



INDEPENDENT REPORT FOR THE KARI FOUNDATION

Findings on interviews from participants, service providers and educators.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people should be aware that the names and images of deceased persons may appear in this publication.



Who is the KARI Foundation?

KARI provides Aboriginal community support and cultural preservation initiatives.

Our main mission is to build strength in families through the provision of quality Aboriginal community support services. Our vision is to help Aboriginal families, youth and communities flourish.

KARI Foundation Lead With Culture

The KARI Foundation Lead with Culture project supported by the Try, Test and Learn Fund - an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

Lead with Culture is a co-designed project between the Department of Social Services, KARI Foundation and Aboriginal community members.

The Lead with Culture program identifies two contributors to the high rates of unemployment, disability, lack of education and welfare dependence of young Aboriginal people:

1. A lack of cultural connection, and the resulting confused sense of self-identity
2. A lack of understanding of an Aboriginal young persons cultural context by the wider community



Five key pillars

This project operates under five key pillars, designed to empower Aboriginal youth with culture to increase resilience, belonging and respect for self and others.

1. Unearthing the Path to Cultural Consciousness
2. Building the Foundations for Cultural Erudition
3. Creating Cultural Competency: Conception to Comprehension
4. Cultivating Culture: Determination & Empowerment
5. Youth Yarn: Evaluation and Feedback



What is Try, Test and Learn?

Using insights from the Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare, the \$96.1 million Try, Test and Learn Fund is trialling new or innovative approaches to assist some of the most vulnerable in society onto a path towards stable, sustainable independence.

The fund focuses on priority groups identified, through analysis of Priority Investment Approach data and other policy considerations, as being at high risk of long-term welfare dependency.

The objective of the Try, Test and Learn Fund is to generate new insights and empirical evidence into what works to reduce long-term welfare dependence. Project selection is based, in part, on the value of the evidence that they will generate. Projects will be evaluated to produce high-quality policy evidence about the effectiveness of interventions, for whom, and under what circumstances. In this way, the fund will allow the Government to identify approaches that work, and use this evidence to transform our investment in existing programs or make the case for new investments.

Innovation

The objective of the Lead with Culture project (LWC) is to reconnect young Aboriginal people with their culture by building a sense of identity, purpose and meaning while also ensuring non-indigenous community and business people gain a sound understanding of Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The LWC project is designed to achieve this objective by providing multi-tiered supports that centre on helping participants to reconnect with Aboriginal culture. The LWC project will address the joint issues of lack of cultural connections for young Aboriginal people and a lack of understanding of this group's

The Try, Test and Learn Fund takes an open and collaborative approach to policy development. This approach is focussed on seeking new ideas from and collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders, including the community sector, business, academia and the general public, in order to develop new ways of tackling complex social challenges.

Co-development activities are embedded into projects supported by the fund to refine and optimise project design. These co-development activities are tailored to the needs of each project and may involve collaboration with end users, the Commonwealth and other stakeholders.

The Try, Test and Learn Fund will help achieve the objectives of welfare reform - that is, to develop a modern welfare system that increases the capacity of individuals, reduces the risk of welfare dependency and maintains a strong welfare safety net.

cultural context in the wider community. This approach will help participants to improve their cultural connections, health and lifestyle, leading to increased employability, better long-term employment outcomes, and ultimately reduced welfare dependence.

The program takes a strengths based approach, recognising the powerful influence of culture as a determining factor in the lives of the participants. By drawing on culture, it assists with reinforcing existing notions of identity and reaffirming for others who participate in the program.

There is evidence that suggest programs like Lead with Culture that underpin or imbed culture provide positive and life guiding outcomes (Walter, Martin, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2017).

The LWC Project may have utility for other program based initiatives where diversion from the criminal justice system or transition from the criminal justice system is the goal (Cunneen, Russell, & Schwartz, 2020; Goldson et al., 2020).

