with continued investment in interpersonal relationships across organisational staff.

Stakeholders reported strengthened relationships between the CJG and Police and both parties reported better outcomes as a result (discussed in [Chapter 4](#)). Similarly, the collaboration between the CJG, the AHC, GEBIE and NT Community Corrections has grown, with respective organisations working to understand one another's needs and obligations and work within agreed parameters. Through the CJG's case management practice, relationships with many other organisations/groups have been established and/or strengthened. Examples of organisations now collaborating to address clients' social justice issues and support them to adhere to their sentencing orders include: the Elders Visiting Program, NT AOD, the Men's Shed, legal services, local radio, ALC rangers, Families as First Teachers, the MJD Foundation and Bush Fit.

²⁴ Crundell, I. 2024. *Review of Groote Archipelago Alcohol Management*, <https://anindilyakwa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Alcohol-Review-Report.pdf>

LJG (and other CJG) members had become pivotal in collaborations that occurred in connection with Local and Community Court activities which involved the judiciary, court officers, defence lawyers, prosecutors, NT Community Corrections and other stakeholders (such as GEBIE, NT AOD, the AHC and Police). Stakeholders were very positive about their interactions which they reported to be informative, respectful and productive. The Judges²⁵ presiding over Community Court routinely facilitated 'stakeholder meetings' in which justice-related matters were discussed and information was provided by participating agencies. The meetings were well received, with stakeholders making comments like, *"it's a great space to have the opportunity to talk about what people are doing. For the Judge to provide time to do this, it's really valuable. It's the only place I have ever seen this happen"*. As a structural measure, the Judge overseeing the Community Court at its inception also reviewed the Practice Direction for Community Courts. The review nominated adaptations for the consideration by the Chief Judge for its next iteration that would maintain the established and desired practice and culture within Community Court processes. Similarly, the development and distribution of a short training video for lawyers, prosecutors and other stakeholders new to Community Court, which sets out how it operates and why, was identified as a useful tool in maintaining the desired practices and culture.

The CJG, as discussed, had also contributed purposefully to referral and service design and delivery of the AHC, and through providing logistical support for clients to attend AHC events. Overall, the AHC had invested in re-setting and (re)establishing productive relationships with stakeholders. On occasion, however, it encountered barriers with organisations that, on the one hand, indicated a willingness to collaborate in service delivery, while on the other hand, had not initiated any demonstrable action.

The CJG, AHC and Community Court and Aboriginal social justice

The people of Groote Eylandt can make changes. They are at the forefront of self-determination and self-governance.

We now have a voice. We can speak for ourselves and tell our own stories.

More and more people are keen to go to Community Court because people know that they have a better chance of being heard than in Local Court... In Local Court, they're just seen as their crime, but in Community Court, they are seen and heard as a person.

So often I sit with a client and I think 'you are amazing and if only the Judge could see that'. [The Community Court is] the first time in my legal career for Court to see that and learn about who a person is and this is leading to better outcomes for clients.

The justice reinvestment initiatives on Groote Eylandt were hard won community initiatives which were introduced with the bipartisan support of the NTG. The community wanted different justice outcomes and options, including through opportunities for offenders to serve sentences and rehabilitate on country. They have been committed to making decisions to effect change for the Anindilyakwa.

Stakeholders in the evaluation were consistent in their views that the justice reinvestment initiatives on Groote Eylandt were important, progressive and improved Aboriginal social justice outcomes for the Anindilyakwa. Stakeholders agreed that the Community Court, with the involvement of the LJG, has enabled a more just and fairer judicial system for Aboriginal people. For the first time, many offenders, victims, their respective families and the Elders feel heard and understood, and simultaneously, understand and participate in the justice

²⁵ During the evaluation there were two Judges presiding over Community Court.

system. The LJG members felt respected and recognised by the justice system and participated in a “*real*” and meaningful way. As one stakeholder commented, “*the Community Court is a joining of two worlds, both law systems joining together. It would be hard if this process was taken away now*”.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This evaluation explored the Community Justice Group (CJG) and the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre (AHC) justice re-investment initiatives on Groote Eylandt. The work of the CJG in the Community Court, and court support more generally, has progressed well. Law and Justice Group (LJG) members are skilled, equipped and confident leaders and effectively perform their role and responsibilities. They are widely respected and are meeting the needs, priorities and expectations of the community. The work of Peacemakers has led to a de-escalation of conflict in the community and contributed to a reduction in offending. As a strategic investment in social justice in the Archipelago, ongoing recruitment of CJG members will be necessary. Capacity development activities in areas such as mediation and trauma-informed approaches will also be necessary to further strengthen their skill sets and confidence. In addition to the work of the CJG on country, there is value in exploring and addressing offending by people from Groote Eylandt in other places.

Since commencement of operations, DASA has navigated many challenges to establish the AHC. Starting as a day program, DASA developed (and continues to develop) a program that focusses on changing offending behaviour and which is based on best practice, evidence and Anindilyakwa cultural values. The design and delivery of the services at the AHC has involved Anindilyakwa leadership through the CJG and the employment of local Aboriginal staff. Moving forward, maintaining the meaningful contribution and involvement of the CJG in the AHC is essential and should remain a priority. Similarly, with the AHC making the transition to a residential program and functioning as an Alternative to Custody, DASA must clearly articulate its practice model, define program activities that are responsive to client goals and needs, and continue to maintain and build stakeholder relations. Creating and monitoring a communications plan will be important for bringing a system level focus to a highly dynamic and challenging operational environment.

