



## **Stage 1 Developmental Evaluation: Alternative Service Response for at-risk youth – Oonchiumpa Consultancy & Services Pty Ltd**

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### **1. Purpose of this report**

The purpose of this report is to provide the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) with a developmental evaluation of stage 1 of the implementation of the Alternative Service Response (ASR) project for at-risk youth delivered by Oonchiumpa Consultancy and Services Pty Ltd (Oonchiumpa). The ASR was funded by the NIAA for an initial period of six months.

### **2. Intention of the Stage 1 Evaluation**

The main intention of this first stage developmental evaluation is to:

- record and assess the activities undertaken by Oonchiumpa during the first six months of the program's operation
- identify learnings for consideration in the ongoing rollout of the program
- identify systemic issues which should be addressed to better support the future implementation of the program (including to promote more integrated service delivery in Alice Springs)
- describing how the model has unfolded, and how it could continue to operate, ideally, on an expanded scale.

As agreed with NIAA, the Agreement between Oonchiumpa and Demetrius Consulting was amended to allow the allocated project funding to be extended over a longer period of 18 months, rather than the six months envisaged under the original agreement.

After providing mentoring support to Oonchiumpa for a three month period, I made this suggestion, as it was becoming increasingly clear that insufficient time had been allocated to build the overall capability of Oonchiumpa to deliver what is effectively a case coordination and support model to young people with highly complex needs; and to allow for other Aboriginal enterprises to understand and embed child safe practices in their organisation – a pre-requisite to partnering with Oonchiumpa.

As a result, the original funding allocated for the developmental evaluation was also split into two stages – this stage 1 developmental (process) evaluation, and a second stage evaluation focused more strongly on qualitative measures and longer-term client outcomes, which is now due for completion in July 2025.

An 'interim progress report' was delivered to NIAA in May. The information contained in the interim progress report is integrated within this evaluation document as relevant.



### 3. Background

In 2023, the NIAA awarded a grant to Oonchiumpa to deliver a project in Alice Springs over the summer holiday period to help keep at-risk young people healthy and engaged in activities with a view to promoting community safety. The aim was for Oonchiumpa to deliver (and broker via Aboriginal enterprises), a suite of tailored, culturally-led activities and interventions, such as therapeutic camps and day trips on Country with elders, young people and their families coming together in out-stations and locations throughout Alice Springs to address challenges and develop new pathways for young people in a culturally-led and supported way.

The project was part of the continued rollout of the \$250 million plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*.

#### 3.1 About Oonchiumpa and its approach

Oonchiumpa is 100% Aboriginal owned and operated. All of its staff are currently local Aboriginal people, along with its board of directors. Oonchiumpa's employed positions are identified for Aboriginal people.

All employees of Oonchiumpa and board directors are connected to Native Title in Mbatua. While Oonchiumpa seeks to support young people and families beyond Mbatua, their work is centred there. Oonchiumpa's vision includes setting up a community hub in the town centre to further strengthen its connection to 'place'.

Before starting the ASR project, Oonchiumpa was, and continues to offer, a range of cultural training and mentoring programs delivered 'by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people' that can be offered as one-off sessions or as a continuous program. Building on this cultural training and advisory platform, and strong desire to connect young Aboriginal people to their culture and create a sense of belonging for them, Oonchiumpa conceived what later became known as the Alternative Service Response project, based on their strong belief that young people were not being well served by the mainstream criminal justice and child protection systems.