KARI Foundation engaged participants through its existing networks, including but not limited to:

- KARI Ltd
- KARI Foundation network
- NSW Department of Education
- Individual schools, and Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers
- NSW Department of Justice
- NSW Police; community groups
- Members of the community; and the
- Parents of participants or participants themselves.

The successful implementation of the LWC project by KARI is reflected in the DEX Score of 100%. This reflects the two-way partnership of information sharing between funding agencies and organisations, enabling both to find smarter and more efficient ways of improving service delivery and the overall outcomes achieved for individuals, families, and communities” (<https://dex.dss.gov.au>). The score also reflects changes that may occur through the provision of large group or community engagement work.

The score is linked to four domains that reflect changes that may occur for a group or community rather than individual clients. These include:

- Group/Community knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour for a group of clients or community members participating in the service (where it is not feasible to record the changes for individual members of the group or community)
- Organisational knowledge, skills and practices to better respond to the needs of targeted clients or communities.
- Community infrastructure and networks to better respond to the needs of targeted clients and communities.
- Social cohesion to demonstrate greater community cohesion and social harmony.





Findings

Set out in the following pages are the preliminary findings from interviews with the participants, service providers and Aboriginal Education Assistance in schools.

The Lead with Culture (LWC) project has provided access for participants to a program that allows them to grow and develop within a supportive program that recognises the important role of culture. The supportive environment includes important role of organisational systems, management and mentors.

Culture

Some of the participants came to the program with very little engagement with culture. The LWC Project provided an opportunity for these participants to be grounded in culture, in a safe manner. By grounding the participants in this manner, it allowed them to be proud of their culture and frame a new identity.

For some like P1, it meant being able to know and understand the tribe that they were from.

P1 also indicated that the LWC program had

“a really big impact on me emotionally”

as she had grown up in difficult circumstances where culture was not a focus or priority. It was a family situation that was dysfunctional.

P2 was of the opinion that the program allowed him to understand the complex nature of Australia’s history.

When asked about the cultural component he said,

“It helped me form an identity, there is a lot of confusion out there about who an Aboriginal person is... it helped me channel who I am”.

In doing so, the program was a grounding influence. This new sense of identity allowed him to be more engaged in his local community.

When reflecting on the program P4 said,

“I feel a lot of Aboriginal youth need to be connected to their culture. It brings such a wholeness ...I’ve gained my identity”.

Furthermore, irrespective of the colour of the participants skin, they were exposed to the real history of Australia.

P4 said

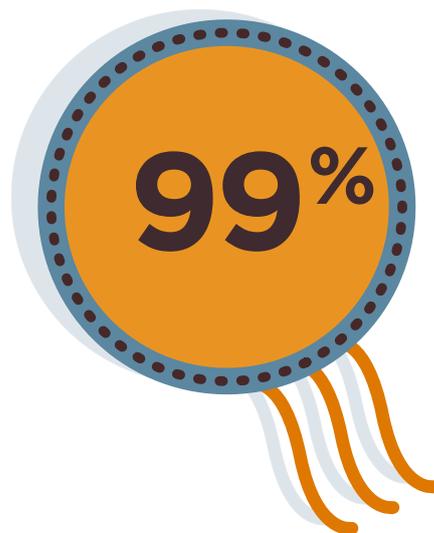
“I learnt the real history”.

P8 expressed that the program allowed him to connect with community and made him feel better as a person.

He said,

“makes you feel better as a person... makes you know who you are...not as depressed”.

The participants felt empowered after being involved in the program.



Of youth report increased connection to culture



Of youth in program have a Cultural Plan

Mentors

The major theme to emerge from the interviews was the pivotal role that mentors play in the LWC program. Management and mentors went above and beyond expectations to support both the participants in the program and school based staff.

All of the participants and school based staff described the supportive and proactive role that the mentors played in delivering the program.

“You only have to walk into the room when they’re (mentors) here to see the impact” (P10).

