

Open Hearts, Open Hands: A Spiritual Journey of Change

Evaluating change in the provision of mental health and drug and alcohol services to Nyoongar families in the south-east metropolitan corridor of Perth, Western Australia



A handbook produced as part of the



LOOKING FORWARD PROJECT
'Culture is the pathway to wellbeing'

Ngaala kaaditj Wadjuk moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja.

In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge Wadjuk people as the original custodians of this land, Perth Western Australia.

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LOOKING FORWARD PROJECT
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In collaboration with
Ruah Community Services



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Table of Contents

Open Hearts, Open Hands: A Spiritual Journey of Change	3
Foreword	5
Looking Forward Project Team: Our Mob	6
How to use the Handbook	9
Nyoongar to English Translation of Terms	10
Glossary	11
Acronyms and Abbreviations	12
Your Participation Agreement: A Commitment to ‘Working Together’	13
Section One: Foundation Practices	15
Assessing the landscape	15
Uncovering the story: Engaging silenced voices	16
The Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework	18
Being Nyoongar: Yarning with Elders	21
Reciprocity: holding and being held	23
Exploring the inner self	25
Holding and Being Held	26
Section Two: A Spiritual Journey of Change	28
Working Together: A decolonizing practice	28
Working Together: Organizational change	31
A participatory evaluation methodology	31
Data collection	33
Self-reflective survey	34
Team-based focus groups	34
Baseline data questions (your service snapshot)	34
Telling your story: mapping your spiritual journey of change	35
Data analysis	38
The <i>Open Hearts, Open Hands</i> journey	39
Process One: Participatory Organizational Assessment	40
Service-based systems change	40
Governance	41
Management / Leadership	42
Workforce	44
Communications	46
Resourcing	48
Work Ethos / Culture	50
Team-based clinical work practices	51
Everyone as partners.....	54
Trusting relationships	56

Shared understanding through a common language.....	57
Tolerance of uncertainty	58
Process Two: the <i>Looking Forward</i> project evaluation	61
Connecting the Dots: Translating our story of change for others	61
Summary: Taking up your spiritual journey of change	62

Figures

<i>Figure 1. The Looking Forward Project team (from left): Michael Wright, Tanya Jones, Elder Margaret Culbong, Margaret O'Connell and Danny Ford, Sydney 2012.</i>	7
<i>Figure 2. Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework, endorsed by Nyoongar Elders for the Looking Forward Project in 2012.</i>	18
<i>Figure 3. The expansive nature of the reciprocal teaching-learning relationship between Elders and service providers.</i>	24
<i>Figure 4. The four 'Working Together' ethical principles enacted through a Nyoongar worldview.</i> ..	30
<i>Figure 5. The Looking Forward Project's PAR process has helped to build our project story so far.</i>	32
<i>Figure 6. Organizational Assessment planning elements.</i>	33
<i>Figure 7. Capturing your story through observation, description and writing.</i>	37
<i>Figure 8. Four inclusive work practices based on the Finnish Open Dialogue method.</i>	52

Foreword

As Nyoongar Cultural Consultants who have been involved in the Looking Forward Project for the past two years we are very pleased with this edition of the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* handbook. The release of the handbook is the culmination of two and half years work. Given the ongoing seriousness of mental health issues in the Nyoongar community both the evaluation and this handbook are timely. The purpose of the handbook is to provide cultural and technical direction for mental health service providers engaged in the evaluation. As Nyoongar consultants we are particularly satisfied that the principles underpinning the handbook are premised on Nyoongar law and culture. Importantly, the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework, designed to assist Wadjellas to understand the cultural aspects fundamental to working with Nyoongar people, is the centerpiece of the handbook. The handbook, we believe, will greatly assist service providers, for it will provide them with a cultural map for assessing every step of their assessment journey. The handbook is primarily intended for service providers involved in the project, but given the scope presented in the document, policy and program makers would also find it useful.

Needless to say, there is an air of expectation that positive changes will occur both during and after the evaluation. Improvement in mental health service delivery, is long overdue and desperately needed, for the Nyoongar community continues to experience too much unnecessary suffering. On a positive note we are very pleased and encouraged with the willingness and enthusiasm shown by service providers involved in the evaluation. The mere fact that service providers have signed up to project signifies that they are committed to change to ensure everyone can access their services. This is very encouraging. We are very committed to staying involved in the project, and with supporting service providers and the project team with the evaluation to ensure outcomes that benefit Nyoongar people are realized. Although we are quietly confident that change will occur, we will nevertheless, be watching and evaluating for we are determined that positive change needs to happen for our community. Finally, as the Nyoongar Consultants for the project we are very pleased to give our endorsement to the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* handbook.

Margaret Culbong
Nyoongar Elder

Mr Danny Ford
Nyoongar Consultant

Looking Forward Project Team: Our Mob

We are three Nyoongars and two Wadjellas. It was Dr Michael Wright who initially brought the Looking Forward Project to life, following on from his PhD work investigating the care giving experiences of Aboriginal people affected by mental illness. Michael is a Yuat Nyoongar man. His family is from the Moora and New Norcia area. He has worked as a hospital social worker and mental health manager and shares many stories about his experiences in these settings to those engaged in this project, in particular service providers.

Danny Ford joined Michael in the early preparations of the project and in discussions with the Aboriginal community. Danny is a Nyoongar man with connections to Wadjuk, Ballardong and Yuat clans. Having worked in government for 29 years in child protection, family support, housing and training, Danny has brought a unique breadth of knowledge to the Looking Forward project. As the Looking Forward project progressed into 2012, we met with a small group of Aboriginal people to discuss the themes that arose from the community forums held in 2011. It was during these discussions that we were joined by Aunty Margaret Culbong, a Nyoongar Elder from the Wadjuk clan; in fact, her great grandmother was born in Kings Park. She also has connections to the Ballardong and Wagyl Kaip clans.

Aunty Margaret has been our cultural mentor and supporter ever since. She began her career as an enrolled nurse, working with Aboriginal communities in both the Kimberley and the Murchison Gascoyne regions. Over the past 40 years she has worked both within government and Aboriginal organisations to develop health services, raising the profile of Aboriginal health needs throughout Western Australia. Aunty Margaret continues to be an agent of change for her community regarding housing, welfare, legal assistance and family support. It is this depth of experience and knowledge, both of the health sector and of her community, that Aunty Margaret brings to the project.

In the early stages of preparing for the 2011 community forums, Tanya Jones joined the team, firstly as a notetaker, then as a contributor to the research process. Tanya is a Wadjella woman born and raised in Perth. She has previously worked on research projects in the areas of child and adolescent health promotion and chronic disease self-management. Tanya has embraced the participatory ethos of the project and become an integral member of the team, as well as developing close ties with the Nyoongar community during this time.

It was during the Community Steering Group preparations that Marg O'Connell joined the project team. Marg co-facilitated the focus group sessions alongside Danny and quickly settled into the team with her background in education and experience in participatory action research (PAR). Marg is a Wadjella woman born in Perth and raised in the south-west.



Figure 1. The Looking Forward Project team (from left): Michael Wright, Tanya Jones, Elder Margaret Culbong, Margaret O'Connell and Danny Ford, Sydney 2012.

Together, we have yarned, reflected and yarned some more to deepen our understanding of mental health experiences of Nyoongar peoples. We have captured much of our yarning in the Foundation Practices, the first section of this handbook. Section two is a guide to planning your work with Nyoongar Elders and the community and capturing your own yarning as you build the foundations for your ongoing relationships with Nyoongar peoples.

We thank Aunty Margaret for providing the title of this handbook, *Open Hearts, Open Hands: A Spiritual Journey of Change*, which emerged from our preparations for the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* Workshop held in November 2012, where Nyoongar Elders came together with service providers for the first time.

In addition, we sincerely thank our critical readers for their insightful comments and frank feedback on earlier versions of this handbook; Sheryl Carmody, Pat Dudgeon, Heath Greville, Helen Lynes, Brian McCoy, Glenn Pearson, and Fiona Stanley, together with Danny Ford and Aunty Margaret Culbong.

Lastly, but by no means least, we extend our appreciation and thanks to our Ruah partners, in particular Sheryl Carmody, Maxine Drake and Reg Henry, who helped

manage the project and the initial engagement of service providers in the south-east metropolitan corridor. We are grateful for their ongoing support and advocacy for the Project.

How to use the Handbook

We have written this Handbook in a conversational style as a way to guide you into an understanding about the complexities and uniqueness of working with Nyoongar peoples. There is such intricacy in forming and developing relationships with Nyoongar people. The handbook can introduce you into this space through some of the cultural mechanisms inherent in Nyoongar culture.

Sit and take your time when reading this handbook; digest it, question and reflect on its messages. Note your thoughts in the margins, highlight sections of interest, circle passages for further reflection.

We have offered you a Glossary of terms and concepts that provide some basis for understanding Nyoongar culture. It is a place to start building your understanding and prepare you to work together with Nyoongar families, and Elders in particular.

This handbook won't make you an expert on working with Nyoongar peoples; it is the beginning of a means to reach that point in the longer term.

There are times when you'll read sections and reflect on your own, and other times when you may discuss some points with your colleagues and others. We encourage you to use this handbook as a conversation starter and as a reflective tool.

Enjoy the read; allow yourself to be challenged and embrace the journey.

Nyoongar to English Translation of Terms

Please note there are various ways to spell Nyoongar words. Our spelling is based on advice received from Nyoongar Elders with whom we have worked throughout the Project to date (2011-2013) as well as the *First Noongar Dictionary* (Whitehurst 1992).

Boodja	Country, Land
Ballardong	A clan of the Nyoongar nation based east of Northam taking in the township of Merredin.
Kaart	Head
Koort	Heart
Minditj	Sick
Mia mia, maya, Kullark	Camp, House
Moondang-ak Kaaradjiny	Carers of Everything, the Nyoongar creation story.
Moorditj	Good, strong
Moorny	non-Aboriginal person of non-Anglo Saxon descent.
Moort	Family
Nidja	Here, look, what's over there.
Nyetting	Time of freezing cold (refer to <i>Moondang-ak Kaaradjiny</i>).
Nyining	Sitting, staying here, being there.
Nyoongar	The collective name for groups of Aboriginal people living in the Southwest of Western Australia.
Wadjella, Nyidiyang	non-Aboriginal person of Anglo-Saxon descent.
Wadjuk	A clan of the Nyoongar nation, living in the Perth metropolitan area.

Wandju, Kiah	Welcome
Warrkinying	Talking
Waugal, Wagyl	Rainbow Serpent
Wagyl Kaip	A clan of the Nyoongar nation, living in the Great South area of Western Australia, which takes in the township of Albany.
Yuat	A clan of the Nyoongar nation living to the North of Perth, which takes in the townships of Moora and New Norcia.

Glossary

Boodja	A Nyoongar word meaning 'Country' or 'Land'. For Nyoongar people, <i>Boodja</i> is more than a geographical location; it is a spiritual connection to, and relationship with, the Mother, the Land.
Colonization	The ideology of colonization, through the use of power, enforces a rule of living which oppresses and excludes those who are dispossessed of their land.
Decolonization	Decolonization is a process, not an outcome; it involves an ongoing discussion between those who are beneficiaries of colonialist practices and those who have been impacted by colonization. One of the key objectives of decolonization is to reconstruct and rewrite the discourses and practices that reinforce the principles of colonization to include those silenced voices ¹ .
Nyoongar Elder	Nyoongar Elders are recognized as the traditional holders of culture and traditions, and they are important

¹ Tiffin H, 2006, 'Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd Edn, Eds Ashcroft B, Griffiths G & H Tiffin, Routledge, London, pp. 99-101.

custodians of that history and spirituality. Through the Elders people are introduced to the kinship system and the land. Through the Elders telling the stories they also reveal the relationships people need to have if they are to experience the land in a spiritual way. The Elders are the link with the past to help bridge into the future.

Nyoongar Spirituality²

Nyoongar spirituality refers to the deep and personal relationships that Nyoongar people have developed with the Land, *Boodja*, over many generations. These relationships draw people beyond human experience and are nurtured by the Elders.

Nyoongar Storytelling

Nyoongar storytelling emphasizes the importance of relationships that link people and the Land across generations. It values the human relationship in this link and it strengthens the use of oral history through memory.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

TICHR	Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
MHC	Mental Health Commission (WA)
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CREAHW	Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
PAR	Participatory Action Research

² We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Brian McCoy.

Your Participation Agreement: A Commitment to ‘Working Together’

As per your signed Participation Agreement, we reiterate the key attitudes that are critical to the success of your *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey.

These key attitudes insist that you be prepared to:

1. Acknowledge that mainstream services currently do not sufficiently meet the needs of the local Nyoongar community.
2. Explore and learn new ways to improve mainstream services so that they are more relevant for the local Nyoongar community.
3. Be open and willing to learn new ways of relating to the local Nyoongar community under the guidance of the Looking Forward team and the local Nyoongar Elders.
4. Actively participate in building meaningful relationships that secures trust with the local Nyoongar community.
5. Work collaboratively with the Nyoongar community so that genuine long-term partnerships can be established.
6. Engage in new and innovative ways and to let go of your usual ways of thinking and operating.
7. Work with humility by becoming learners and allowing the Nyoongar Elders to be your teachers.