When describing how the project came about in December 2023 ahead of the start of the school holidays, Oonchiumpa Director, Kristy Bloomfield said:<sup>1</sup>

*"After consultation with many of our at-risk young people and their families it has become evident that there is a lack of cultural brokerage provided by Aboriginal people with the cultural authority and knowledge to connect families and young people with the services, elders and communities most suited to build identity and bridge the gap between the two worlds we live in. With this in mind, Oonchiumpa consultancy have developed the Alternative Service Response activity to direct our young people to the appropriate services and programs."*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, media release, <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/mccarthy/2023/preparing-safer-summer-central-australia>, 6 December 2023



*"We hope that by providing culturally appropriate training, mentorship and referral services we will empower young people and their families to achieve independence and resilience in the non- Aboriginal World while also reinforcing respect and knowledge of culture, country and elders, as has been taught to us for all of time."*

During interviews with Oonchiumpa leaders, Kristy Bloomfield and Tanya Turner, they told me a compelling story about what drove them to put forward their project model for the NIAA grant:

*In Alice Springs Aboriginal people are significantly disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system, stemming from colonisation which involved police using incarceration as a method of controlling Aboriginal people. It is well documented that incarceration has a limited impact on people's ability to turn their lives around or in relation to improving the life outcomes of their family. In Central Australia we have the privilege of strong language and culture, but Western systems and justice do not allow for the proper recognition of this culture in programs designed to assist people to avoid incarceration and prevent them from reoffending.*

*The continued incarceration of Aboriginal men, women and children all contribute to the high rates of poverty, violence, neglect and disengagement from services and support in Central Australia. The recent curfews implemented in Alice Springs for young people illustrate that despite the investments being made, change isn't happening fast enough.*

*We are at a critical point in Central Australia's history where we need to take positive action to assist people here to operate in the Western world, but in a way that preserves our culture and heritage, these two worlds we talk about can no longer work in isolation; and the only way to do this is to allow Aboriginal people to take the lead and support them to provide culturally safe, appropriate programs led, and implemented by, Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.*

*We know that the mainstream service models imposed on Aboriginal communities in Alice Springs and elsewhere around Australia are not working. Alice Springs is 100 years behind the rest of Australian Aboriginal communities because of the delayed impacts of colonisation which came much later for us.*

*We want to focus our work with young people and families on Mbatua, because it is the melting pot of all the different language groups and people are forced to come here to access services. And, because it is here where violence and anti-social behaviours often occur; with traditional laws and customs not being followed. As a result, it is here in Mbatua that people find themselves entangled in the justice system. By focusing on Mbatua we are still providing support to other communities such as Utopia and Yuendumu because of the multiple language groups in Mbatua, so as a consequence, we are also servicing other surrounding communities in Central Australia.*

*Community wants to lead change by giving Aboriginal people not only the 'lead' but the authority to actually 'take charge' – many activities that are supported come with conditions and layers of oversight and fixed requirements. On the other side, you also have the continued funding of, and a lack of accountability over, some longstanding services despite community people knowing they are failing to deliver the expected outcomes, and people are getting really tired of this.*

*We want to create a place where families can come and get practical hands-on help with accessing services and increasing the opportunities for their children.*



The Oonchiumpa vision revolved around developing a project that centred on working with at-risk Aboriginal young people to enhance their social and emotional as well as cultural wellbeing. The aim is to help these young people manage difficult emotions and stressful situations by encouraging them to seek help from others when needed, develop healthy relationships, make safe positive choices and experience 'a sense of mastery and achievement' in their lives. At the heart of the program is fostering among the young people involved, a stronger connection to their culture and identity to give them a better understanding of their heritage, values and traditions, which ideally, engenders pride in who they are, where they have come from, and a sense of belonging.

Oonchiumpa's team work alongside at-risk young people by first identifying everyday practical goals, then working up to providing them with a stronger sense of direction, independence, hopefulness about the future, and identifying longer-term aspirations.

A central theme in Oonchiumpa's approach is giving young people the skills to 'live in two worlds' – these two worlds are their 'Aboriginal identity' and 'town life'.