One participant made the comment that the mentor had facilitated and helped her realise,

“the best version of myself”.

The mentors insured that the participants were well organised and responded to opportunities when they arise. Mentors provide a range of supportive services to participants including;

- Following up on job and education opportunities
- Arranging interviews
- Checking in on participants well-being
- Transport to and from service providers.
- Emotional support.
- Motivation

Mentors have assisted the participants with finding professional help such as access to TAFE, University, Fair Trading and multiple mental health services. One participant who suffered from depression (P1) made it clear that her mentor was responsible for helping her deal with mental health challenges.

My mentor was constantly, “hyping me up and encouraging me”.

This approach to support was reinforced by the mentors consistently checking in with participants to understand their health and well-being.

An example of the impact of mentors work is seen in P1s following observation, “she even helped me go for a job in an art gallery which I never thought [possible] before”.

The commitment of the mentors can be seen when P3 responds to her experience in the program.

When describing her relationship with her mentor P3 says,

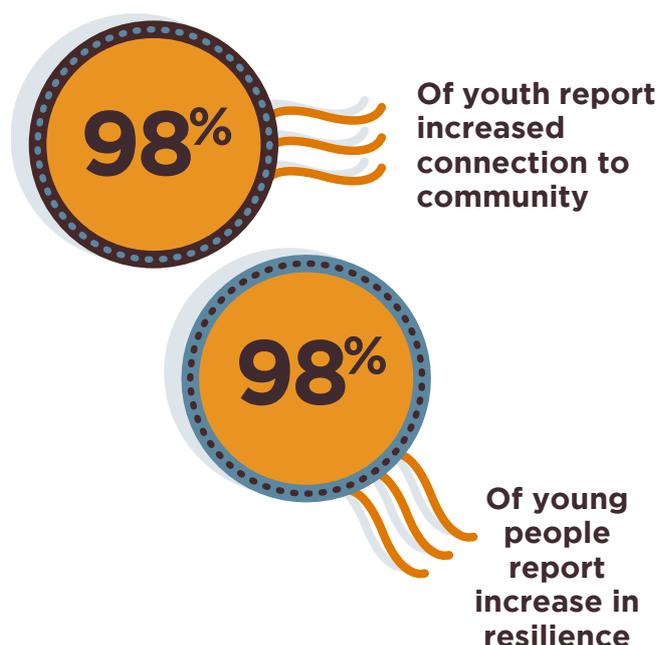
“she is doing all she can to help me”. P6 said, “They’ve got the right people for the job”.

In addition the mentors worked closely with participants with one responder commenting,

“The mentors even reached out to parents to ensure the program was effective”

In addition the mentors and management handled difficult or sensitive situations with integrity (P10).

“Lyle and Peta were just sensational”





KARI Foundation staff reported that at least 35 suicides have been prevented during the delivery of the Lead with Culture program. A recent productivity commission report highlights the growing

impact of mental health on the lives of many Australians including Indigenous Australians. Set out below is a synopsis of mental health.

Action 9.2 - Empower Indigenous communities to prevent suicide

Indigenous communities should be empowered to prevent suicide.

Start Now

- The Australian, State and Territory Governments should support development of a renewed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and associated Implementation Plan to guide suicide prevention activities in Indigenous communities. The development of this strategy and its implementation plan should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Indigenous organisations should be the preferred providers of local suicide prevention activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- All organisations providing suicide prevention programs or activities in Indigenous communities should recognise the importance of building existing capabilities within the Indigenous workforce.
- Performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements for programs to prevent suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be adapted to ensure they are appropriate to the cultural context in which they are delivered and consistent with Indigenous evaluation principles.

(Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 20)

The Lead with Culture program addresses all of the above points raised in the commission's report. In addition, Lowitja Institute advocates that programs which

blends its activities in natural settings with a focus on culture, have positive outcomes for individuals and the wider community (David et al., 2018).