Wandju Wandju Nidja Nyoongar Wadjuk Boodjar

Welcome, welcome here to Nyoongar *Wadjuk* Country.

The Looking Forward Project tells the story of how Nyoongar peoples want to see change in the provision of mental health services in the south-east metropolitan corridor of Perth. The story begins with a question: “What do we want to see change in mental health services in our community?” And as the story unfolds, it captures the unique experiences of Nyoongar peoples and how they live through culture, land and family. The story takes place on Nyoongar country, *Wadjuk boodja*, the land created by the *Waugal* (the spirit serpent) and brought to life out of the *Nyetting* (the time when it was ‘freezing cold’, before the world was formed)³.

Wadjuk boodja extends along the Swan River, south to Fremantle, east to Armadale and north to Upper Swan. The majority of Aboriginal people living in the region where the research is being conducted are Nyoongar people.

So far, we have seen the development of the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework, a way of meaningfully engaging with Nyoongar peoples. Over a period of 12 months we will ask in what ways has your service engaged meaningfully with Nyoongar families, in particular Nyoongar Elders, to bring about systems change to achieve more positive health outcomes.

Our collective purpose is to reframe and grow the mental health sector, by undertaking a critical analysis of the structural systemic constraints of the mental health system. We believe a new paradigm is required if we are to effect real change for Nyoongar people and the mental health system at large. This will only occur if we can effectively decolonize the structures and systems that exclude and disenfranchise Nyoongar peoples.

This handbook consists of two sections. The first is ‘Foundation Practices’. It provides a historical background and rationale to the work required of you as service providers engaged in an Organizational Assessment and is based on a firm commitment to bring about sustainable change in their organizations by dismantling the colonialist structures that have restricted genuine engagement with Nyoongar families. The second section describes the two parallel processes of that will be

³ Please refer to Noel Nannup Karda, 2003, *Moondang-ak Kaaradjiny - The Carers of Everything*.

undertaken as part of the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey itself, that is, your Organizational Assessment and our Evaluation of your assessment process.

In preparing for your spiritual journey of change, we invite you to read this handbook with an open heart and in doing so we have great faith that you will take up this work of change with open hands.

Section One: Foundation Practices

Assessing the landscape

In designing this handbook, we realized that our work on the Looking Forward Project has been a spiritual journey of change. So as we begin, together on this journey it is important that you both realize and understand that the work you are about to embark upon is also a spiritual journey of change. We believe it is a spiritual journey of change, for the journey is not simply about developing an understanding of the needs and aspirations of Nyoongar people, but to bring about exploring at depth the underlying causes and conditions required for change in the provision of mental health services; it is also about deepening relationships with Nyoongar people in order to be open to the teachings of the ways in which the Nyoongar Elders tell of their experiences of the world around them. To learn from Aboriginal people means to encounter and engage with the spiritual dimension of their life. In order to deepen your understanding, you will need to be open to listening and learning. It has been through this listening and learning that we ourselves have been transformed. We are no longer who we were before. Throughout the journey we have been both inspired and challenged and our understandings of the world and our place within it has shifted. On a deeper level, our views and perceptions have been irrevocably changed, we believe, for the better. We have no doubt that you too will have a similar experience as you engage with Nyoongar families and Elders during the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey and beyond.

”
Culture is what heals. If it's held in cultural hands..., then the healing can take place.

Community member, 2012

In this section, we want to remind you of the commitment you made to begin the important work of decolonising your workplace. Understandably, you may, at times doubt your capacity to fulfil this task, and it is certain that you will be challenged along the way, both from within yourself and from external sources. Engaging in this work will require you to move forward in ways different to 'business as usual' and

with courage and determination. It is to be expected that the task of decolonising your workplace will not be straightforward. We believe in you, as do the Nyoongar Elders, so we ask you to also believe in yourself. Importantly, you will not be alone, as the project team and the Nyoongar Elders have made a commitment to support and guide you in this process.

Before you begin your Organisational Assessment proper, it is very important that you read and understand this first section of the handbook, 'Foundation practices'. We believe it will strengthen both your resolve and commitment during your *Open Hearts, Open Hands* spiritual journey. We need you to understand and commit to the spiritual journey of change you will be embarking upon. If you do have any apprehensions or doubts about your ability to fully engage in this process, we encourage you to contact us to discuss your concerns.

Finally, we wish to thank you for making the commitment to truly work together to change and improve the way the mental health services engage with Nyoongar families.

By committing to the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey in this way, you will have a very powerful story to tell. The story begins here.

Uncovering the story: Engaging silenced voices

To determine the mental health needs and concerns of the local Aboriginal community, we conducted 11 community forums from March to December 2011, and held a further 10 community meetings with a smaller cohort of Aboriginal people (i.e. a Community Steering Group) living in the region from January to August 2012. Through our analysis of the community discussions we uncovered the following five key themes:

1. Recognising a Nyoongar worldview within services and the health system,
2. Cultural healing,
3. Empowerment,
4. Promoting the strengths of Nyoongar people and culture, and
5. Recognising Nyoongar Law and Cultural Practices.

Even though each theme is unique there is, not surprisingly, some commonality. For example, whilst participants spoke about the need for services to recognise and understand a Nyoongar worldview, they also said that they wanted a safe space where cultural healing could occur and where Nyoongar people felt comfortable and

welcomed. In this space Nyoongar people wanted their input to be valued and that they wanted some control over the healing process.

Our analysis has shown that mental health services need to be delivered in a way that demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of, and respect for, a Nyoongar worldview. Nyoongar peoples have a distinct worldview, which has been maintained prior to, and simultaneously adapted since, the arrival of the European colonisers in 1829.

The stories we have heard, both from Nyoongar Elders and Nyoongar participants, suggest there has been a very sophisticated form of Nyoongar adaptation and cultural exchange that has occurred since the beginning of colonization. Adaptation and cultural exchange in a Nyoongar context involved adopting certain Western ideas and adapting these ideas to ensure protection, continuation and survival of Nyoongar culture. For example, Nyoongar peoples maintained their connections to their traditional country after colonization. As the white settlers established farms on land that was traditionally Nyoongar country, Nyoongar peoples would stay and work on these farms, thereby ensuring that they were able to continue looking after their traditional country. So too, as we read in Host and Owen (2009)⁴, Nyoongar families used their extensive kinship network systems to protect children from government agents who were authorised to take Nyoongar children away from their families.

We now know that past colonial practices have been the cause of much pain and trauma for Nyoongar peoples, as with other Indigenous groups around the globe. A number of researchers have used the term 'soul wound' to describe these past traumas. Thus, the Looking Forward Project provides a pathway for healing the 'soul wound' through the recognition, understanding and acceptance of a Nyoongar worldview.

A key outcome from the Community Steering Group process was the development of a Nyoongar framework for working together to bring about systems change. This framework, titled *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart*, ('sick head, good head') is based on a central element of Nyoongar peoples' worldview, namely the six Nyoongar seasons, which reinforce Nyoongar peoples' connection to the land. The stories that underpin the Nyoongar way of life inextricably link to the changing seasons that connect place,

⁴ Host J and Owen C, 2009, *"It's Still in My Heart, This is My Country": The Single Noongar Claim History*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Publishing.

animals and people. In the next section we discuss each component of the framework in more depth.

The Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework

The *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework is a culturally safe engagement process that enables mental health services to work together more effectively with Nyoongar people.

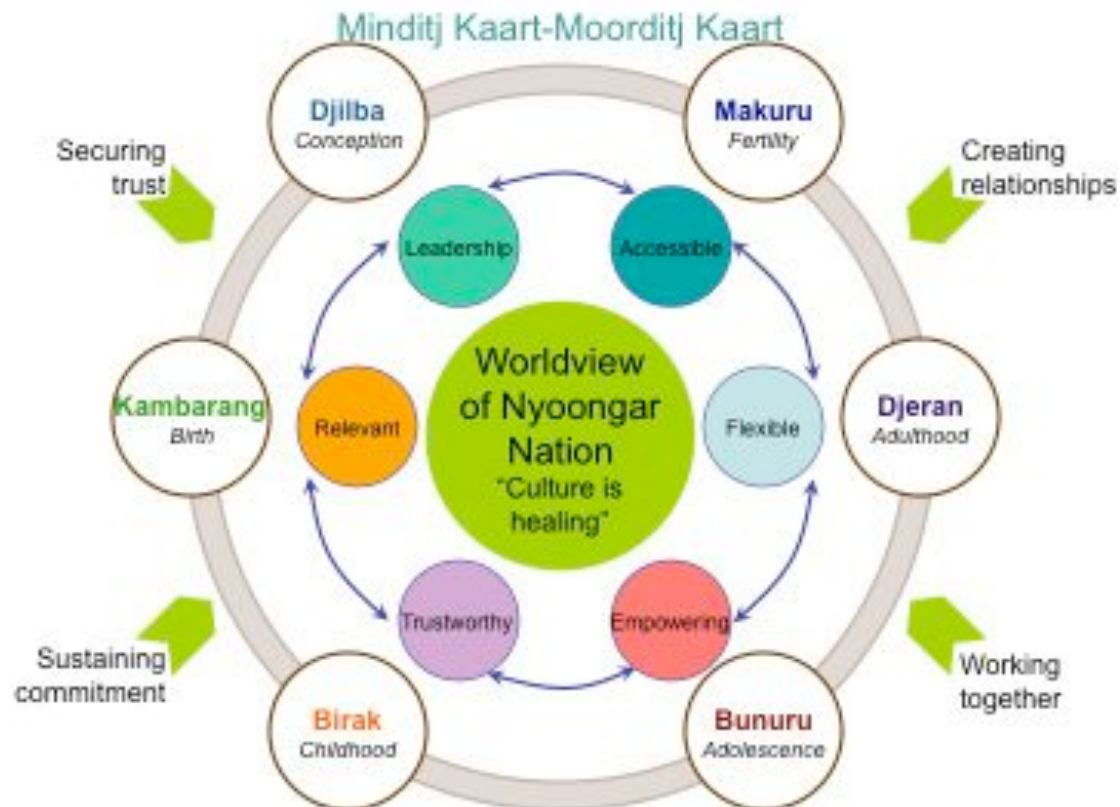


Figure 2. *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework, endorsed by Nyoongar Elders for the Looking Forward Project in 2012.

Central to this, depicted by the inner circle (see Figure 2), is the worldview of the Nyoongar nation. There are three key elements to a Nyoongar worldview:

1. Nyoongar peoples' powerful spiritual connection to, and interdependence on, the Land (the *boodja*),
2. the central role of the Elders who hold and protect culture, and
3. Kinship and the importance of Family and their strong connection to the Elders.

Nyoongar culture is passed on across generations through stories expertly told by the Elders. It is through storytelling that services can learn from, and develop better relationships with, Nyoongar peoples. So too, by reconnecting to culture, people can

return to wellness and become stronger. By celebrating and privileging a Nyoongar worldview we are able to step back from our own (more dominant) worldview to create a space in which to begin the process of decolonization.

Secondly, the six attributes that emerged from the 2011 community forums, that is *Leadership, Accessibility, Flexibility, Trustworthiness, Relevance and Empowerment*, give voice to Nyoongar peoples and their express wishes to see services become more accessible and responsive to their health care needs. Services aspire to encompass these attributes and commit to undertake a change process in order to better reflect Nyoongar peoples' wishes, thus, showing the Framework to be inherently strengths-based.

The arrows moving back and forth between the six attributes illustrate the 'Working Together' space, where services come together with Nyoongar people, in particular Nyoongar Elders, to work towards these attributes. We discuss the 'Working Together' space in more detail later in this section.

In addition, the four ethical principles highlight the 'rules of engagement' by which all participants come into this 'working together' space, *building and demonstrating high levels of trust, sustained commitment, well-developed relationships*, all through a collaborative *working partnership*. If this is a decolonizing process, then a key outcome is self-determination and emancipation for all involved.

Encircling this are the six Nyoongar seasons; *Djilba, Kambarang, Birak, Bunuru, Djeran and Makuru*. Nyoongar stories include the six seasons, as they represent, for example, the Nyoongar creation stories of the beginnings of life, the lifecycle and identity of an individual, the availability of food throughout the seasons, and the rituals and ceremonies conducted on country. The six seasons are inseparable from the *boodja*, the Elders, from family and kinship, and together they give life to a Nyoongar worldview. As well as being intrinsic to Nyoongar peoples' relationship to the *boodja*, the six seasons also provide a strong cultural reference to the participatory inquiry practices on which the engagement process is based. It is circular and interdependent, synonymous with the local conditions and one's active observations of these conditions, and thus, necessarily participatory.

The *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework is an engagement process that is fundamentally democratic, where all participants are equal contributors to the process and its outcomes. People engage by choice and because they value the

collaborative process, they will aspire to deliver on shared outcomes. The *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework is brought to life through the telling and sharing of stories and through the very act of storytelling itself. It celebrates the Nyoongar story of enduring, sustaining and upholding culture, and also enables service providers to tell their story of courage and change through the decolonizing of their workplaces.