#### ***Aboriginal identity***

- *Connection to Country and people*
- *Cultural responsibilities*
- *Story and song lines*
- *Kinship*
- *Elders and respect*

#### ***Town Life***

- *School*
- *Jobs*
- *Money*
- *Housing*
- *Drivers' license*
- *Sports*

#### ***Living in both Worlds***

*According to Oonchiumpa:*

- *When these two worlds collide, our social and emotional wellbeing is impacted and this affects the whole community, white and black.*
- *Oonchiumpa supports Aboriginal people to bridge the divide and live positively in both worlds.*

### **3.2 The Alternative Service Response Project – culturally-led service provision**

Based on the project proposal put forward, the NIAA in collaboration with Oonchiumpa, settled on the following project for delivery under the Agreement between the parties.

#### **3.2.1 Project objectives**

##### **Project description**

The objectives of the ASR project are to:



1. Implement culturally-led support for at risk youth and their family/kin to understand how innovative approaches can deliver lasting change for the participants.
2. Embed a range of innovative culturally-led ideas to effect change provided by community in response to the Central Australian Plan.
3. Improve knowledge and implementation of the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* in services across Central Australia.

### Activity partners

The project has four activity partners involved in the delivery – they are:

- Oonchiumpa
- Demetrius Consulting (child safe advisory work and embedded evaluator)
- Northern Territory Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (Territory Families)
- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

### Outcomes Framework

The strategic direction of the ASR project is aligned with national objectives under:

1. The *Closing the Gap* (CTG) targets relating to:
  - a) Target 07 – Aboriginal young people are engaged in employment or education.
  - b) Target 11 – Aboriginal young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.
2. The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Safe and Supported* relating to:
  - a) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experiencing disadvantage who are vulnerable reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect.

### Key deliverables

The project has three key deliverables:

1. The purpose of the ASR project is to deliver a bespoke culturally led case planning and structured individualised supports to at-risk youth and their families/kin by empowering them to continue their rich culture, language, knowledge and history while living in two worlds. Activities to be undertaken in support of this objective include:
  - on-country camps
  - day trips
  - workshops
  - access to health and wellbeing supports
  - encouraging education and training pathways, and
  - accessing employment opportunities



2. The project is intended to link participants to the existing network of services aligned to their needs which should be identified in their case plan in addition to utilising the brokerage service to deliver innovative culturally-led services to meet the needs of participants.
3. It is also expected that, through the ASR project, workforce capability across the child and family sector in Alice Springs (Mbatua) would be strengthened through embedding the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*, and by supporting:
  - access to quality universal and targeted services designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families
  - excellence in practice and policy development, based on evidence, data and information sharing
  - listening and responding to the voices and views of children and young people, and the views of those who care for them
  - clear responsibilities and strong monitoring, evaluation and achievements of outcomes
  - trauma-informed, culturally safe, and inclusive policies and actions, and
  - embedding the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection

### 3.2.2 Practical components of the ASR Model

The overarching vision for the project is to empower at-risk Aboriginal young people and their families/kin to achieve independence and navigate the two worlds they live in.

On a practical level, realising this vision involves Oonchiumpa partnering with local Aboriginal businesses and service providers to deliver coordinated training, mentoring, case management and support to at-risk young people who are regularly coming to the attention of Territory Families, Police and Education. The aim is for Oonchiumpa to help at risk young become more independent and resilient through reinforcing respect and knowledge of culture, country and elders.

In addition to the four activity partners under the project Agreement, the other agencies comprising the cross-agency taskforce labelled 'Operation Lunar' – the Northern Territory Department of Education, Police (and Territory Families) – have a key operational role in working alongside Oonchiumpa and supporting the project.

An integral part of the project was collocating Oonchiumpa's office within the same building as Territory Families to foster close collaboration and provide in-kind financial supporting the form of a rent-free premises. The project was designed to leverage off the existing case management support being provided by Territory Families to at risk young people. Oonchiumpa's role is to augment this support with culturally-led responses designed to meet the needs of each young person.

Referrals to Oonchiumpa come from Operation Lunar and focus on young people located in Mbatua (noting that young people will likely come from a range of surrounding communities).