“Given the relatively large numbers of Indigenous children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia, and the fact that one third across the country are not placed according to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, it is important to ensure that those in care maintain contact with their families and cultural community to satisfy their basic human rights, and to contribute to identity formation and lifelong support. Based on these findings, it is argued that those responsible for Indigenous children and young people in out-of-home care must do more to ensure that these young people understand the long-term importance of being part of their culture and, if the young people wish, do everything possible to help them maintain that connection “
(McDowall, 2016, p. 5)



Attributes

A common response from participants outlined how involvement in the program helped them to grow, develop and gain a sense of belonging. Participation in the program and interaction with their mentors provided them with life skills that complemented the cultural focus. These skills and knowledge included:

- Mentoring
- Respectful
- Being organised and confident.
- Financial management
- Planning and prioritising daily activities.
- Engaging with people in a respect manner.
- Dealing with difficult situations.
- Pride in culture.
- Having the confidence to achieve goals
- Being optimistic about the future.

Organisational Responsiveness

The current arrangement of the mentors and manager have provided a fundamental platform for the program's success. Those interviewed reiterated that they had experiences with other organisations in the sector and were of the view that the operational staff were highly responsive. A consistent message for service providers and education professionals such as Aboriginal Education Assistants and Welfare support staff in schools is that KARI delivers.

A key response from those interviewed was that if KARI said they would do something it would be done.

P9 from Employment Services said,

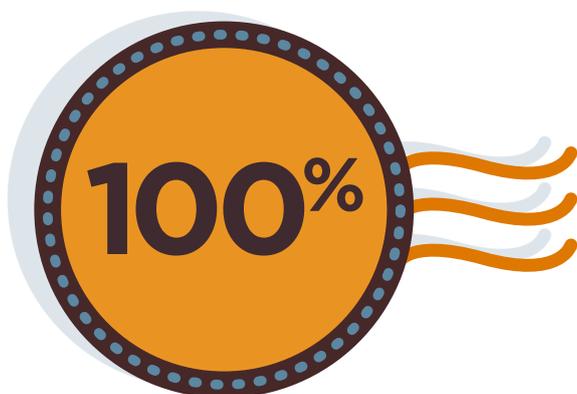
“KARI has been fantastic with all the clients I look after For example, I ring PJ, Lyle or one of the mentors and they organise the kids to respond to opportunities”

The relationship between the mentors, clients and Employment Services builds trust.

P9 goes on to point out that

“They (mentors) are always there for me, I've worked with other programs before and KARI is the best”

P9. The organisation responded by being,
“flexible with the school and amazing with the kids” (P10)



Said it was important to them that a cultural education and employment program was delivered by an Aboriginal organisation.

Future Potential or Improvements

Participants made very few suggestions about how the project could be improved. However, there were 2 suggestions which were provided

“Make the program available to years 7-12. This would support students throughout their time in high school and provide a good platform to transition to further study or work”

What would be good would be “a kind of mini program for primary schools where the same mentors could follow up with them over time”.

“Extend the program across NSW or even Australia.”



Cost Benefit Analysis SROI

Reducing the impact of unemployment not only changes lives, but also improves the health of the community (Mission Australia, 2010). Action taken to prevent young Aboriginal Australians from becoming unemployed ultimately saves the wider community money.