The *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework is designed to be flexible in nature. For example, the broad scope of the Framework allows each participating organization to design an appropriate Organizational Assessment tool uniquely tailored to their organizational needs and structures, but with a central focus on developing an understanding of the uniqueness of Nyoongar peoples' experiences, particularly their health care experiences. Subsequently, the Framework guides the implementation and measurement of key structural changes that will advance the process of decolonization.

Such a process insists on a high level of engagement. But what do we mean by engagement⁵?

”

Engagement is a “bottom up,” grassroots process that cannot be directed from above. Engagement occurs when [people] undertake tasks related to their interests and competence, learn about them continuously, participate freely with (equal) associates, immerse themselves deeply, and continue the task with persistence and commitment because of the value they attribute to the work.

James Marcum, PhD, 2011

Thus, engagement is participative, democratic and founded on intrinsic motivations; that is to say, it is your choice alone as to how and why you engage with others.

The central aim of the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework is the decolonization of places and practices, which means respecting and supporting the rights of Nyoongar people to make their own decisions without influence from non-Aboriginal peoples. This Project is about healing the ‘soul wound’ through reconnection to and celebration of Nyoongar law and culture.

⁵ For more on engagement see Marcum, J, 2011, Engagement Theory, available online at <http://jameswmarcum.com/engagement-theory/>

Being Nyoongar: Yarning with Elders

What does it mean to be Nyoongar? In our attempts to answer this question and to better understand a Nyoongar worldview we consulted with Nyoongar Elders. The Elders very generously provided many accounts of being Nyoongar and, in a very typical Nyoongar way, they told us stories. We say typical because storytelling is the most common way for Nyoongar people to talk about cultural norms and practices.

From the stories we heard from the Elders, together with Nyoongar participants, we have identified three key concepts that, we believe, form a Nyoongar worldview.

They are:

1. Connection to Land
2. Recognition of Kinship
3. Respect for Elders

We felt that our efforts in trying to formulate or translate a Nyoongar worldview by using concrete examples were inappropriate. In our view it is impossible to try and describe a Nyoongar worldview as an abstract concept in concrete terms. As we sat in the garden of one of the Elders, amongst the garden art made by her grandchildren, and listened to the stories, we realized that a Nyoongar worldview cannot be perceived, conceptualized or constrained within a narrow definition of a concept or a theory. A Nyoongar worldview can be experienced through the storytelling by the Elders. In part, it is in the listening, sensing with the whole body, that a Nyoongar worldview is heard and understood. It is difficult to construct a theoretical concept of a Nyoongar worldview from the stories, and to do so would be counter-productive. It is our view that it would be more instructive and beneficial for service providers to be taken onto country to listen to the Nyoongar Elders tell stories of country and thus, more deeply connect to what it means to 'be Nyoongar'.

To begin to understand a Nyoongar worldview we invite you to move beyond concepts. We need to move beyond words and allow for a deeper more sensory experience to occur; through seeing, hearing, and hopefully within your being. Westerners are

generally more familiar and perhaps more comfortable with the secular world that is more pragmatic and represented by concepts that are grounded in the worldly and material. In contrast, a Nyoongar worldview is less pragmatic and has a mystical quality, and as an oral tradition, deeper understanding is revealed through stories,

”
You could just yarn with people and you'll find out a whole lot of stuff.

Nyoongar Elder, 2013

which weave together knowledge, information, protocols and Law. In the pragmatic world, details are important and it is the written word that is valued and conserved. Cultures that have an oral tradition rely more on memory and it is in the stories of long held memories that contain the fundamental nature and meaning of Nyoongar culture. In Nyoongar society, it is the Nyoongar Elders who are the keepers and knowledge holders of the stories and therefore of the traditions and cultural practices unique to Nyoongar peoples.

A Nyoongar worldview is meant to be experienced, it cannot be learned in the conventional didactic way. One example of how learning in the Nyoongar way was explained to us by a non-Aboriginal friend. She had recently been on a weekend away with a group of non-Aboriginal people and their host, a Nyoongar Elder. They were taken on to Nyoongar country and told stories of the living Nyoongar *boodja*. The Elder described the country as a living experience, incorporating the different places and sites in the Wheatbelt, including dancing grounds and rock formations. Our friend learnt of the relationship and meaning Nyoongar peoples held for the many different trees and plants used for tools, food and medicine. She told us that the experience had profoundly changed her because she had not previously had knowledge of the country from a Nyoongar perspective. Now, as she goes on her daily walks in the Perth suburbs, the experience of being with the Nyoongar Elder has given her another level of sensitivity to, and association with, the local natural environment. Her experience has been transformative for her, as a citizen of this land.

Culture is a dynamic process, and Nyoongar law and culture is continually adapting to suit constantly changing situations. Nearly always, Nyoongar communication, whether through language, song, dance or art, embodies and conveys the spirit of family, land and kinship. Within the experience of engaging with a Nyoongar worldview there is unlimited potential for anything to happen, in particular, we anticipate a stronger and more direct experience of the meaning of, and relationship to, country.

Finally, a key learning for us in yarning with the Elders and listening to their stories has been the deepening of our experience of Nyoongar cultural ways⁶. We have realised that firstly, we cannot fully articulate what it means to be Nyoongar and secondly, it is not our place to do so, for we believe that that should be the task of the

⁶ We encourage you to read more about yarning in Bessarab, D and Ng'andu, B, 2010, Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research, *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Volume 3, Number 1: 37-50.

Elders, as custodians and keepers of Nyoongar stories. We were told that some stories can be shared while others cannot, so it is our view that a more appropriate way forward is for the Nyoongar Elders to decide on and direct the stories that underpin a Nyoongar worldview when they come together with you to assist with your Organisational Assessment. We will assist by organising cultural activities between Nyoongar Elders and yourselves, as service providers, throughout the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey.

Reciprocity: holding and being held

Hearing the Elders' lived experiences has deepened our understanding of Nyoongar ways. We were given space to ponder and question and to explore our own ignorance in terms of our ideas and assumptions, and we felt confident in being held securely in such a space of learning. In short, we have been held in our learning. In doing so the dignity and authority of the Elders is reaffirmed. Thus, this is an inclusive and reciprocal experience.

Whilst you will be working together with the Elders to bring about systems change, it is important to recognise that the Elders are not your peers. Their status as the custodians of Nyoongar culture means that you will be held in their authority. We honour the wisdom the Elders have brought to the project so far and we ask that you demonstrate the same reverence with the Nyoongar Elders with whom you will work.

Embarking on this journey requires courage and compassion. You and others around you may at times question the value of challenging your own worldview and privileged status in the dominant society, but move forward knowing that you are meeting a higher moral imperative by playing a part in positively transforming the lives of Nyoongar people. Along the way you may also encounter resistance from some Nyoongar people who are wary of non-Aboriginal people, due to past experiences of injustice and mistreatment. You may also encounter resistance from some of your own peers (perhaps even your family members) in a similar way. Persist in trying to build the relationship; as your continued faith and determination in the face of criticism will demonstrate you are genuine and trustworthy. Show care and empathy by seeking to understand the perspective of the other person, Nyoongar or Wadjella, in the context of colonization.

We hope that by documenting our experiences, your own opportunities to learn and gain confidence in this way are greatly increased, as you too come together with the Elders. Your immersive experience of holding and being held in relationship with the

Elders will form the very foundations on which you too will come to hold and work skillfully with Nyoongar families. Overall, you will develop confidence, grow in patience and practice a greater level of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

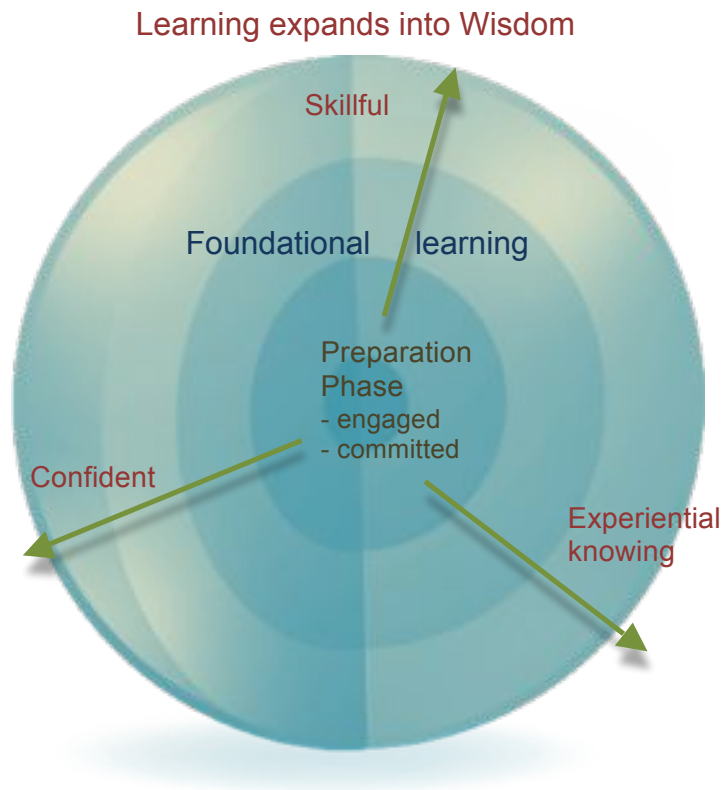


Figure 3. The expansive nature of the reciprocal teaching-learning relationship between Elders and service providers.

The journey for you will be one of self-discovery and reflection, and will no doubt include moments that will challenge your beliefs and test your patience and your skills. You will engage in deep reflective questioning about your thinking and actions that underpin and influence your work. Understandably, as you proceed, you may have many questions about how to engage and interact with Nyoongar people, whose culture is so very different and unique from your own. Therefore, our expectations of you are realistic, for we understand that for many of you the learning may be gradual. However, we are optimistic, for we do expect changes both in your actions and thinking over the coming 12 months. This self-reflective process is the gateway to bringing about systems change, as you will see in section two, which describes the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey in greater detail.

To assist you we have developed a set of guidelines and principles that will help to inform your self-reflective process. We hope that these will act as a set of “thinking

tools” to assist you as you engage in the change process. These guidelines embody our personal awareness (our Self), our interactions with others, and our engagement via cultural means. We have named these:

1. **Exploring the inner self:** a process of self-reflection and purposeful deliberation to develop patience and mindfulness.
2. **Holding and being held:** an inclusive and reciprocal process of holding, through inner quietness to develop active listening to the rhythms of others to develop skills to work in culturally inclusive ways.

Exploring the inner self

We invite you to explore your beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and feelings through this spiritual journey of change. Over time you will develop a sense of awareness about, and increasing confidence and competence in, working with Nyoongar peoples. Through an experiential learning process, that includes a series of immersive cultural activities, you will come to identify the qualities and attributes necessary for the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey and your ongoing work.

Reflection helps us to slow down our thinking and allows space in which to identify, question, and deepen our understanding of the world around us, just as the PAR cycle does. When we systematically reflect we reveal old habits and discover new learning. When reflecting on your experiences throughout this journey, be aware first of your feelings for they tell us a lot about how we handle situations and events long before our thoughts form a reasonable explanation of these situations and events. You might call this intuition or “that gut feeling”. We invite you to ask yourself (and perhaps your team) the following questions to enhance your reflections. You may find it useful to practice this self-reflection on a regular basis using a diary, notebook or journal.

1. What do you **notice** (i.e. capture the moment by describing your feelings, thoughts, questions without judgment).
2. **Name** what you notice (i.e. explore possible reasons behind these feelings, thoughts and questions).
3. **Pay attention** to these feelings, thoughts and questions and assess their value to you.
4. Consider what it is you **wish to learn** from this.
5. **Commit** to exploring your learning further.

While reflection can sometimes be unsettling, it can also alert us to our assumptions as to how we do things and help us to ask why that is so. Over time, we will begin to identify patterns in our thinking and our behaviour and see “what makes us tick”.

Bear in mind that good intentions are not enough in the process of engaging with Nyoongar peoples. The saying “actions speak louder than words” is very applicable in Nyoongar culture. You will struggle to connect with the Elders and other Nyoongar people if your actions are not in accordance with a Nyoongar worldview. Before engaging with or responding to Nyoongar people take the time to reflect on whether your intended actions will serve to enhance their ability to have influence over their own lives. Also, consult with the Elders about your plans. You can be confident that they will guide you in the right direction.

Take a modest, respectful and down-to-earth approach in your interactions with Nyoongar people. The aim is to give your attention to others in the cultural space rather than draw attention to yourself. Put aside any assumptions or preconceptions you may have about Nyoongar peoples and remain tolerant of difference in the face of challenges to your own personal views. Also, be transparent with regard to your personal intentions and motivations as this will help to build trust between yourself and the Nyoongar people you whom you will work.

Be flexible when working with Nyoongar people. In Western culture we try to control and manipulate our environment to suit our own needs. In contrast, Nyoongar people tend to adjust to fit the environment and current circumstances. Trust that the Elders will guide you safely.

Your spiritual journey will take time to unfold and there may be times when you feel confused, overwhelmed or out of your depth. Remain calm, persevere and try not to succumb to negativity when your progress feels delayed or the unexpected happens. Keep in mind that your perseverance in understanding the Nyoongar worldview and building relationships with Nyoongar people will make a difference to the lives of Nyoongar people in the future.