Recorded crime on Groote Eylandt almost halved over the past 5 years and the justice re-investment initiatives have been important contributors to that reduction. The initiatives are progressive and are underpinned by the core strengths of respected and active leadership, stakeholder goodwill, commitment and hope. The initiatives are further enhanced by the staff and leaders engaging in critically reflective practice and by the legal and policy frameworks which empower LJG members to exercise their cultural authority. The initiatives have advanced the objectives of the Anindilyakwa people to determine service delivery models that work best for them. They have increased Anindilyakwa involvement and leadership in the justice system, with early indicators demonstrating success. If this trajectory is continued, the social justice outcomes for the Anindilyakwa look promising.

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Appendix 1: Timeline of key events



Appendix 2: NTAJA aims, commitments and actions specific to the evaluation

Aim 1: to reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians	
Commitment	Establish and offer alternatives to custody
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish, maintain, and offer alternatives to custody for Aboriginal offenders in the Northern Territory. ▪ Ensure that Aboriginal Territorians are involved in the governance, oversight and operation of alternatives to custody and implementation of services. ▪ Monitor and evaluate alternatives to custody and ensure they meet the needs of Aboriginal Territorians and the Northern Territory Government to achieve the aims of the Agreement.
Commitment	Establish Community Courts
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and establish Community Courts in consultation with Aboriginal communities, members of the judiciary and other relevant legal entities. ▪ Ensure pre-sentencing reports are prepared for all Aboriginal offenders before a Community Court to identify the behaviours and causes of their offending to assist in their rehabilitation. ▪ Provide Community Courts with improved sentencing options
Aim 2: to engage and support Aboriginal leadership	
Commitment	Establish and support Law and Justice Groups
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a process for the assessment and selection of Law and Justice Groups. ▪ Partner with local Aboriginal leaders and respected persons to co-design models for the operation of each Law and Justice Group. ▪ Deliver training and information to Law and Justice Group members. ▪ Establish and support Law and Justice Groups across the Northern Territory. ▪ Develop a Local Action Plan for each Law and Justice Group.

Appendix 3: Key Inquiry Questions and methods of data collection

Table 4: Community Justice Group inquiry areas, questions and methods

Community Justice Group							
Data collection methods	Document analysis	Administrative data analysis	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions	Informal interviews	Surveys	Participant observation
Questions							
1. Processes							
1. Are CJGs able to address the law and justice priorities identified by community?							
2. Are CJG members skilled and equipped to perform their roles and responsibilities?							
3. Do Aboriginal people gain paid employment and have opportunities to enhance their skills?							
4. Are community members satisfied with the CJGs and Community Courts? Do they have increased confidence in the justice system?							
2. Leadership							
1. Are Community Justice Group members seen as role models and mentors in their communities?							
2. Do community members have a say in how victims, offenders and their families are supported in their interactions with the justice system?							
3. Is the Cultural authority of Aboriginal Elders and respected persons recognised through Community Court sentencing processes?							
4. Safety							
1. How has the CJG contributed to changing patterns of offending?							

Table 5: Anindilyakwa Healing Centre inquiry areas, questions and methods

Alternative to Custody							
Data collection methods	Document analysis	Administrative data analysis	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions	Informal interviews	Surveys	Participant observation
Questions							
A. Community							
1. Do community members have a say in how victims, offenders and their families are supported in their interactions with the justice system?							
2. Are Aboriginal people recognised through paid employment and opportunities to enhance their skills?							
B. Referrals							
1. Are the judiciary, government agencies, non-government organisations and Aboriginal Territorians aware of the referral pathways to alternatives to custody?							
2. Have there been opportunities for employment and training?							
3. Are appropriate community-based alternatives to custody the default consideration when sentencing Aboriginal offenders?							
C. Completion and cultural (re)engagement							
1. How many people complete the ATC program?							
2. What are the main barriers to completion?							
3. What supports help people to complete (e.g. alcohol services)?							
4. Are ATC participants engaging or re-engaging with culture, via the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre, and via other programs and organisations?							
D. Safety							
1. Is Groote Eylandt experiencing an increase in safety?							