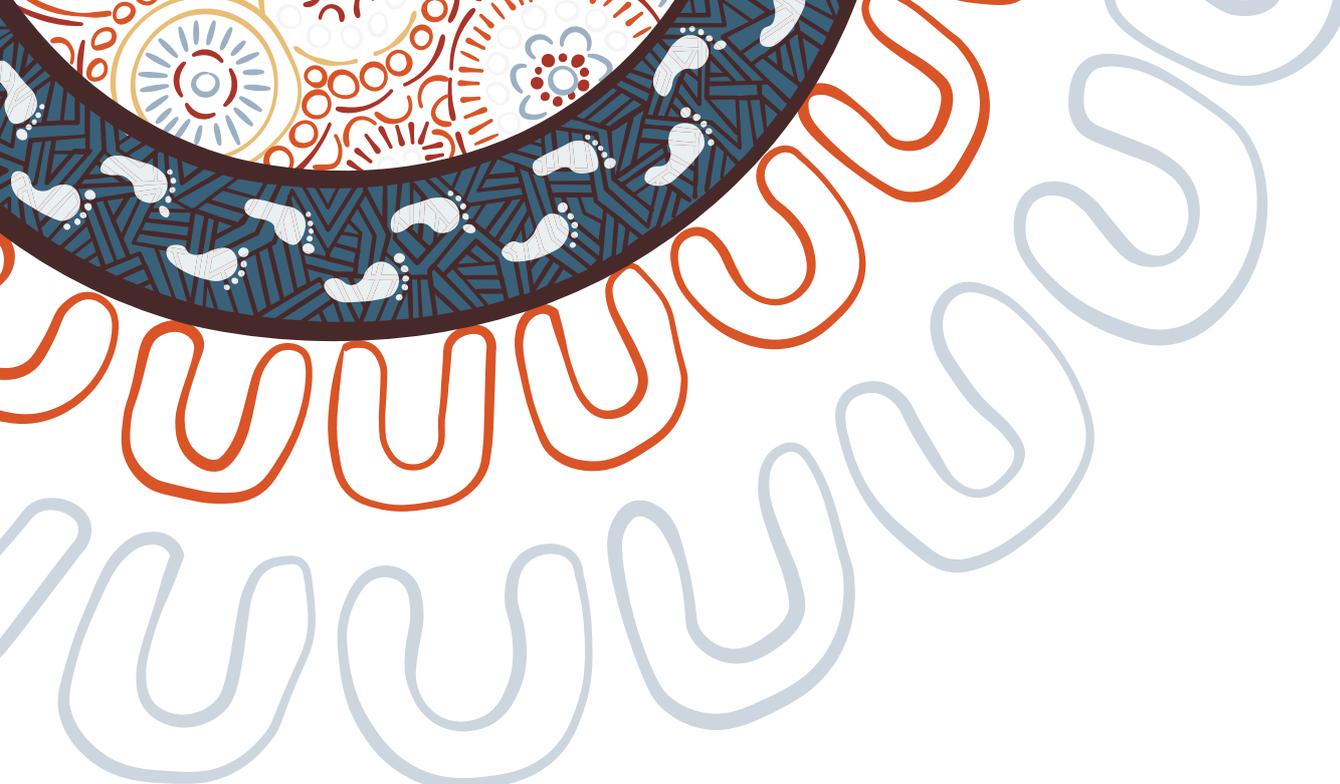
The cost-benefit analysis for those young Aboriginal Australians who participated in the Lead with Culture program demonstrated they were far less likely to access publicly-funded and justice services in the future. It could cost the government less in the future to support this cohort of young people if it was supported by an early intervention program such as the Lead with Culture program.



*Includes both identified and non-identified clients







The Six Steps of the SROI Analysis

Understanding change

Ethics approval from constitution committee, Interviews with participants, families, staff, community members, schools and employers Survey responses and organisational data and documentation



Define the scope

Define project scope including:

- Timing of the analysis
- Stakeholders to be consulted
- Ethics requirements.



Understanding Change

Engage with stakeholders to understand what changes they experienced. Understand relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Define the logic model.



Measuring Change

Identify and measure the material outcomes that are likely to be experienced by stakeholders through the program.