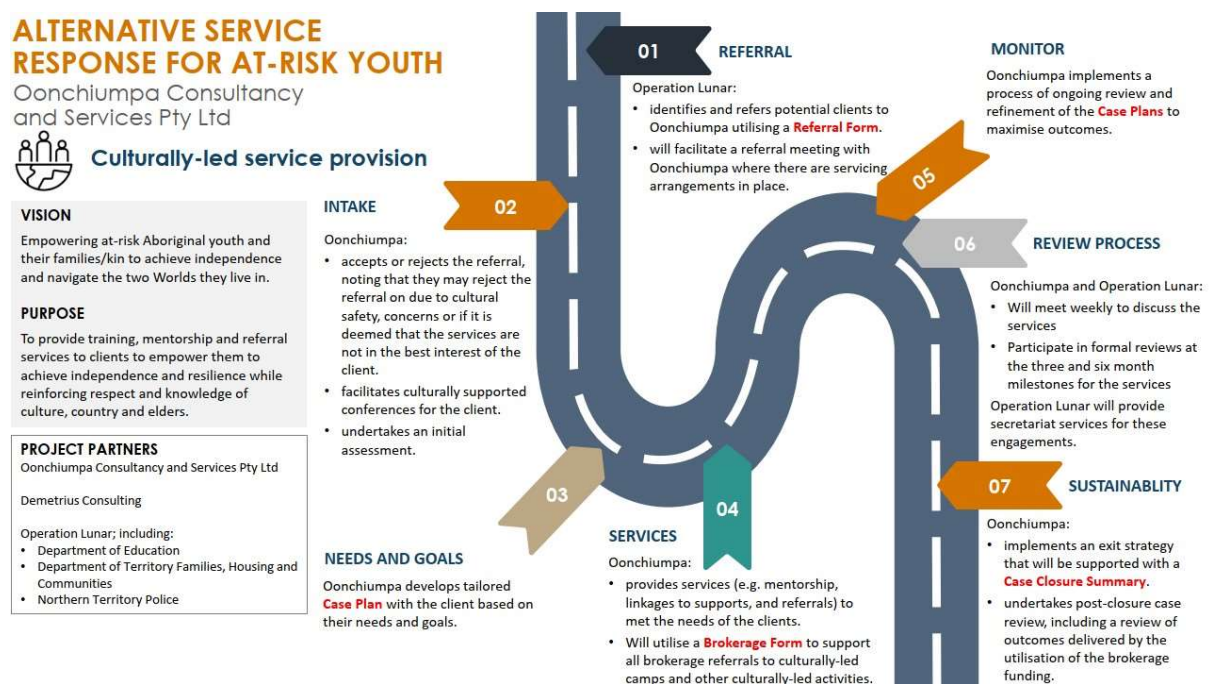
## Case coordination and support

At the outset, it was intended that around 18 young people would be targeted for support through the project. If other children from the same family or living in the same house are identified, then Oonchiumpa was given scope to extend their work to supporting them. Under the Agreement, Oonchiumpa is to assist a minimum of ten young people. Early on in the project, a decision was made in consultation with the NIAA, that Oonchiumpa should seek to limit its reach to focus on delivering more intensive supports to a smaller cohort of young people and in doing so, gain a clearer understanding of how the model, if rolled out more extensively, could operate and the likely outcomes that could be achieved.

It is expected that:

- a cultural lead will be identified to support engagement with each child and their family/kin from the Oonchiumpa team
- an intake and assessment process will be developed in collaboration with NT families, NT Police and NT Education
- a tailored case plan will be developed for each young person reflecting their needs, hopes and goals
- participants will be engaged in activities and services by Oonchiumpa staff, including using the brokerage service to deliver innovative culturally led services that meet the bespoke needs of participants
- an exit strategy and case closure summary will be developed for each participant at the sustainability phase

The diagram below depicts the model.





In short, the ASR works in the following way:

### **Referral**

Operation Lunar:

- Identifies and refers potential clients to Oonchiumpa utilising a Referral form.
- Will facilitate a referral meeting with Oonchiumpa where there are servicing arrangements in place.