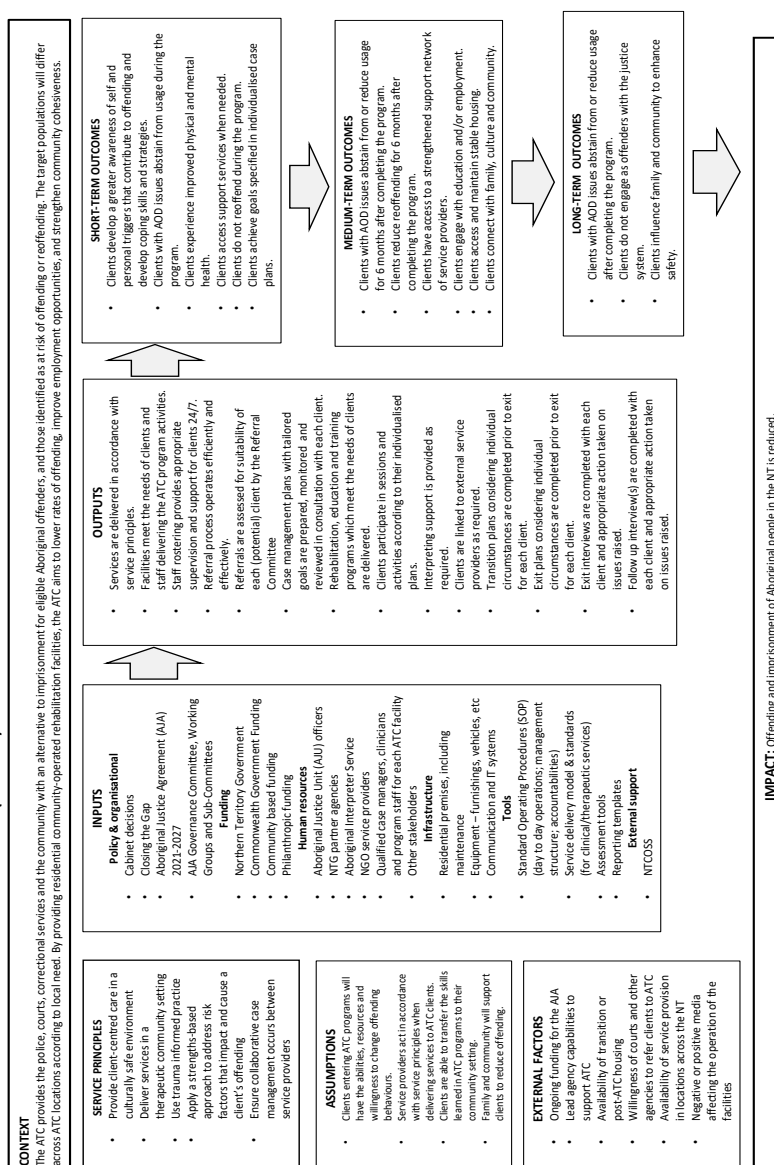
2. How has offending and imprisonment of Groote Eylanders altered?							
3. What are the longitudinal experiences of people who offend post-ATC (employment/education, housing, re-offending)?							

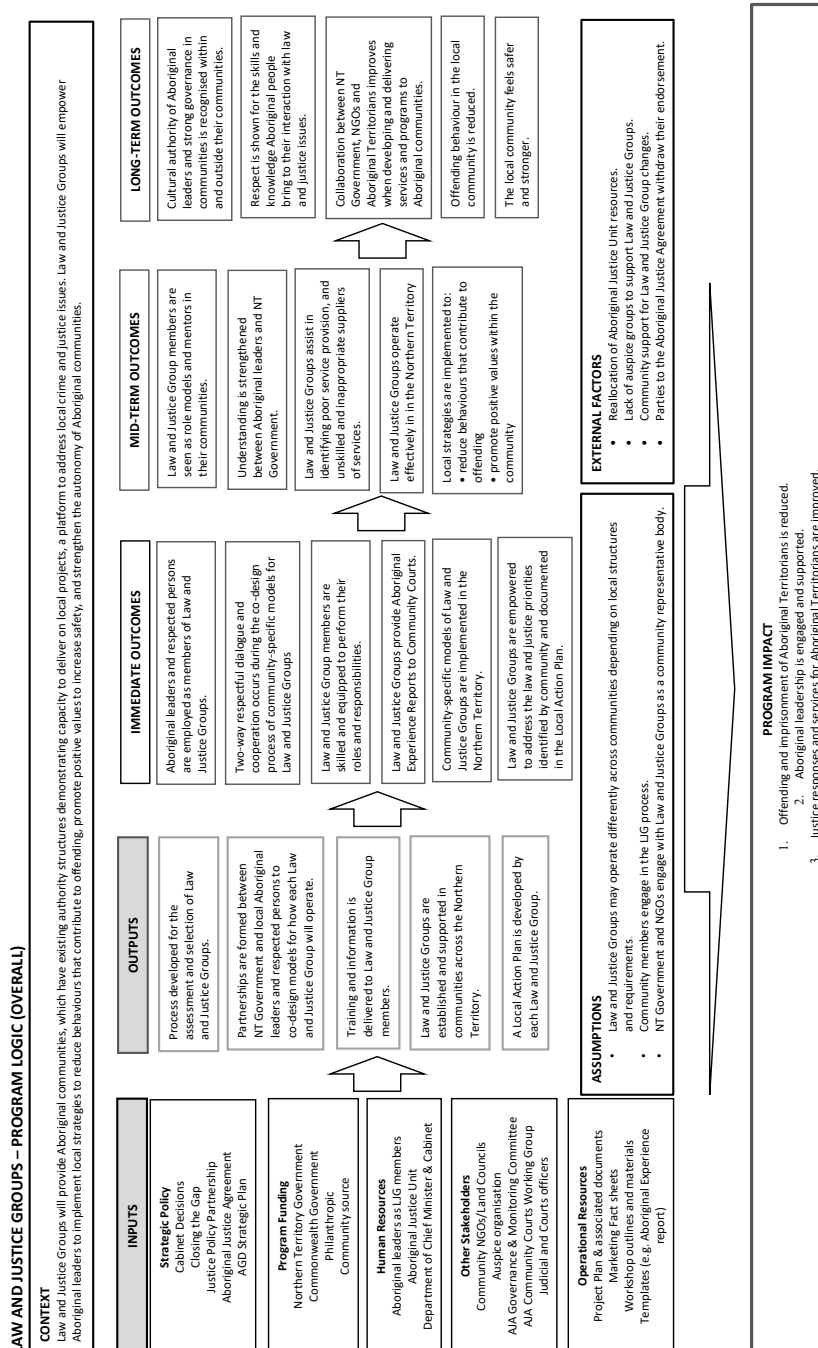
Table 6: The broader justice ecosystem inquiry areas, questions and methods

A. Improvements/changes to the broader justice ecosystem in the Northern Territory							
Data collection methods	Document analysis	Administrative data analysis	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions	Informal interviews	Surveys	Participant observation
Questions							
1. To what extent did collaboration improve among NT Government, NGOs and Aboriginal Territorians to develop and deliver services and programs to Aboriginal people?							
2. What emerges when considering this issue via an Aboriginal social justice lens?							