Holding and Being Held

Working with Nyoongar people requires sensitivity and persistence, stamina, and a reflective posture that allows for an inner quietness to emerge. This inner quietness is important in your work practice for you need to be attentive to the rhythms of your clients and the community. Inner quietness requires being mindful and being present,

and it goes to ways we interact with others, how we engage, and develop and hold relationships. How are we with others? How do we see ourselves reflected in others?

We understand that in participating in this evaluation you need to have confidence that you will be held, both skillfully and competently in this process. The Nyoongar Elders have the necessary skills and knowledge to hold you on this journey, for they have been entrusted as the holders and custodians of Nyoongar culture. Through a deeper engagement with Nyoongar culture, expressed through the stories told by Nyoongar Elders and your collaborative work with them, there will be a deeper connection to Nyoongar *boodja*, people and culture. Indeed, it will be the stories of culture and spirituality that will support the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey.

Section Two: A Spiritual Journey of Change

In this section, we describe the methodology behind the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey as a whole, and outline your Organizational Assessment process and its components, that is, organizational systems change and team-based clinical practice review. We also outline our parallel evaluation of the engagement process you undertake during your organizational assessment.

The *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey is indeed a multi-layered one. What brings all of these layers of activity together is the ‘Working Together’ ethos perpetuated through the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework.

Firstly, how do we move from the foundations into a ‘Working Together’ space? In order to begin to decolonize our places and our practices, we should first understand the histories that have brought us to this point. In this way we can see the colonialist structures that restrict genuine engagement and only then can we begin to dismantle them. Just as a fish does not ‘see’ the water in which it swims, we too cannot ‘see’ colonizing practices and structures, because we ‘live’ them. But, as we become more aware of them, we can no longer be blind to them and can see how the ideology of colonization shapes and impacts our beliefs, attitudes, choices, behaviours and knowledge.

Working Together: A decolonizing practice

”

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, let's work together.

Lilla Watson, 1992

In this section we will discuss both the principles and processes that you will be required to undertake for the ‘Working Together’ phase. As you would agree this is a critical phase of the project, for we are asking you to begin the process of decolonizing both your beliefs and your workplace. Working together in this context will also require that you think and act differently, for in this cultural context and setting, you, as a service provider, will not be the expert, rather you will take up the role of a learner; one who is curious to know and keen to explore. In the context of

being a learner, with the Elders as your teachers, you will show humility and sensitivity. This will be challenging, but through the practice of self-reflection and through developing the skills of inner quietness you will become more attentive and patient.

Often, we run to a solution before we have given the problem sufficient attention. This is a predominant approach taken in our Western thinking. If we narrow our view too quickly we lose sight of other opportunities – and often lose sight of the problem itself. Staying with the questions and being patient amidst our urges to resolve issues, will deepen our understanding of the issues and the environmental conditions which surround us, leading us to more considered and creative solutions, that often produce better and more sustainable outcomes.

Further to ‘holding and being held’, we have framed the following four ethical principles for respecting and celebrating Nyoongar ways of being, knowing and doing. The four principles are based on the Chino and DeBryne (2006) model for working with First Nation peoples⁷. These four ethical principles provide the foundations on which to respectfully ‘Work Together’ with Nyoongar peoples, as ‘protocols of engagement’, if you like.

The four ethical principles are:

1. **Securing trust:** By seeing the uniqueness of others and recognizing your own uniqueness allows acceptance to emerge. Service providers have seriously compromised the trust of Nyoongar peoples. Therefore, service providers must show mature leadership and demonstrate positive change, and be prepared for the community to judge their efforts in order to gain trust from the community.
2. **Creating relationships:** Holding and sustaining relationships are critical in any change process. Importantly, Nyoongar peoples must be acknowledged, valued and respected and their views and opinions must be acted upon.
3. **Sustaining commitment:** Engagement that brings about behaviour change involves sustained commitment and courage. Commitment requires maturity to sustain the circumstances of change. Courage is the strength and tenacity for holding the vision that change is possible. Service providers must show courage and maturity to take the vision forward as a reality.

⁷ Chino, M & DeBruyn, L., 2006, Building True Capacity: Indigenous Models for Indigenous Communities, *American Journal of Public Health*, Apr 2006, 96 (4), ABI/INFORM Global: 596-99.

4. **Working partnerships:** Working in partnership with others demands humility. Humility misses nothing and takes even the smallest of things seriously, for inside little things there is immensity. Therefore, service providers must be honest in their interactions with the Nyoongar community. Service providers must accept and show genuine humility in their commitment to developing and sustaining genuine relationships with Nyoongar peoples.

These four principles are critical in providing a culturally inclusive framework for you as service providers to both engage and work with Nyoongar peoples. There is the need to create a new and open communicative space that allows for critical discussions to reshape mainstream systems so they are relevant to Nyoongar people in their everyday life and, in the case of this Project, their health and wellbeing. We encourage you to view your organisational change journey through a Nyoongar worldview lens, as you plan your assessment over the next few weeks (see Figure 4 below and Figure 2 on page 16).

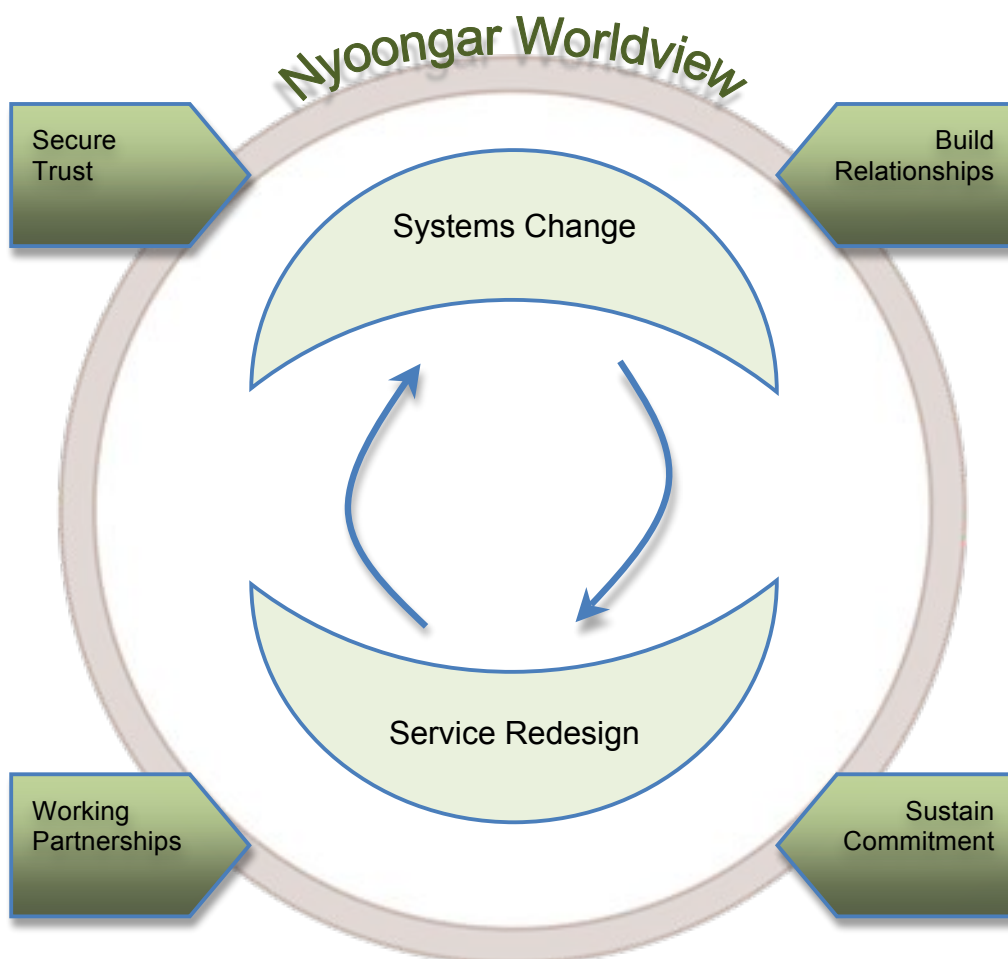


Figure 4. The four 'Working Together' ethical principles enacted through a Nyoongar worldview.

Working Together: Organizational change

This section zooms in on developing your understanding of a Nyoongar worldview through your change efforts at a systems and organizational level, as well as at a team (clinical) level. It is also where you will consider how your personal reflective thinking will help to inform your service's change efforts.

The key findings that emerged from the community forums form the basis of the Evaluation. Again, these are *accessibility, flexibility, empowerment, relevance, trustworthiness* and *leadership* (see Figure 2 on page 16). Aboriginal respondents were both absolute and resolute in their comments that mental health service providers needed to significantly improve their relationships and engagement with the local Nyoongar community at an organizational systems level and at the client-practitioner (clinical) level.

In the following sections we set out some practices and lived examples you can use to deepen your working together experiences along the way, in particular your own reflective practices.

A participatory evaluation methodology

The Looking Forward Project was borne out of a strong community need to see change in the provision of mental health and drug and alcohol services. It has been this community need that has driven the way in which the Project has taken shape. During each phase of the Project, the community, including service providers, has

- had a voice in determining the direction of the Project,
- actively contributed to the inquiry process (asking the questions, seeking out actions, reviewing outcomes, revisiting the questions, and so on),
- received (and given us) feedback about the findings, and
- shaped and endorsed the Framework on which this entire Evaluation is based.

As a Project team, we have emphasized transparency and inclusivity in our methodology, and have thus engaged with and kept informed both the local Nyoongar community and service providers at every stage (see Figure 5). Many call this method participatory action research (PAR) or participatory action inquiry; a process that is inherently democratic in its approach as well as in its outcomes. In the spirit of our participatory methodology, we have named all participants “co-researchers” in acknowledgement of their contributions to both the project outcomes and its shared, consensus-building processes. We intend to continue with this

practice over the period of your organizational assessment, and invite you, along with the Nyoongar Elders, to do the same.

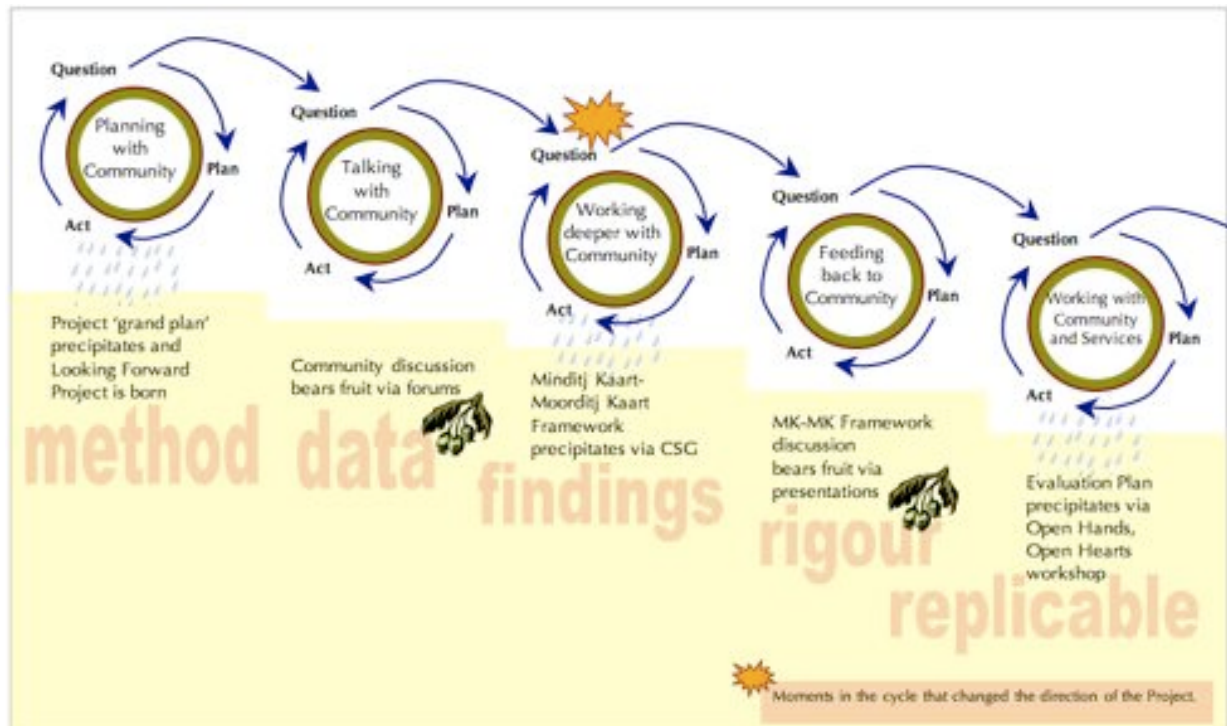


Figure 5. The Looking Forward Project's PAR process has helped to build our project story so far.

Enabling spaces that provide participants an opportunity to talk openly and honestly – and in their own words – allows the organization assessment to get to the heart of the matter, and remain genuine and connected to the needs expressed by those involved. In addition, and most importantly, we have incorporated a Nyoongar worldview and cultural knowledge framework into our participatory evaluation methodology, as is reflected in the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework itself. This strengthens the participatory process in a cultural sense, acknowledging the contributions of Nyoongar Elders and community members to this work overall. Lead researcher, Dr Michael Wright, stated in a recent article in the *Action Learning, Action Research Journal* that

Indigenous research and participatory action research can work together if there is the recognition that the Indigenous world-view is different.