### **Intake**

Oonchiumpa:

- accepts or rejects the referral, noting that they may reject the referral for cultural safety reasons, concerns or if it is deemed that the services are not in the best interests of the client
- facilitates culturally supported conferences for the client
- undertakes an initial assessment

### **Needs and goals**

Oonchiumpa:

- develops tailored Case Plan with the client based on their needs and goals.

### **Services**

Oonchiumpa:

- provides services (e.g. mentorship, linkages to supports, and referrals) to meet the needs of the clients.
- will utilise a Brokerage Form to support all brokerage referrals to culturally-led camps and other culturally-led activities.

### **Monitor**

Oonchiumpa:

- implements a process of ongoing review and refinement of the Case Plans to maximise outcomes

### **Review process**

Oonchiumpa and Operation Lunar:

- will meet weekly to discuss the services
  - participate in formal reviews at the three- and six-month milestones for the services
- Operation Lunar will provide secretariat services for these engagements

### **Sustainability**

Oonchiumpa:

- implements an exit strategy that will be supported with a Case Closure Summary.
- undertakes post-closure case review, including a review of outcomes delivered by the utilisation of the brokerage funding

### **Brokerage**

Oonchiumpa is able to access up to \$15,000 per young person to facilitate and to find culturally-led services that meet the identified needs of the young people and their family/kin as outlined in the case plan. This brokerage includes participation in therapeutic camps.





Oonchiumpa is required to develop and use a brokerage form to broker all referrals which includes an undertaking that the service have processes and procedures in place to support child safety and are actively working towards embedding the National Principles for Child safe Organisations within their organisation in line with the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: Safe and Supported*.

## 4. Evaluation method

### 4.1 The 'embedded evaluator' role

I was engaged by Oonchiumpa as its child safety specialist, advisor and embedded 'evaluator' on 13 January 2024. The purpose of this approach was to assess the model as it unfolded and give advice to Oonchiumpa on related child safe and casework practice issues, with the team making adjustments and enhancements along the way.

I made my first site visit two weeks later to meet with the team. In the five-month period of my engagement during the review period, I visited with the Oonchiumpa team and other stakeholders in person four times (in January, March, May and June) supplemented with regular telephone discussions and online meetings. I also had access to Oonchiumpa's case file records and other project documentation during the review period.

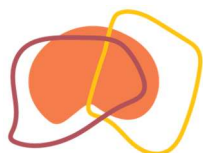
The 'embedded evaluator' and action learning approach adopted for this project has been crucial in giving me direct insights into how the project was operating in practice, and when a change in direction was needed. It also helped crystallise how the project could optimally operate and ideally, be extended to reach a greater number of young people and their families.

### 4.2 A staged approach to documenting and evaluating the model

The original Agreement required a 'developmental evaluation report' to be delivered by 30 June. Early on, a concern for the team (and me), was the very short period available to conduct any meaningful work with young people and then evaluate the impact of the project given the ASR only started operating in December 2023. To complete an assessment of outcomes achieved by 30 June would effectively have allowed only a 4 to 5 month period to gather information and round off data collection.

We were mindful that working with a cohort of young people that government agencies and other services had failed to engage in the past would first require building a connection with these young people and their families, and would then take time to establish trust. In addition, time was needed for Oonchiumpa to establish operational systems and policies to support the implementation of the project. These important steps needed to occur before the impact of the project could be assessed.

After discussions with the NIAA Research and Evaluation team in April and with our NIAA project partners, it was agreed that the main purpose of the 'developmental evaluation' should be on obtaining a clear understanding of the core components of the service model being delivered by Oonchiumpa. In addition, NIAA was keen to understand the wins achieved so far and any practical or systemic challenges identified through the model's



implementation. It was agreed that the impacts of the project could be examined in the Stage 2 evaluation due for completion in July 2025.