Appendix 4: NTG generic program logics for Alternative to Custody and Law and Justice Groups

ALTERNATIVES TO CUSTODY – PROGRAM LOGIC (OVERALL)





Appendix 5: Ethics protocol



Ethics Protocol

CHC recognises there are important ethical considerations when undertaking an evaluation. These considerations have shaped the evaluation design, including our over-arching approach and methods, and seek to mitigate and prevent potential harm to stakeholders involved in the evaluation.

Our team will use a trauma-informed and culturally safe approach, and with respect and sensitivity, will seek to understand stakeholders' views and experiences within their own lived world. Where appropriate, we will invite stakeholders to have a support person with them and will work alongside a local Community Researcher to facilitate warm introductions and provide translation support. Similarly, we will work alongside AHC staff to facilitate warm introductions to clients.

We will:

- Request and use only de-identified administrative data;
- Inform stakeholders about the evaluation and invite their participation;
- Provide/offer the Information Sheet that summaries the evaluation and stakeholder/CHC rights and responsibilities;
- Provide a verbal overview of the Information Sheet content;
- Invite stakeholders to ask questions and provide answers;
- Inform stakeholders that participation is voluntary;
- Discuss confidentiality and anonymity;
- Obtain informed consent, either verbal and/or written;
- Remind stakeholders they do not need answer particular question/s;
- Advise stakeholders they can pause or terminate the interview at any time;
- Remind stakeholders of the value of their participation;
- Monitor for signs of stakeholder distress and act appropriately, including linking the person to suitable support;
- Advise the Steering Committee of any issues or concerns that emerge; and
- Adhere to all health and safety directives when visiting Groote Eylandt and the AHC.

Approval to visit Groote Eylandt for the evaluation has been confirmed by the ALC (27th May, 2024). A formal permit was not required.

Catherine Holmes Consulting

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Appendix 6: Offending data

The data reported in this Appendix has been provided by the NT Attorney-General's Department, Criminal Justice Research, Evaluation and Statistics Unit on 17 July 2025.

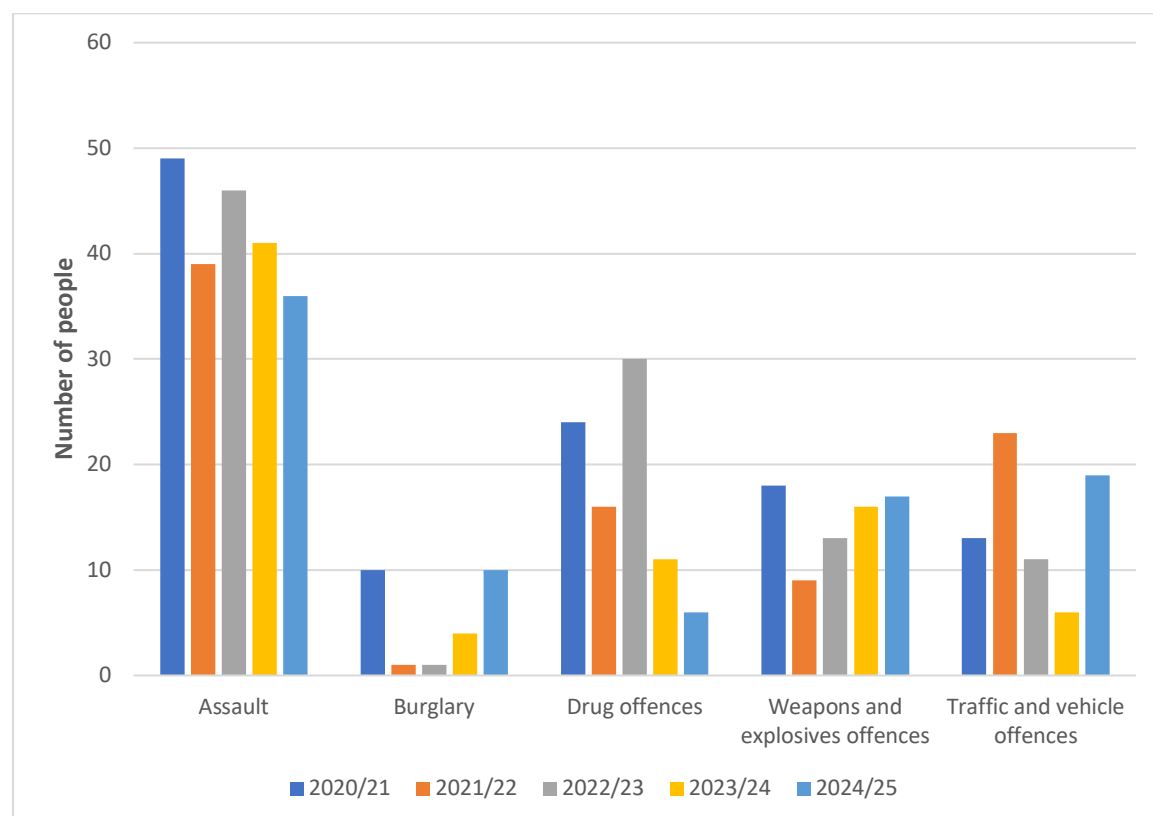


Figure 7: Number of Aboriginal defendants charged for selected types of offending on Groote Eylandt, July 2020 to June 2025, by year, by most serious offence type

Note:

1. Data relates to defendants that offended on Groote Eylandt. The defendants may be from Groote Eylandt or another location.
2. The selected types of offending presented include the offence types with the highest number for the period.