...it offers Indigenous researchers the opportunity to begin the process of decolonizing their efforts by engaging in a research practice which acknowledges that Indigenous people have experienced the oppression of

colonization, and that to be effective Indigenous research needs to be both an act of defiance and an act of healing (2011, p. 28)⁸.

Prior to your Organizational Assessment, we will meet several times with you to assist in the design of your Assessment Plan. A Planning Matrix is available in your Resource Pack. The foundations discussed in this handbook form the themes for your Organizational Assessment, as shown in Figure 6 below.

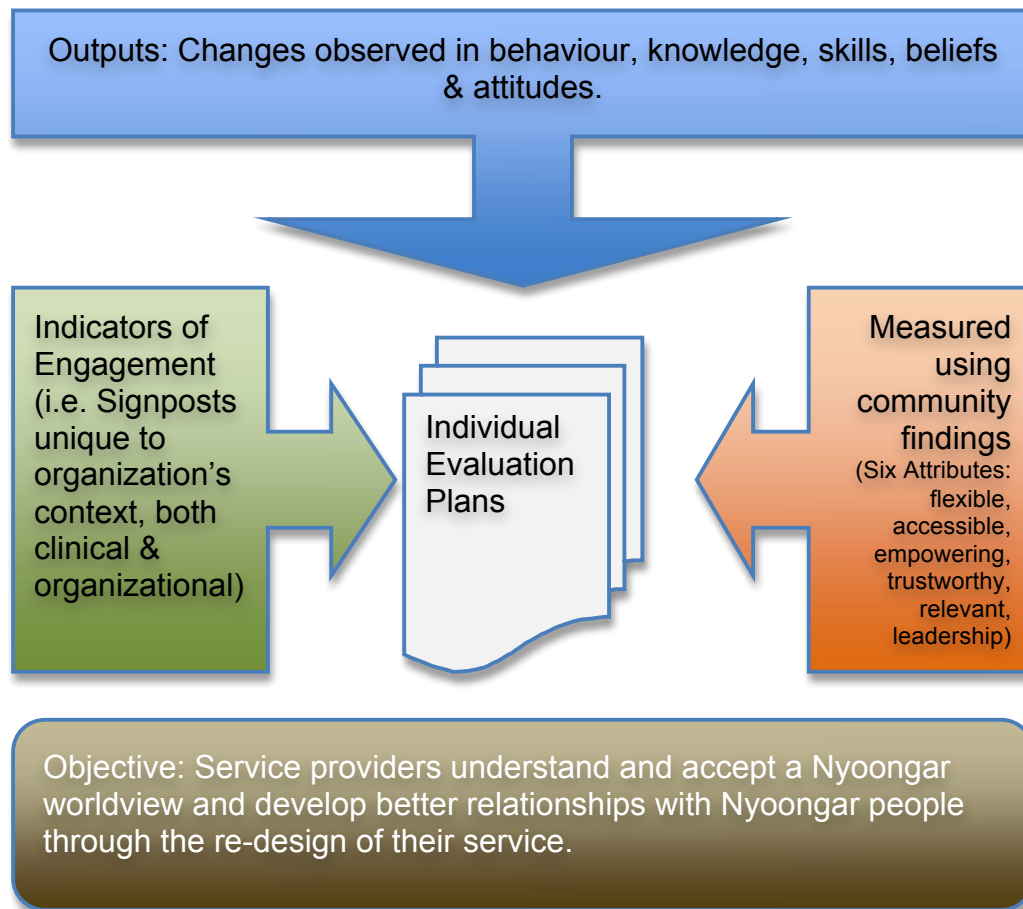


Figure 6. Organizational Assessment planning elements.

Data collection

Over the 12 month period we will routinely collect information that directly relates to the planned organizational assessment changes you undertake. In regards to patient/client confidentiality, we will not request any details from you, as it is not applicable for this project. Rather, you are invited to reflect on your own practices and to review their effectiveness at an organizational level. We have three forms of

⁸ Wright, M, 2011, Research as intervention: Engaging silenced voices, *Action Learning, Action Research Journal*, Decolonising action research, Special edition, Vol 17, No 2, October 2011: 21-41.

data collection; a self-reflective survey (individual), team-based focus groups, baseline questions (your service profile), and your story of engagement and change.

Self-reflective survey

We have developed a short survey (check your Resource Pack for a hardcopy) for service team members to complete on a fortnightly basis. The survey will take no more than 20 minutes to complete and will include rating scale and open-ended questions. The survey will assist in capturing individual reflections, in an effort to put into words some of the questions, experiences, challenges and moments that take place during your change journey. It provides an opportunity to stop and think amidst the 'doing' of the everyday, which is often busy, noisy and distracting. We hope that the data collected at such regular intervals will help you to form a picture of your own change and that of your service, as captured through your experiences of working with the Nyoongar Elders, your team members and managers.

Team-based focus groups

We will also set up a series of focus group discussions that include the Nyoongar Elders, Service Managers and the nominated organizational assessment team members, along with ourselves. These focus groups will provide an opportunity to come together to talk about the progress of the organization assessment and the changes being planned and implemented in your service. We will also bring to these discussions the themes that emerge from the self-reflective surveys (this information will be de-identified), and presented as discussion-starters and questions that we hope will deepen the discussion and highlight key aspects in your 'Working Together' process.

Baseline data questions (your service snapshot)

We ask that you also provide some baseline data (check your Resource Pack for these questions or discuss with your manager) on the current status of your service and your relationships with Nyoongar people. At the end of the Evaluation period, we will conduct a final interview with relevant staff from each service, based on the baseline data you provide, together with the focus group themes that arise during the twelve months. This will bring your organizational assessment and indeed your *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey to a close.

Telling your story: mapping your spiritual journey of change

Many Indigenous cultures carry their culture and law through the telling of stories. Stories are not just a means for recording single-time events, they are essentially timeless, for they provide us with a portal to explore and interpret, both back and forward in time, the multiple meanings of life. Often this occurs through the use of cultural and archetypal metaphors, as metaphors often “explain the unexplainable”. To fully engage with a Nyoongar worldview, through the portal of stories, we invite you to shift your thinking from the pragmatic and secular to the mystical, indeed, to a place where there are endless possibilities. We highly recommend you read *The Carers of Everything* (2003), the Nyoongar creation story, as recounted by Nyoongar Elder, Dr Noel Nannup Karda.

Listening to the Nyoongar creation stories could to some sound implausible; for example, how the *Wagyj*, the Rainbow Serpent, created the rivers and lakes in the Perth area. But, by actively listening to the Nyoongar creation stories, you will begin to hear the importance of kinship, community relationships and caring for the land, all of which are integral to the continuation of Nyoongar culture.

Stories can teach us simply how to listen. Storytelling is both an art and a form of deep communication and connection. In Nyoongar terms it enables Nyoongar Elders to explain both the culture and the way. This is best illustrated by Elder, Mort Hansen, who told us that the best way for non-Aboriginal people to experience a Nyoongar worldview, is by going out on country, sitting by the campfire, and looking into the fire, particularly at night. Only then can non-Aboriginal people really come close to realizing and experiencing a Nyoongar worldview.

”

You learn a lot just by camping and sitting round a campfire. You learn a lot from that because that's the way people used to get things sorted out. Sitting round a campfire can also be used as a healing for you because it makes you feel good and it's amazing but when you look at a campfire you see things in the campfire and then ideas come from that campfire. You're not only getting a feed from that campfire but you're getting ideas [in your head] and when that smoke comes through it's cleaning - actually helping to clear your lungs and it's clearing your eye ducts, so when your tears - you get a lot of tears - it's doing you good...

Mort Hansen, Nyoongar Elder, 2013

Telling your story of change is a critical part of your Organizational Assessment. The principal aim of telling your story is for us to gain an insight into your understanding of the processes of change occurring within your organization, driven by the formation of relationships with the Nyoongar Elders and community members with whom you will work. To write a story about your experiences may seem like an unusual request, so we have outlined a few points to help you with your storytelling.

Intent

In telling your story we want you to tell us about your experiences, both positive and challenging. We are very interested in reading a descriptive account of what is happening in your organizational change process, but just as importantly, we are also very interested in hearing about your reflections on, and feelings about, your experiences along the way. These accounts bring your journey to life beyond a mere factual report.

Style

We should emphasize that this is **your** storytelling process, so we encourage you to be creative and to explore a writing style that will work for you, both individually and as a team (that is, how you bring together individual experiences to create a story of your service's change journey overall). You might like to adopt a writing style similar to that of a memoir⁹. Like a memoir, your story should be about what you've done and how you've come to know what you know. You might agree that some of the most popular non-fiction books are memoirs, for example, Sally Morgan's *My Place*, Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*, Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*. If in doubt, read someone's memoir to get a sense of the style involved in writing a personal story, because it is through your personal journey that your story of change will unfold.

Content

The content of your story should include how and what changes are occurring in your organization. Ideally, we encourage you to write about both the low and high points that occur in your organization during this change process. We would very much like to read how your organization is integrating the principles of the project and what aspects and moments point to the changing culture of your organization.

⁹ Zinsser W, 2006, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, HarperCollins NY

The stories you develop during your 12 month journey of change, will, we hope, nuance the experiences you share with the Nyoongar Elders and others with whom you work along the way. In regards to your Organizational Assessment, we strongly encourage you to find your voice as a storyteller, and to set out your story framework during your planning phase. You may well include photos, images, reflective notes, songs, poems, posters, newsletters and more, as befits your journey.

Not only will this provide a detailed, and relevant story as it unfolds, but the writing of the story itself will both deepen your understanding of the experiences you have as well as offer you a powerful and enlivened memory to recall – and learn from – for a long time to come.

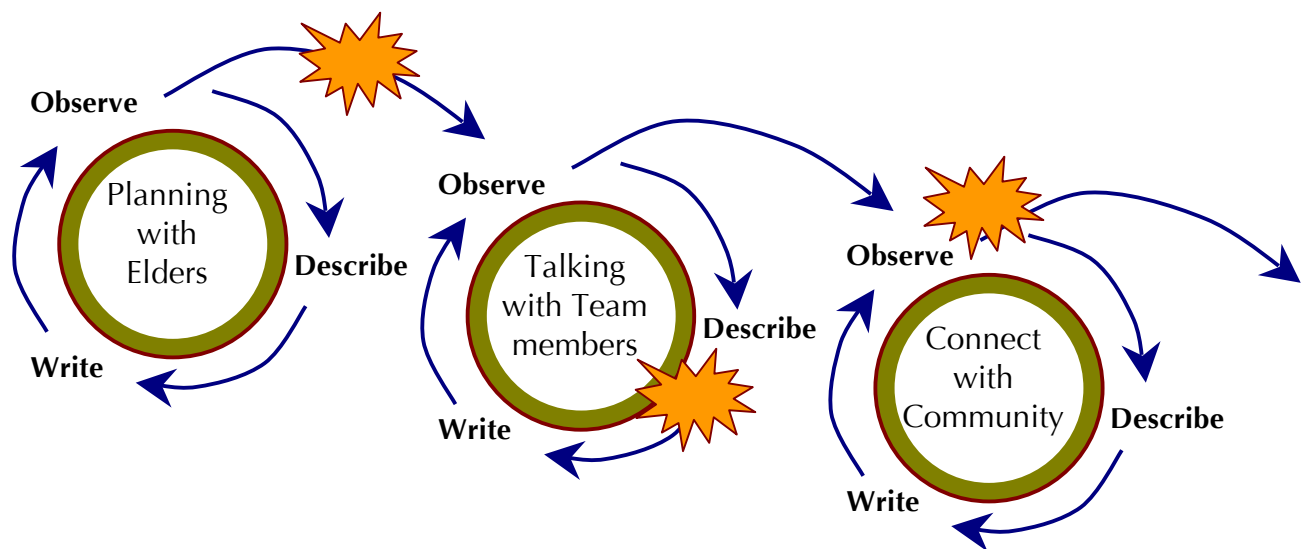


Figure 7. Capturing your story through observation, description and writing.

In addition, capturing your story will also capture the process by which you have

- initiated and developed meaningful relationships with Nyoongar Elders and community members,
- worked openly and transparently with Nyoongar Elders,
- developed greater understanding of Nyoongar culture, and
- learned more about yourself, your service and the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors at large, in order to bring about change in the provision of services to Nyoongar peoples.

Understandably, there will be times where you will feel challenged in this process. During this journey you will find yourself on occasions, in unfamiliar spaces, both emotionally and spiritually, but we can reassure you that you are neither alone nor

unsupported, for working together requires that we be there for each other. As non-Aboriginal people you have been invited to experience and share with others a privileged and very unique culture; Nyoongar culture.

We remind you again to suspend your dominant Western thinking, and stay open to those times of uncertainty and questions that will inevitably arise. Being open and patient will certainly deepen your understanding of the causes and conditions that impact on service provision. In a later section, we explain the idea of “tolerating uncertainty”; this goes to the heart of staying with questions so as to establish a new way of working with diverse worldviews.