Scope

Sydney CBD, South, South West and Western Sydney (Batemans Bay established 12months into the program)
Disengaged Aboriginal youth

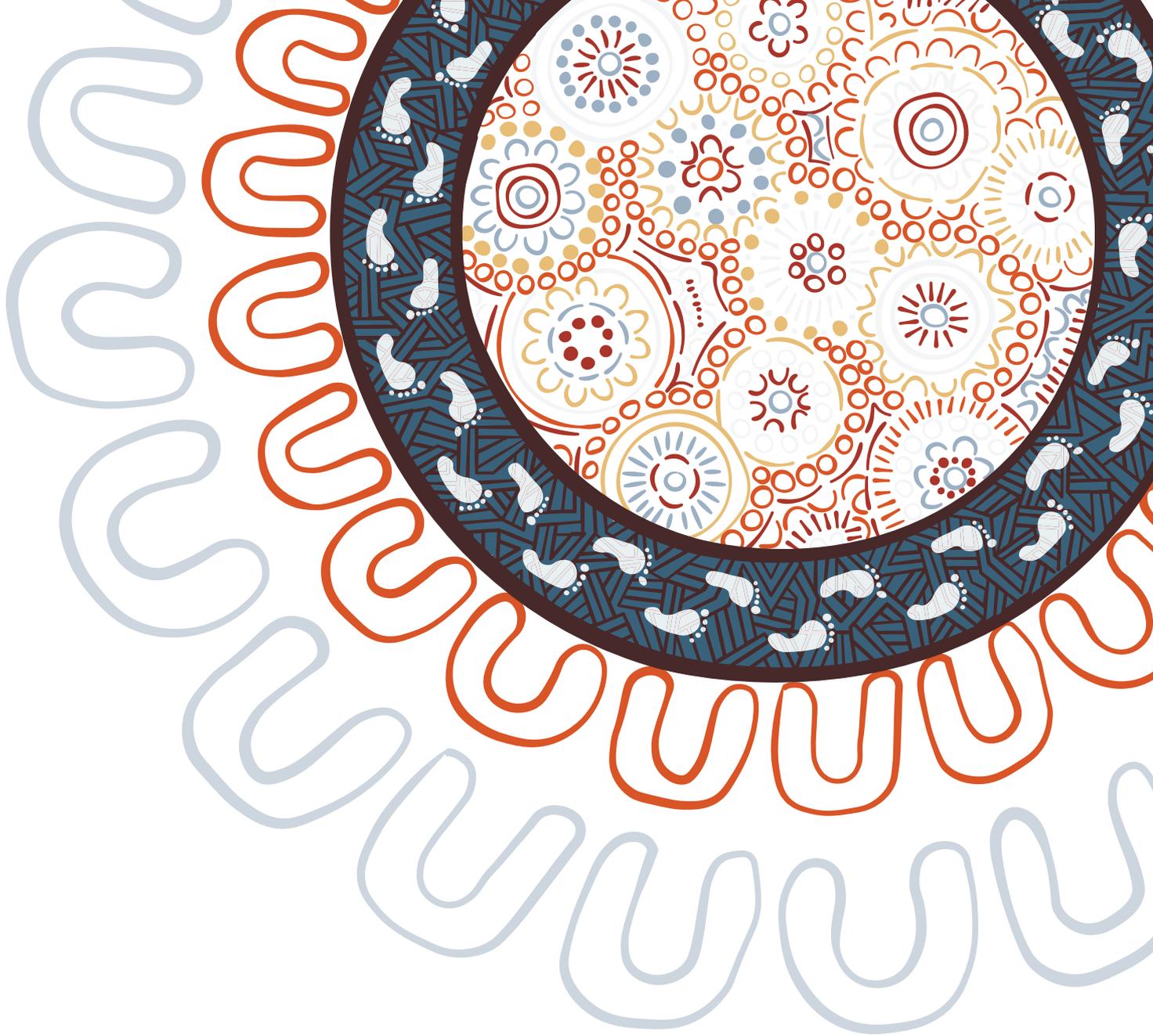


Measuring

Impact of introducing culture to Aboriginal youths lives
Effects of Culture mentoring
Ability of youth to return and stay at school

Ability of youth to gain long term employment
Social benefit to both youth and society





For more information of research finding detailed research document published at www.kari.org.au

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