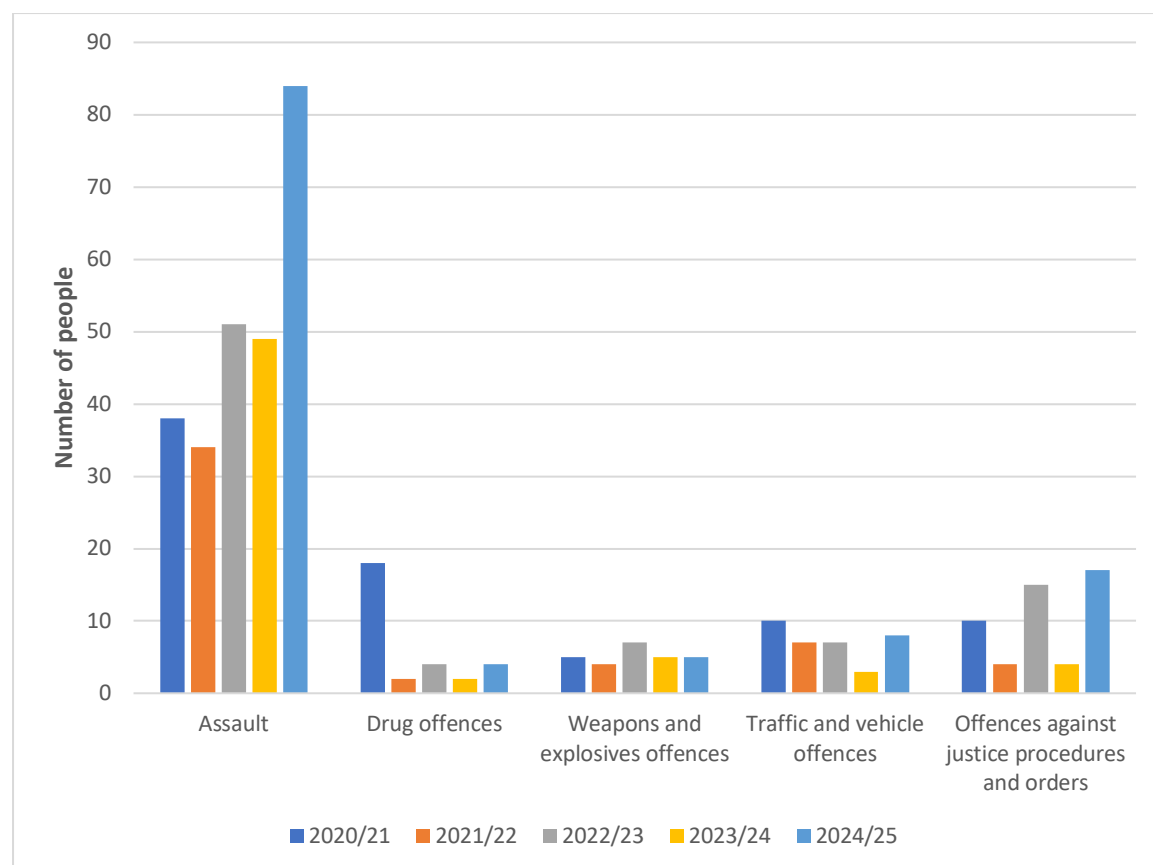


Figure 8: Number of Aboriginal defendants from Groote Eylandt charged for selected types of offending off Groote Eylandt, July 2020 - June 2025, by year, by most serious offence type

Note:

1. Data includes defendants that offended off Groote Eylandt with their last known address recorded as Groote Eylandt.
2. The selected types of offending presented include the offence types with the highest number for the period.