”

They don't know how simple it can be. They start rushing, just like when you open floodgates and the water comes through. It doesn't come in a trickle. It just comes in full force. But if they take time out to sit down and think before they start talking, they'll find it'll be a lot simpler.

Nyoongar Elder, 2013

Data analysis

Upon completion of the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey, we will conduct a rigorous thematic analysis of the data. Through an inductive approach, we hope to identify key themes. We will then undertake a deductive process jointly with Nyoongar Elders and service providers to identify those components that make up a best practice service delivery model that meets the needs of the Nyoongar community in the south-east corridor.

We will present the data in an inclusive and transparent manner. We will measure changes that have occurred in each service over the 12 month period, as well as any changes that occur across all participating services. The data will not be used to compare or contrast the participating services.

The *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey

The *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey is made up of two distinct but parallel processes. The first is a Service-based organizational assessment, which service providers undertake together with Nyoongar Elders, over a twelve-month period. It involves a range of planned service-based tasks and cultural activities that help services develop a better understanding of Nyoongar culture to improve their provision of service to Nyoongar clients and their families. The planning and review process is framed by the 'Working Together' principles (see Figure 4 on page 27), which sets out the 'protocols of engagement' between service providers and the Nyoongar Elders with whom they work.

The organizational assessment will include two focus areas; the first is systems change, whereby, in light of the **six attributes** that emerged from the community findings mentioned previously, services review their organizational structure across the areas of

- *governance,*
- *management/leadership,*
- *workforce,*
- *resourcing,*
- *communication and*
- *work ethos/culture.*

The second is a team-based review of your service's clinical practices and involves a set of four inclusive working practices, based on the Finnish model of Open Dialogue (Seikkula and Olsen, 2003)¹⁰, which strongly aligns with the findings from the community forums. These are

- *everyone as partners,*
- *building trust,*
- *common language for shared understanding, and*
- *tolerance of uncertainty.*

These are detailed in the sections below. Not all services will undertake the team-based review, as not all services provide a clinical service to their clients.

¹⁰ Seikkula, J & Olsen, M, 2003, The Open Dialogue Approach to Acute Psychosis: Its Poetics and Micropolitics, *Family Process*, 42 (3): 403-418.

Process One: Participatory Organizational Assessment

We invite you to undertake an Organizational Assessment of your service delivery in light of the Project findings discussed in the first section of the handbook. It is important that you develop ownership of the planning and design process, for, in so doing, we believe you will have greater incentive to meaningfully engage with the Nyoongar community, as well as implementing your organizational assessment findings in real and sustainable ways. Ownership is one of the fundamental principles on which your assessment is based, just as with PAR. It also upholds those ethical principles that echo the aspirations of the 'Working Together' process you will use when working with the Nyoongar Elders; those of

- *working partnerships,*
- *securing trust,*
- *building relationships,* and
- *sustaining commitment* (refer to pages 25-28).

In this your assessment, you will examine your current policies, practices and processes to assess the extent to which your service is both accessible, responsive to and provides a culturally safe service to Nyoongar people and their families. We invite you to examine the foundations on which your service can better empower Nyoongar people and their families in the decisions made about their recovery and health care. We ask that you also investigate those colonizing structures that bind us to the privileged and powerful positions we inhabit - virtually unknowingly - and how these impact your decision making processes and engagement with others who experience the world through alternative worldviews.

As has been mentioned in the previous section of this handbook, this organizational assessment also asks you to look within yourself. When we notice our own personal preferences, beliefs and behaviours, we begin to see how they inform, influence, impact and indeed impress upon our way of being in the world, especially in our interactions with others around us. We hope that in developing your own self-reflective practice, that your organizational change journey is one that is meaningful and heartfelt, centred on people, and your relationships with them.

Service-based systems change

We have presented you with a set of guiding questions that cover six organizational areas through which you will shape your organizational assessment indicators and

'Working Together' outcomes. These six areas are *governance, management/leadership, workforce, communications, resourcing, and work ethos/culture*. These too are built into the Planning Matrix found in your Resource Pack and you are encouraged to describe those change indicators your service will address according to these areas.

We expect you to plan appropriate ways to measure these indicators through changes in staff behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and skills, to show how your service overall is working more effectively with Nyoongar peoples, and who would in fact hold you to account on the changes you propose, through the very act of working together with you. Given the Framework is inherently strengths-based, we encourage you to take an appreciative inquiry approach (see more on Appreciative Inquiry in your Resource Pack) to reviewing your current situation, setting out your change indicators, capturing and measuring those changes, and, above all, collaborating with Nyoongar Elders and community members.

A set of guiding questions form the bulk of your Organizational Assessment to aid your planning. These are presented below along with some working examples to show how your responses might be expressed and incorporated into your Planning Matrix.

Governance

In the spirit of 'working together', review current policies to better reflect a collaborative governance ethos. Explore ways to identify, and connect with Nyoongar Elders in order to build trust and develop relationships to support the changes your service will undertake through the evaluation.

The Nyoongar community has said that services are not flexible; people have to fit the service rather than the service fitting people's needs. Governance structures in an organization should reflect the diversity and aspirations of the community in which they operate. Responsive and effective governance within an organization will provide leadership and direction at both corporate and social levels. Given the historically fractious relationship between mainstream health services and the Nyoongar community, the most suitable and practical option would be a governance model based on collaborative principles. Collaborative governance is a process that allows for multiple stakeholders to engage in all forms of decision-making at all levels

of an organization¹¹. Collaborative governance is most effective where small victories help to build trust and provide opportunities to develop shared learning and deepen relationships.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current governance structures of your service and identify key aspects you think can be worked on in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for your service's organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

Currently, our service does not include Nyoongar representation, although our Aboriginal client numbers have increased over the last 12 months [**Assessing current situation**].

How can our service include Nyoongar Elders to provide us with an ongoing link to the community so we can listen to their needs and aspirations, and incorporate these into our governance structures and planning? [**Establishing a signpost for change**].

We want to be able to measure this impact through more positive client feedback and will also record our meetings with the Elders to work on this area of change [**Measuring the change**].

Management / Leadership

In the spirit of 'working together', explore how your service's policies and practices can be adapted to ensure it is possible for the Nyoongar voice to be heard and acted upon. Identify and implement appropriate mechanisms for senior management to have regular positive and meaningful engagement with Nyoongar Elders and the community.

¹¹ Ansell, C & Gash A, 2008, 'Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18 (4): 543-571
<http://jpart.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/4/543.short>

Nyoongar people have said that they would like to see mature leadership. They see that a different kind of leadership is needed, one that encompasses emotional intelligence and is heartfelt. They want services to lead with the heart, not just with the head. A service can develop this style of leadership which recognises and values diverse views and opinions and by remaining open to creative ways to lead by truly listening to its clients. Innovative management in this context is about transforming the service so that it can be flexible to both the internal and external opportunities that can bring about meaningful change. Innovation means making room for creative thinking and having the audacity to try out ideas, reframe processes and empower people.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current management structures and leadership preferences of your service and identify key aspects you think can be worked on in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for your service's organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

Currently, we use client feedback forms to get an idea of how clients perceive our service, but we often don't include this information in any prepared or deliberate way in regards to policy changes or work practices.

On a self-reflective level, we don't talk about the ways in which we support each other (i.e. staff) or consider our styles and preferences we use to manage and lead with **[Assessing current situation]**.

With the Elders: We want to know how we can improve our client feedback process so it is more meaningful and shows our increasing understanding of the experiences of our Nyoongar clients and their families.

Reflecting and noticing: Through our Supervision processes, we will explicitly discuss the different ways we lead, reflecting on our leadership preferences and habits. We want to build a picture of how we do this as a whole team, then look at

areas we can improve on to be more inclusive and client-centred [**Establishing a signpost for change**].

We will record our Elders meetings and the re-drafting of *client feedback forms* and reframe these to provide us with more meaningful information that we will link directly to our *client service policy* and *supervision practice* [**Measuring the change**].

A story of leadership

The Nyoongar Youth Diversionary Program (NYDP) is an initiative that was created under the Cultural Corridors Project (CCP). It is about Nyoongar people having ownership and taking control of an important issue that affects them. The key aim of the NYDP is to prevent Nyoongar youth from becoming a part of the criminal justice system. The CCP has been five years in the planning. It derived from a series of Nyoongar men's gatherings over two days involving male Elders, younger men and youth. The CCP would like to continue with the gatherings but securing ongoing funding has been a significant issue for the organisers. The funding would be utilised to work more closely with the Children's Court and the families of the youth to strengthen their connection to culture under the guidance and teachings of Elders. The NYDP would also support the youth towards education, training and employment. CCP representatives have had discussions with various WA departments on the issue of securing funds. They have been clear to potential funders that monies would be auspiced appropriately however the NYDP will always be managed, owned and controlled by Nyoongar people. CCP representatives understand the need for transparency, but they will not accept monies that impose conditions that would compromise the Nyoongar Cultural aims of the CCP¹².

How will you capture your leadership story?

Workforce

In the spirit of 'working together', review current service practices to ensure there is flexibility around shared work arrangements, supervision and mentoring of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff. Focus on the elements of the service that serve to empower both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff to better meet the needs of Nyoongar clients. In addition, explore ways to engage Nyoongar Elders and the community at all stages of the recruitment process when seeking to take on Aboriginal staff in your service.

Nyoongar people have said they want to see more people on the ground. They say that health is 24/7; that is, that it impacts their everyday in every way. They want services to be visible and responsive with capable, skilful staff who are connected to

¹² We thank Danny Ford for permission to include this story.

the community. As well as recruiting such staff, they also see a need to support and empower Aboriginal staff members to meaningfully contribute to the development of a service that responds well to the needs of Nyoongar families. When services seek to collaborate with Nyoongar families they are open to the potential skills and talents of those both within and external to the service.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current staff recruitment and support processes (including supervision and career pathways) of your service and identify key aspects you think can be worked on in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for your service's organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

Currently, our service does not include Aboriginal staff members. We see a need to recruit a project based staff member to help us to develop funding opportunities and see this role as one way to draw in Aboriginal skills and knowledge if the role is broadened to include these talents. So too, whilst we undertake cultural awareness training, it is generic and offered as a mix of Indigenous and CALD perspectives. It is not compulsory for staff to attend such training **[Assessing current situation]**.

How can we work with Nyoongar Elders to set up ongoing links to the community so we can develop better career pathways for Nyoongar people to work in our service and lend their talents to support us to build a better understanding of working with Aboriginal families? **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

We want to be able to measure this impact through more inclusive recruitment processes and staff supervision practices. Elders will provide us feedback on our current practices in these areas. **[Measuring the change]**.

A story of courageous change

In the final year of my social work course, I was approached by one of the senior social worker's working at a Child Health Development Centre help prepare the Centre for an Aboriginal staff member. We met with a number of Aboriginal people in the community to discuss both the purpose and role of the proposed Aboriginal

Health Worker position. I also arranged for local Nyoongar people to present on Aboriginal cultural issues to the staff at the Centre. On one such occasion one of the presenters, a Nyoongar man and social worker, whose family lived in the area, told the staff that the local Nyoongar people thought the Centre was the local school dental clinic. Needless to say he was very surprised to see and hear about the range of health services located at the Centre, for the Centre had two part-time social workers, two part-time clinical psychologists, a number of part-time speech therapists and a part-time pediatrician. When the staff heard this they were quite dismayed, for they had no idea that their presence was invisible to the local community. Although it was a shock to hear this, it also provided staff with valuable insight and they had renewed enthusiasm for the task of employing an Aboriginal staff member. I heard later that the Centre finally employed a local Nyoongar person, and was told that before they employed this person, they called all the staff together to tell them of the changes they would see within the Centre in preparation for the person to start work. The Managers suggested that if anyone did not agree with these changes they should request a transfer elsewhere; such was their commitment to changing their service to meet the needs of the local Nyoongar community¹³.

How will you tell your story of courageous change?

Communications

In the spirit of 'working together', explore practical ways for the Nyoongar voice to be heard at all levels within your organisation. Review your service's current methods of communication and identify changes that will enhance responsiveness, inclusivity and openness. Consider how you might further embed and sustain these changes for the long-term.

It was one of the Nyoongar Elders who said: "you could just yarn with people and you'll find out a whole lot of stuff."

The term communications in this evaluation context has a broad definition. In this context, communication is about the creation of a new language. Communication is the portal to relationships; communication between and within organizations needs to be clear and unambiguous. Policies designed to communicate operational practices can confuse and exclude those who are unfamiliar with managerial-style language. Therefore, we encourage you to review your service's policies and practices to identify and if necessary change the language terminology so that it is more inclusive of the range of people that access your service. In particular consider your use of clinical and therapeutic language and begin to search for a common verbal and written language that is accessible by Nyoongar peoples.

¹³ We thank Michael Wright for providing this story.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current both the internal and external communication strategies of your service and identify key aspects you think can be worked on in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for the organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

We have not fully considered less conventional forms of communication and how we might think differently about our methods of communication. Our communication strategies are limited to digital forms and how we keep clients informed, and so on. We don't reflect much on the non-verbal forms of communication we use either **[Assessing current situation]**.

We acknowledge communication within a Nyoongar context is more about listening and sitting with Nyoongar people to learn more from them, especially Nyoongar Elders. We will bring to mind our assumptions, actions and values to pay more attention to them in our interactions with Nyoongar peoples. In particular, we want to learn more about **Nyoongar spirituality** and how it supports Nyoongar families in their experiences of wellness and care, so we can incorporate elements of this in our **health care planning** with them. We will specifically seek advice and learning through the Nyoongar Elders on aspects of Nyoongar family-centred care giving.

We will attend Nyoongar language classes at Langford to learn basic Nyoongar language and broaden our understanding of a Nyoongar worldview through Nyoongar songs and stories **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

We want to capture the changes in the language we use through documentation (e.g. meetings, client health care plans) and discussions (e.g. yarns with Elders) **[Measuring the change]**.

Yarning celebrates Nyoongar spirituality. It's a part of Nyoongar oral tradition and expresses Nyoongar ways of being. Elders are the custodians of Nyoongar stories and law. It is a teaching tool used to share knowledge across generations. Yarning helps people to talk freely.

Stories teach us to listen.

Adapted from D. Bessarab (2012).



Resourcing

In the spirit of 'working together' review your service's current mechanisms for allocating resources and identify changes that enable greater flexibility in using resources. In particular explore practical ways that your service can uphold the Nyoongar principles of reciprocity and sharing. Nyoongar Elders and the community are an essential resource; develop ways to access and embed their expertise into your resource management processes.

Nyoongar people are unequivocal in their thoughts about the way money and resources are spent on "Aboriginal issues", as this quote expresses:

Racist politicians pour all this money in but they are not talking to us. They blame us for things not changing but we don't have a say.

Community forum participant, 2011.

When applied in an organisation context, the term resources includes all the physical components such as infrastructure, staff members and funding, plus the non-physical elements such as the intellectual, mental and emotional/spiritual attributes brought to your service in the form of professional associations, roles, knowledge and experience (you might call this 'talent'), client feedback and their care experiences and beliefs, and the perceptions and beliefs expressed in the wider community in

which your service operates and with whom it interacts. Often when organisational reviews are conducted they ignore the intellectual, mental and emotional/spiritual attributes. In your organizational assessment we ask you to include both the tangible and the intangible. A review of your resources should not be restricted to a narrow economic definition, ignoring the intangible attributes, as these cannot be measured in monetary terms. We invite you to think creatively about how you might capture these less tangible aspects of your service. There is an ethical and moral value to these attributes that needs to be acknowledged, especially when working with a Nyoongar worldview.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current funding structures and resourcing opportunities of your service and identify key aspects you think can be changed in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for the organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

Our current Aboriginal client load is small but with potential to increase within our existing resources. We could cater to a client load of 50. \$xxx from core budget can be freed up to employ community consultants and pay sitting fees to Nyoongar Elders to work closely with staff to identify better ways to engage more Aboriginal clients **[Assessing current situation]**.

We will work with Nyoongar Elders to develop a client information booklet, with a long-term aim to work with Nyoongar Elders to develop a recruitment and retention plan to support Aboriginal staff members **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

Our meetings with Nyoongar Elders will be documented and drafts of both the Booklet and Recruitment and Retention Plan will provide information on how well we have consulted and worked with the Nyoongar community **[Measuring the change]**.

Work Ethos / Culture

In the spirit of 'working together' explore ways your service's work culture impacts upon your staff members' abilities to engage meaningfully with Nyoongar Elders and the community. Consider practical ways to engage with Nyoongar Elders and the community to reframe ways of working with Nyoongar peoples and redefine the overall "feel" of your service.

There's the Wadjella world where ... they change their environment based upon their religion and what they believe, and our world, the Aboriginal world, where our environment shapes our culture and our beliefs.

Findings from the study have shown that the Nyoongar community is distrustful of the motivation and intentions of the mental health system. Many of the participants who attended the forums were Nyoongar, and they expressed a need for organisations to recognise their unique Nyoongar worldview. Given the loss of trust felt by Nyoongar people of organizations, you will need to demonstrate your commitment to working with the community in an inclusive manner. Your organization assessment plan should clearly articulate and demonstrate this commitment.

Organizational assessment:

In your assessment plan, take some time to consider the current explicit and "hidden" (or assumed) organizational activities of your service and identify key aspects you think can be changed in the coming twelve months. Define these aspects as clearly as possible, inviting comments and questions from colleagues to ensure the aspects are well explained and suitable for the organizational assessment team to work on.

An example:

Currently, we don't prioritize diverse worldviews, especially a Nyoongar worldview and the health care experiences of our local Nyoongar clients. In fact, we are not 'seeing' Nyoongar clients [**Assessing current situation**].

We will set up regular meetings with Nyoongar Elders and think about how we prepare for those meetings. We will practice our new understandings by sitting with

the Elders and asking questions to continue to develop our practices with Nyoongar peoples, to create our own story. Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) will be developed using this process **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

Our meetings with Nyoongar Elders will be documented and will provide information on how well we have sought advice and engaged with the Nyoongar community. Our RAP will become our service's 'living' story, a working document that we will use to seek feedback about our identity as an active and responsive service for, and in, our community **[Measuring the change]**.

Team-based clinical work practices

Findings from the Project show that Nyoongar people are seeking greater collaboration in the way mental health and drug and alcohol services are provided. They are keen for organizations to work *with* them; to recognize their collective wisdom and expertise, and to acknowledge them as partners in the design of their health care plans. To reflect the Nyoongar community aspirations we have included four ethical work practices that will guide the 'Access and Responsiveness' component to your organizational assessment, based the Open Dialogue method used by Finnish mental health practitioners, which provides an inclusive framework for collaboration between clinicians and clients, their families and significant others. These align strongly with the views we heard from Nyoongar participants in the forums. We are confident that in developing a practical understanding of this method you will develop better clinical approaches in your work with Nyoongar clients and their families.

The method has demonstrated success through improved treatment outcomes for young people experiencing episodes of acute psychosis. The main focus of the intervention is to support a client and their network of family and significant others, where:

The goal is to generate joint understanding, rather than striving for consensus. Every effort is made to talk about any major issue concerning the patient or only in their presence, including responses to the meeting itself (Seikkula and Olsen, 2003, p. 410).

The emphasis is on creating a democratic space where talking and listening occur. In this space a shared language and understanding of the situation is developed and

the client's experiences acknowledged, and decisions are made together with the client and their family and significant others. Thus, all parties are empowered through this inclusive conversational process. We strongly encourage you to read the Open Dialogue article available in your Resource Pack.

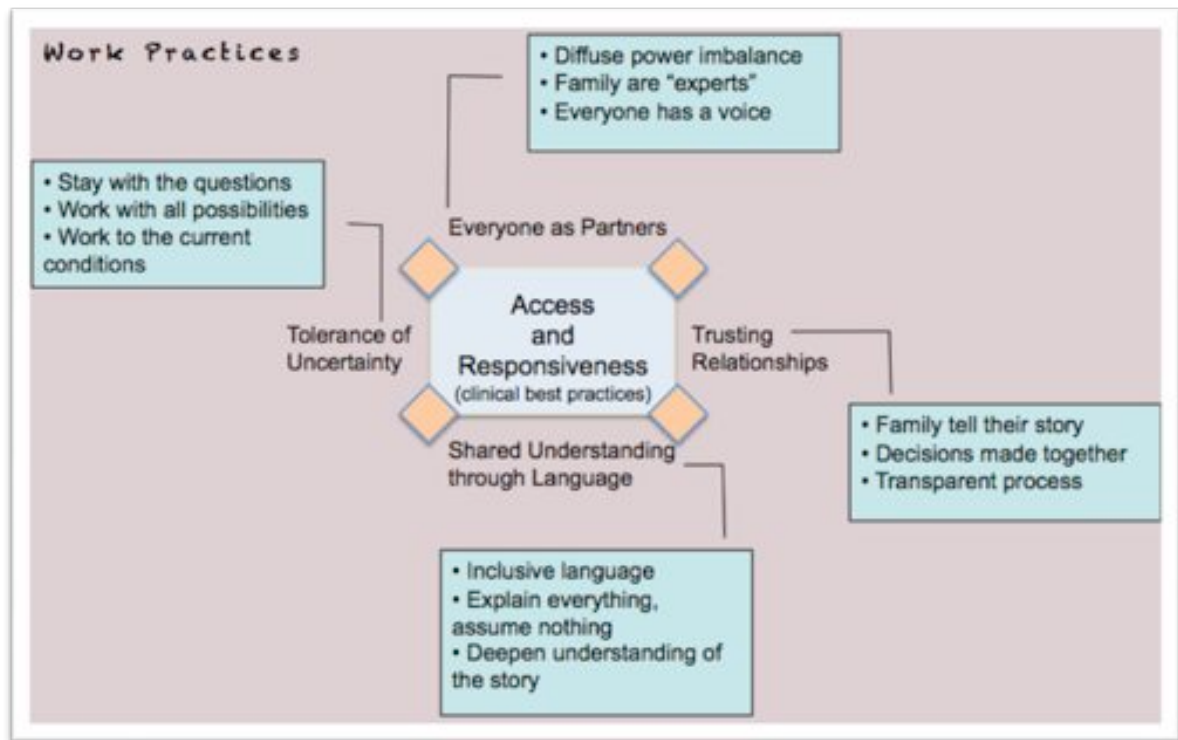


Figure 8. Four inclusive work practices based on the Finnish Open Dialogue method.

We outline the four inclusive work practices in more detail below.

1. **Everyone as Partners:** This practice is designed to diffuse the power imbalance in the conventional clinical setting. In the conventional patient-practitioner relationship, clinicians have the greater power. They decide what and how treatment will be provided. We propose that clinicians view the client and their families as being the experts of their situation, and reconsider their needs through their eyes. Importantly, the voices of the client and their families would have priority in the clinical setting. Consequently, clinicians would relinquish some of their control and view the client and their families as equal partners in the treatment and recovery planning.
2. **Trusting Relationships:** Developing and sustaining trusting relationships is a key element in the change process. Clients and their families need to feel safe in the clinical environment, they need to be able to trust both the clinicians and the healthcare setting. In this space, clients and their family and

friends must be able to tell their story without being judged and criticized, trusting that clinical staff will allow room to tell their story in the way they feel most comfortable. Importantly, decisions regarding treatment need to be an inclusive and transparent process.

3. **Shared Understanding through a Common Language:** A critical element in this practice is that stories told by the client and their family and friends are heard in an accepting and uninterrupted way. Importantly, a common language needs to be established so that clinical staff understand the situation from the client's point of view. Effective communication predominantly listening openly to enable such a common language to be developed. It is for the families to describe their experiences, and for practitioners to listen. Clinicians will need to explain everything and assume nothing. Using this approach will deepen both the understanding of the story being told and the interaction between all participants.
4. **Tolerance of Uncertainty:** The concept of 'Tolerance of Uncertainty' points to the many and varied opportunities present in a situation. It is a way of being open to other ways of knowing and experiencing the world. Listening for these in the stories told by the client and their family and friends is pivotal to establishing an environment of trust and acceptance. It means letting go of assumptions, of not making a diagnosis based on referral information, and it means allowing the client and the family to direct the situation towards a range of solutions that best suit their expressed needs. A mental health crisis will often induce stress and anxiety, so families need to feel that they are being held within a safe and trusting therapeutic setting. Allowing the client and their family to speak about their issues and what is most relevant to them helps to bond the group. This method of communication allows families to prioritize the issues discussed and to direct the flow of interaction. In this method the clinical team has a listening role, and as Seikkula and Olson state, 'the crisis becomes the opportunity to make and remake the fabric of stories, identities, and relationships that construct the self and a social world' (2003, p. 409). Tolerance of Uncertainty means working with all possibilities, displaying patience, sensitivity and professionalism as needed, as well as the skill of active and open listening.

These four inclusive work practices that respond to our theme of 'Access and Responsiveness' are critical for building a culturally inclusive framework to enable you to engage and work with Nyoongar peoples.

As with the guiding questions that support your service-based systems change, we have provided a set of guiding questions that align to your team-based clinical work practices. If you are including a *team-based clinical review* as part of your change journey, you should include these in your Planning Matrix.

Everyone as partners

In the spirit of working together as partners, examine the team's work practices and how team members work with clients and their families. How does the team demonstrate a collaborative ethos? What evidence is there that the family are empowered, being listened to, and share in the decision making?

From the community forums, Nyoongar people stated that they wanted to have greater input into the decisions made around their healthcare.

This is our country, this is our land and yet we're not respected for any of that and we don't have a voice. And I think it's time that we need to have a voice.

Community forum participant, 2011.

An example:

At present, our client meetings occur without the client, except to inform them of the decisions made about treatment and ongoing care planning. To date we have not established any family-centred options for clients as part of their care planning. We currently do not have any specific involvement of the client's family or significant others who may support or care for them; this has been assumed, depending on the client's situation or their understanding of our service provision **[Assessing current situation]**.

We will review our **Intake Meetings** and only make an assessment of clients when we have met with them, and in collaboration with them. We will set up such a meeting *within 24 hours* of the first contact with the client and their family, or significant others. The meeting will take place where it best suits the client and will be arranged in a circle. Following the meeting, the team will provide the client and their family with a verbal and written summary of the decisions and outcomes from the meeting. Finally, the team will ensure they will stay connected to the family until the family feels safe and the crisis has sufficiently abated.