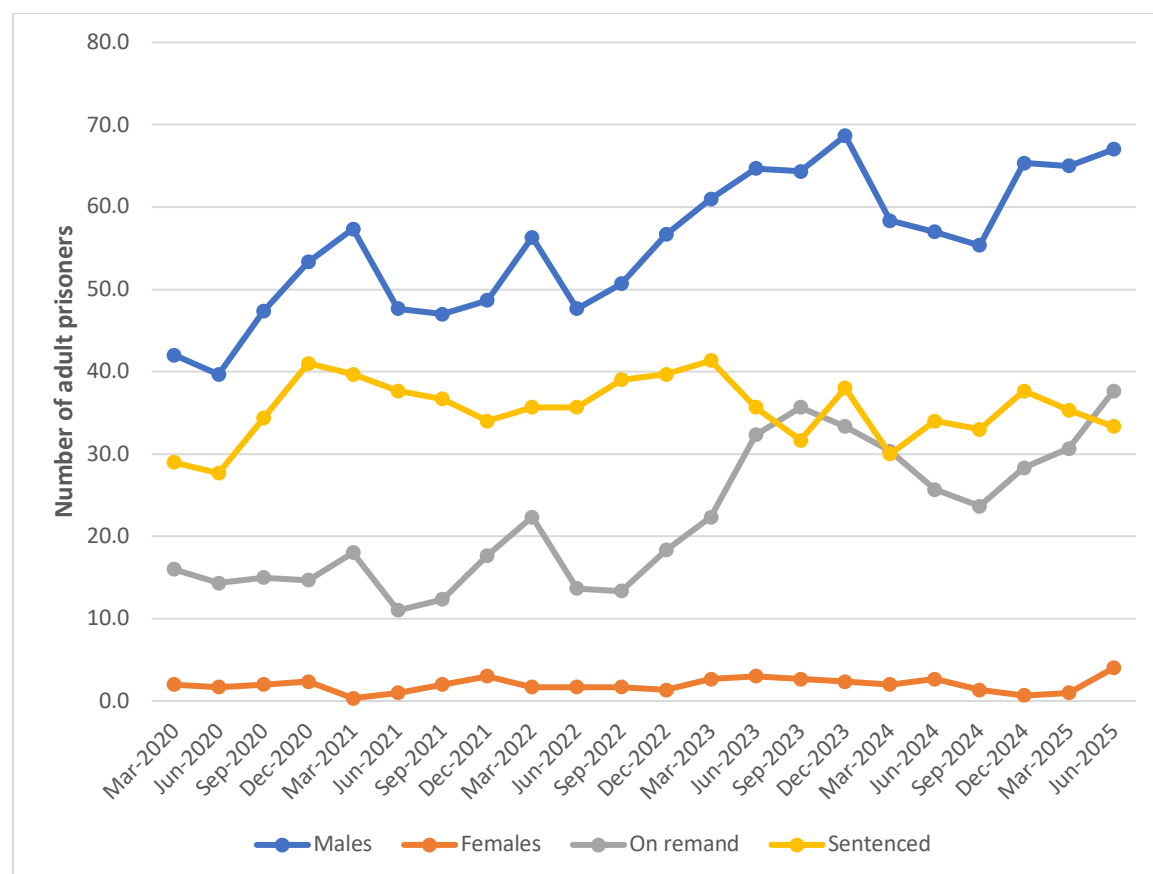


Figure 9: Adult Aboriginal prisoners from Groote Eylandt, March 2020 - June 2025, by total, gender, remand and sentenced

Notes

1. There were no non-Aboriginal female prisoners from the Groote Archipelago for the period reported. There were fewer than 1 non-Aboriginal male prisoners during quarters in 2020 and 2023.
2. Counts of prisoners are taken on the last day of the month.
3. To determine quarterly figures, the monthly data has been averaged.
4. Data should not be added, as many of the same individuals are present in different quarters.

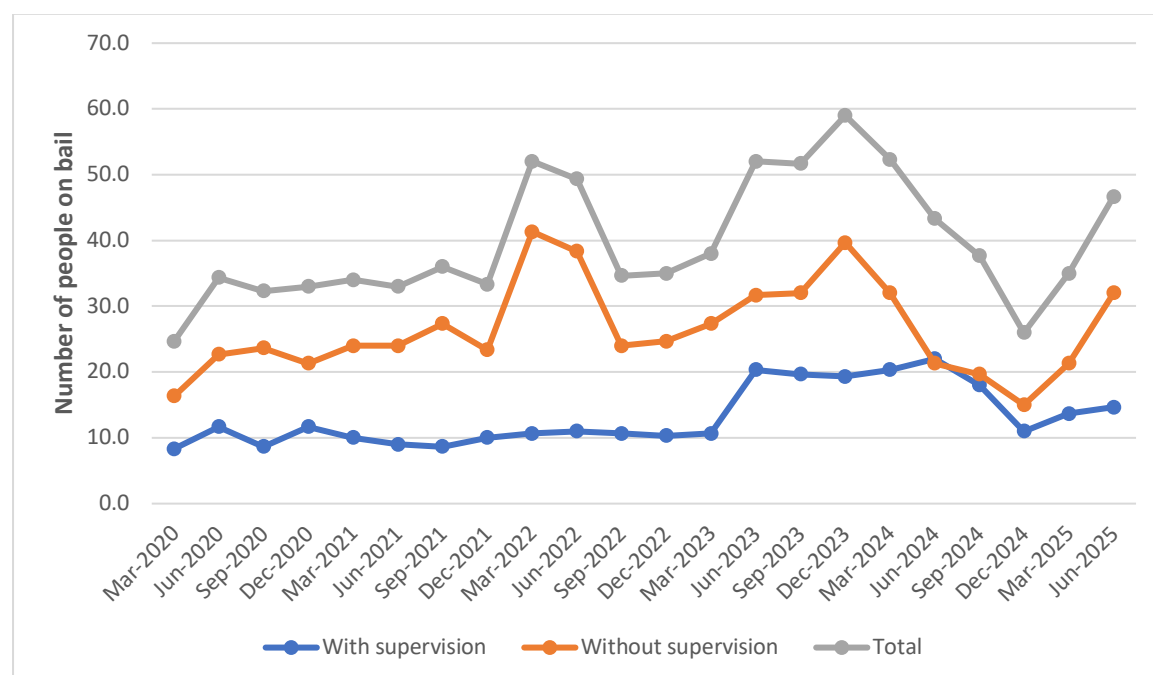


Figure 10: Number of adults from Groote Eylandt on bail, March 2020 to June 2025, by Department of Corrections supervision

Notes

1. Data includes people that were: bailed from the Alyangula Local Court (regardless of where resident); or are from the Groote Archipelago and bailed from any court in the NT; or bailed from any court in the NT specifically to the Groote Archipelago.
2. The number of people on bail are counted on the last day of the month.
3. Quarterly figures are based on an average of three months.
4. Data should not be added as many of the same people are present in subsequent quarters.