Signpost: Demonstrate relationship-building: We see that building and sustaining meaningful relationships between the clinical team and the family are

central to this approach. We will seek *client input and feedback* on how we are establishing and building a relationship with them. We will reflect on our relationship-building as part of our *supervision procedures*. **[Establishing a signpost for change].**

In consultation with the Nyoongar Elders we will develop a **Client Information Booklet** on our agency's clinical processes. Our meetings with the Nyoongar Elders will be documented and drafts of both the Booklet will provide information on how we have consulted and worked with the Nyoongar community **[Measuring the change].**

A story of rigidity...

When working at a local Perth hospital, I recall a very disturbing event. An Aboriginal Elder from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, in the Gibson Desert, had been admitted into the hospital. He had only just arrived onto the ward when I was urgently called to the ward by the nursing staff. I knew the gentleman, as he had previously been an inpatient in the hospital with his wife, who had stayed with him during his time in hospital. It had been arranged, on that occasion, that his wife stay with him in a single room on the ward. On this occasion when I got to the ward, he was alone without his wife and in a very distressed state, pacing the length of the ward with the nurses attempting to reassure and comfort him. I had asked the nurses and the ward clerk where his wife was. They told me that the admissions clerk had sent her away. As the patient did not speak English and the nurses and I could not speak Ngaanyatjarra, the situation for us was very distressing. Seeing and hearing the patient's anguish was incredibly upsetting. We later heard that on arrival at the hospital and at the admissions desk he had provided the admissions clerk with a letter from his community health centre requesting that he be given a single room so his wife could stay with him during his admission as previously. The admissions clerk had decided that the patient and his wife could not have a single room, and booked him into a shared room, without checking with the medical staff on the ward. The ward clerk then sent his wife away, without checking to see what arrangements had been made for her in regards to accommodation. Needless to say it took us a few hours to locate his wife, as she had already left the hospital, but thankfully had been taken to one of the women's refuges in Perth. This unfortunate and distressing situation could have been avoided if the admission clerk had not been so rigid in their role and checked before making a unilaterally decision. The lesson in this instance is that the one size does not fit all. In order to treat people equally there may be a need to treat them differently. Systems can often lack the flexibility required if policies are applied in a

rigid manner. Creative solutions that respond to the immediate needs of clients (and their significant others) often produce favourable outcomes¹⁴.

How will you tell your story of flexibility and creativity?

Trusting relationships

In the spirit of working together to build trusting relationships examine the team's approach to developing authentic sustained and meaningful relationships with clients and their families. How does the team demonstrate this authentic and meaningful engagement? What evidence is there that the family feels respected and secure?

Empowerment was a key attribute that community forum participants wanted to see in services. They wanted to have a say in the way services provided care and support options, in ways that worked to people's strengths, rather than seeing people as "broken" and needing fixing.

[T]hey use this word "empowerment", yet they don't want to give us the power. They still want to be the governing body. Fine, you can be the governing body but surely you can work hand in hand, in tandem...

Community forum participant, 2011

An example:

At present, our client information is spread across a number of pamphlets and brochures, with no meaningful connection to client health care plans we develop with our clients. Our client information is not culturally sensitive, especially to Nyoongar clients. We currently do not make any mention of the involvement of the client's family of significant others who may support or care for them; this has been assumed, depending on the client's situation or understanding of our service provision **[Assessing current situation]**.

We want our clients and their families to know that our service is reliable, consistent and trustworthy so that they feel safe. Therefore, all decisions on any proposed treatment, including ongoing therapy, medication, and hospitalization, will be discussed with the client and their family, or significant others.

¹⁴ We thank Michael Wright for providing this story.

Signpost: We see that **trustworthiness** is a key attribute in the acceptance of a service for Nyoongar peoples. We will note how we are developing trusting relationships with clients, through our return client experiences, as well as our intake of new clients. We will reflect on elements that promote trust as part of our *supervision procedures* [**Establishing a signpost for change**].

In consultation with the Nyoongar Elders, we will develop a more comprehensive and culturally relevant Supervision Practices Manual on our service clinical and support processes. Our meetings with Nyoongar Elders will be documented and drafts of both the Booklet will provide information on how we have consulted and worked with the Nyoongar community [**Measuring the change**].

Shared understanding through a common language

In the spirit of working together to develop shared understanding, examine the team's efforts to communicate in an open and transparent manner. How does the team demonstrate active listening and clear and direct use of language? What evidence is there that the family and their story is heard in such a way as to lead the team in the decision making process regarding their care?

Nyoongar community members told us that they found services unwelcoming and isolating by the medical terms and professional language often used. They would prefer that services spend more time in the community itself, listening to people on their terms.

It's sort of using language of being unwell, rather than you've got a mental health problem. "What's making you unwell?"

Community forum participant, 2011

An example:

We recognise that language can be alienating and disempowering. Our client information uses medical terms and concepts that may confuse or put off clients. We currently don't have culturally specific information available in our offerings to clients, especially Nyoongar people [**Assessing current situation**].

As part of our collaborative assessment process, we will provide space for the client and their family to tell their stories in their voice, and ensure that our clinicians hear the stories of the clients directly, without filtering the information through the clinical lens of their discipline. With this, we will then re-write our client information to reflect the language clients themselves use, in particular, Nyoongar people.

Signpost: *Supervision procedures*: We will reflect on our use of language as part of our supervision practices, as well as through team debriefing following client meetings. We will practice alternative communication ideas, using role play, to better engage with our Nyoongar clients and demonstrate our cultural awareness in meeting their needs **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

In consultation with the Nyoongar Elders we will develop a client information booklet on our agency's clinical processes. Our meetings with the Nyoongar Elders will be documented and drafts of the Booklet will provide information on how we have consulted and worked with the Nyoongar community **[Measuring the change]**.

A story of differing worldviews

I remember working with a woman who was experiencing difficulties in her relationship with her partner. I remember in one of our sessions together doing an eco-map with her. An eco-map is a simple but very effective method for identifying supports in a person's life. I remember doing the eco-map with her and being struck by how minimal her supports networks were in relation to my own, and for many other Nyoongar people I know. Thankfully I did not reveal my thoughts, for what was really interesting was her response, for she noted that in seeing the map she felt she had more supports than she realized. It was a very interesting comparison. The point to this is that central to the Nyoongar worldview is that relationships often have multiple meanings, for connections formed and held through relationships to family and the wider Nyoongar community are critical to a well-formed sense of self¹⁵.

How will you hold the differing worldviews within your service?

Tolerance of uncertainty

In the spirit of working together in a climate of uncertainty examine the team's willingness to stay with the questions ensure appropriate space and time for the

¹⁵ We thank Michael Wright for providing this story.

client and their family to arrive at solutions and convey their thoughts in a respectful manner. How does the team demonstrate a high level of tolerance in the face of crisis stress and work based pressures? What evidence is there that the family remains at the forefront of the team's actions in a mutually respectful manner?

Very rarely did forum participants discuss their mental health experiences without touching on a range of factors that at first seemed unrelated. But, as we know, mental health issues are often intertwined with a range of social, psychological, physical and economical factors. It is not realistic for a mental health service provider to try to address all these concerns raised by a client, but service providers do need to appreciate and indeed work within the current conditions their client finds themselves in, at that particular point in time.

But for you as an individual they need to be dealing with you in your circumstances and not making assumptions about Aboriginal people and then applying it to you.

Community forum participant, 2011

An example:

We accept the limitations of our roles as clinicians, and while we work closely with clients in their surrounds, we can do more to support their recovery journey more holistically **[Assessing current situation]**.

We will critically reflect on and examine our feelings and beliefs about not being in control, and how we might work better in this situation. We see there is a need for Management to work more closely with the clinical team to ensure they have what they need “at their fingertips” and in a timely way.

Signpost: We will document the discussions, requests and practices set up between Management and the Organisational Assessment team to work on a flexible and responsive structure of support, to ensure the client's needs are met, as *they determine them*. **[Establishing a signpost for change]**.

Your meetings with the Nyoongar Elders will be documented and drafts of both the Booklet will provide information on how well we have consulted and worked with the Nyoongar community **[Measuring the change]**.

Suggested Activity: A Team-based inquiry - Learning to ask “Why?”

Focus on a discrete process or procedure in your service that the team has noticed does not meet the needs of your Nyoongar clients and their families. Use the ‘5 whys’ technique found in your Resource Pack to explore why this is so and define and describe the root cause. Be sure to directly involve those using the process/procedure (in particular, stay with your team members at this early stage). Once the root cause (or causes) is established, set up a positive question to focus your efforts to change this process/procedure, with active engagement with Nyoongar Elders.

Once again, we encourage you to make use of the Planning Matrix found in your Resource Pack, so that you can record your planning in some detail. Make the Matrix a living document, one that becomes central to your conversations and your everyday work. Your Matrix may very well become an integral part of your story, or at least the means by which you come to capture your story as it unfolds.

Process Two: the *Looking Forward* project evaluation

The second and parallel process will be the Evaluation conducted by us, the Looking Forward Project team. Alongside your Organizational Assessment, we will observe your change processes and in what ways you are engaging with Nyoongar people and their families, in particular, Nyoongar Elders with whom you will work during your Assessment phase. Our Evaluation indicators are based on

- the forming and development of relationships,
- consensus-building processes, and
- ongoing, sustainable commitment to working more cohesively with Nyoongar peoples.

As with your Organizational Assessment, the design of the Evaluation is to adopt the principles of PAR, strongly underpinned by the unique characteristics of Nyoongar culture. This Evaluation will focus on the ways in which you demonstrate your engagement with Nyoongar Elders throughout this twelve-month period, using the *Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart* Framework. You will use the Framework to guide your engagement with Nyoongar Elders and community members, as well as its six attributes to develop specific and contextualized change indicators for your service redesign. Thus, at the same time, we will measure the efficacy of the Framework through its use.

Whilst we keen to see positive outcomes from the redesign of your service, you will take carriage of these outright. We will instead evaluate **how** these outcomes are met; that is, the process by which they are achieved. For us, the means to the end is more important than the end itself.

Connecting the Dots: Translating our story of change for others

The central premise of the Looking Forward Project is about decolonizing spaces and practices. We have employed a PAR framework, which has necessitated an intimate and close working relationship with both Nyoongar Elders and community members, as well as and participating service providers, through all stages of the project. We have rigorously applied the underlying PAR principle, that of a *commitment to work in partnership with participants in addressing community concerns*, which has meant being open and prepared to adjust our methodology to fit

community expectations and aspirations. To achieve this, it is our view that all participants, Elders, community members and service providers alike, have control and ownership of both the process and the findings from the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey.

We are therefore proposing an innovative and relevant method for the dissemination of the Organizational Assessment and our Evaluation findings. Both the Nyoongar Elders and the community, together with service providers, will be invited to co-design a mental health service model applicable to their localized needs. Our proposal both recognizes and acknowledges the work and efforts of all participants and continues the participatory and democratic journey on which we have travelled so far.

The co-design process will include at least two half-day facilitated workshops within a six-month period, and involve Nyoongar Elders and participating service providers. The aim of the workshops is to identify and develop a culturally safe mental health service delivery implementation model. The structure for the workshops will be guided by Nyoongar cultural ways similar to the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* journey itself.

To bring about real change for Nyoongar people and the mental health system at large requires a paradigm shift and a new way of working. This will only occur if we can dismantle the structures and systems that exclude and disenfranchise Nyoongar peoples. Your engagement and active involvement as service providers in the decolonising process is critical to this. Therefore, our proposal for the dissemination of the *Open Hearts, Open Hands* findings co-designed by Nyoongar Elders and the community together with service providers is both critical and essential if we are to fully achieve the outcomes of the Project.

Summary: Taking up your spiritual journey of change

With the support of the local Nyoongar community and with you, the service providers, we are committed to changing those systems that oppress, marginalize and disenfranchise. Encouragingly, you have realised that whilst you may be part of the problem, you also have a major role to play in finding and implementing solutions. We all understand the need for a new paradigm if we are to effect real change for Nyoongar peoples and it will only occur if we can effectively decolonize the structures and systems that exclude and disenfranchise Nyoongar peoples.

Embarking on this spiritual journey of change will require a shift in the way you think and act, and it will help if you remind yourself to:

- commit to making the project a priority for yourself and your organization,
- relish the role of a learner and be patient with yourself and others,
- actively and creatively engage in a reflective space for yourself and others so as to explore, listen and observe the change process,
- commit both heart and mind to this journey of change,
- critically analyze the influence and appropriateness of your cultural worldview in your work practice,
- recognize and acknowledge the significant contribution you and your organization are making as leaders in this unique systems change process,
- be more attentive and mindful to the moods and rhythms in your work and general life, and
- wholeheartedly accept that the journey of reconciliation itself is a long-term commitment.

You are embarking on a unique time-limited opportunity, one that will unequivocally, change the way you think and act.

We are also deeply indebted to the Nyoongar Elders for their continued support for this Project, as well as the many community members and service providers living and working in the south-east metropolitan region.