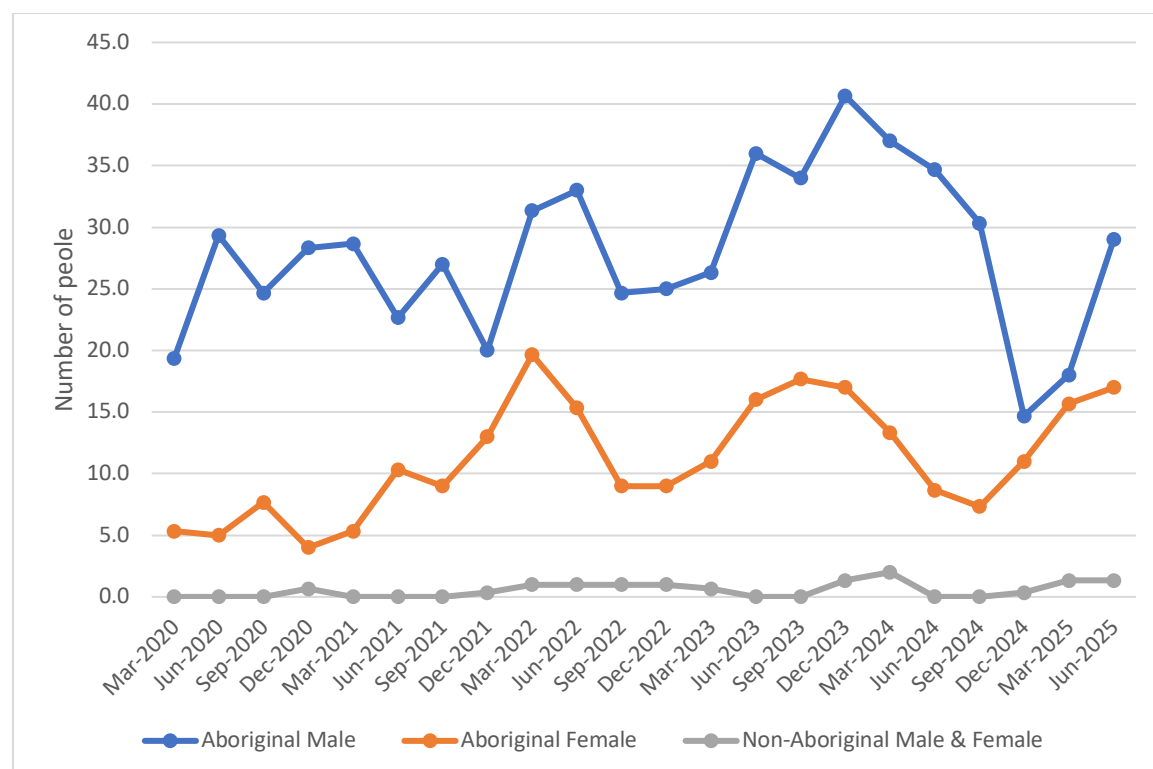


Figure 11: Number of adults from Groote Eylandt on bail, March 2020 to June 2025, by Aboriginality and gender

Notes

1. Data includes people that were: bailed from the Alyangula Local Court (regardless of where resident); or are from the Groote Archipelago and bailed from any court in the NT; or bailed from any court in the NT specifically to the Groote Archipelago.
2. The number of people on bail are counted on the last day of the month.
3. Quarterly figures are based on an average of three months.
4. Data should not be added as many of the same people are present in subsequent quarters.

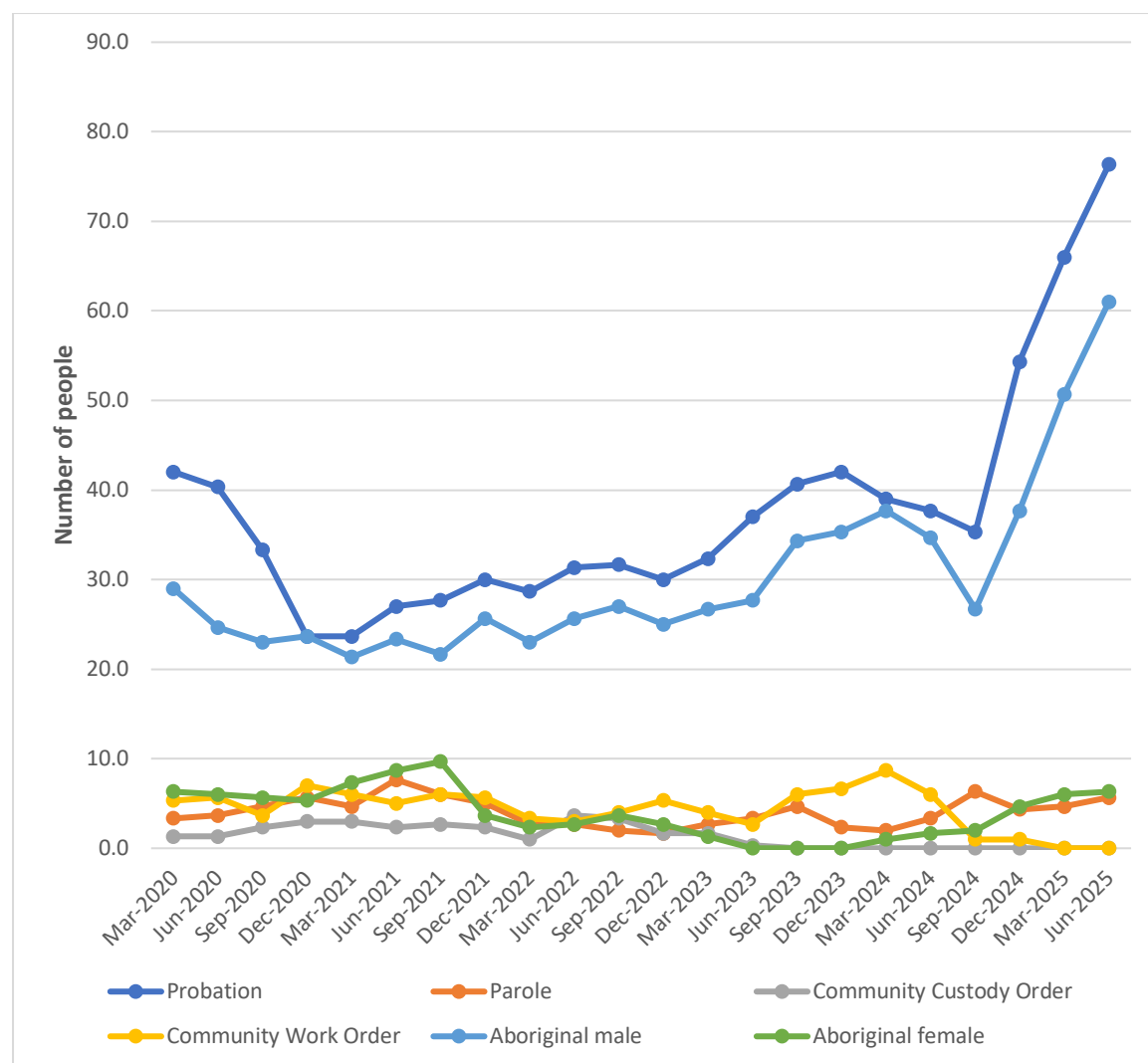


Figure 12: Number of Aboriginal adults with active Community Based Corrections (CBC) orders, March 2020 to June 2025, by order type and by gender

Notes

1. Count of offenders serving CBC orders are taken on the last day of the month. Quarterly figures are based on an average of the 3 months.
2. Probation includes the following orders: Bond, Good Behaviour Order, Suspended Sentence of Detention Order, Suspended Sentence of Imprisonment, Community Correction Order and Intensive Correction Order.
3. The sum of CBC orders may be greater than the number of unique individuals as some offenders may have multiple orders.
4. These are counts of offenders managed by NT Department of Corrections on Groote Eylandt
5. Data excludes people on bail.
6. There were no non-Aboriginal offenders with active CBC orders except in the September and December quarters of 2021 and the June quarter of 2025.

Appendix 7: Professional development (PD) and training opportunities for CJG members and/or staff

Type of training/PD/skills development	Rationale
Trauma-informed practice	Lived experience of trauma and/or being Aboriginal in themselves do not necessarily equip a person to engage in a safe and trauma-informed manner. The CJG recognised the need for professional development in this area for both CJG members and staff to promote trauma-informed interview techniques, particularly in connection with AERs and case management, to safely explore offending behaviours at a deeper level.
Mediation training	Stakeholders, including the CJG, agreed that mediation training would add value to existing skills and build confidence and capacity, particularly non-CJG peacemakers.
Supervision of offenders	Sentences handed down at Community Court include those that ascribe offender supervision responsibility to LJC members. Practices and processes for managing this effectively must be established as a priority to meet the expectations of the Court and properly support offenders. This was a priority matter for the ALC's CJG.
Domestic, family and sexual violence	Understanding the various forms of domestic, family and sexual violence, and the mechanisms by which violence is normalised and reproduced, are critical to strengthening the capacity of the CJG to support victims and bring about desired social justice changes.
Management of vicarious trauma	The work of the CJG routinely exposed members to traumatic events and it was recognised that CJG members themselves may have experienced trauma in their own lives. Understanding what vicarious trauma is and its impacts, along with management strategies, are important to the health, safety and wellbeing of CJG members and staff. The ALC had progressed a draft policy and procedures relating to vicarious trauma and were exploring running a workshop, ' <i>Kings Narrative</i> ', which is focussed on healing from trauma.
Meeting procedures	While CJG members were strong contributors at meetings, they often did not chair them, and this was perceived to be related to confidence. In response, the ALC CJG were initiating an in-house program, starting with small group meetings.
Mock courts	The NTG AGD had delivered mock courts as part of training of new LJC members and the CJG was enthusiastic about the strategy as a way to build confidence in new LJC members and promote consistency in approaches among the LJC group.

**Case management
framework**

The CJG were developing a case management framework to guide practices that are more efficient and empowering, applying a step-up/step-down principle that enables clients to do things for themselves when they are capable and receive appropriate and targeted support.