Conducting this two-stage developmental evaluation over an extended period of Oonchiumpa's operations will yield more meaningful results, and allow a more robust process to be used to measure the value and impacts of the service model over a longer period. It will also enable further work to be carried out with partner agencies over the next six months to establish the data required from them to support the evaluation process. The second stage of the evaluation process will allow time to work with Oonchiumpa and partner agencies to address ethical issues relating to the use of any client related data and client interview processes.

In relation to accessing client data, I discuss the need for the project partners and agencies with a stake in this project to settle the Stage 2 evaluation data requirements together with the ongoing sharing of client data with Oonchiumpa for operational purposes which is aimed at promoting the safety and wellbeing of children in its cohort group (see section 8). Critical policing, justice, child protection and education data is currently not held by or being shared with Oonchiumpa, and without such data, several quantitative and qualitative measures outlined in the NIAA Agreement covering this project will be difficult to assess.

#### 4.3 Evidence relied on during the review period

I relied on the following evidence to inform my observations in this report:

- On site and online consultations with the Oonchiumpa Director and Manager during the review period.
- In person consultations with Oonchiumpa casework team members about the young people they're supporting.
- Reviews of case file records, including client case notes, client monthly summaries and client case plans.
- Individual case file reviews with Oonchiumpa staff in person.
- Responses from Oonchiumpa to requests for information relating to service referrals undertaken; brokerage activities, and Oonchiumpa-led activities delivered during the period.
- Reviews of night notes taken by YORETs (provided to me on 8 August).
- Oonchiumpa Good News Stories and photographs of activities.
- Testimonials from stakeholders (including local community leaders, families and young people involved in the project).

#### 4.4 Key measures used to assess progress so far

I relied on the key activity (and quantitative) measures contained in the NIAA Agreement with Oonchiumpa to assess the progress made:

##### **Casework support**

- Total referrals made to Oonchiumpa
- Number of referrals accepted by Oonchiumpa



- Participant information (aggregated)
  - age of each young person referred
  - gender of each young person referred
  - disability status
  - cultural background
- Number of referrals declined
- Reasons for all declined referrals
- Number of 'service exits'
  - number of ad hoc exits and as a % of total exits
  - number of case closure exits at sustainability phase
- Reason/s for all service exits
- Number of case plans developed and as a % of all referrals accepted
- Number of referrals that reached the sustainability phase and as a % of all accepted referrals and broken down by gender
- Number of referrals made to other services and broken down by gender

During the second stage of the evaluation, I will examine the following:

- Completion of relevant case plan activities and courses of treatment
  - % of participants who complete all relevant activities or courses of treatment in their case plan
  - % of participants who complete 75% or more of the relevant activities or courses of treatment in their case plan
  - % of participants who complete 50% or more of the relevant activities or courses of treatment in their case plan
- Core activities or service being delivered meets or exceeds the requirements

### **Brokerage activities**

- Brokerage activities including:
  - name and number of all agencies which entered into a collaboration agreement with Oonchiumpa
  - description of all activities and services brokered per agency
  - number of times the service/activity was brokered per event
  - number of times the service/activity was brokered per child
  - number of brokerage events delivered
  - number of agencies attending each brokerage event
  - capacity building activities engaged in with brokerage agencies (e.g., child safe training, model child safe policy development, input into evaluation process)

For the reasons outlined in section 5.7, these measures have been reported on but a greater level of activity in this area is expected in 2024/25.

The second stage of the evaluation will examine in greater detail:

### **Service integration**

- Examples of collaborative activities undertaken



- Examples of actions taken to enhance service sector integration
- Systemic issues identified via the project which require collaborative efforts/legislative/policy interventions to address (example, information exchange provisions, absence of reportable conduct scheme).

This first stage evaluation also examines measures relating to employment of Indigenous people and issues relating to financial management.

## 5. Key activities and developments undertaken during the trial

Outlined in this section are the main areas of progress made by Oonchiumpa during the initial operating period in relation to establishing its operating model, building relationships with critical stakeholders and service brokers, and most importantly, working to support young people referred for support.

In section 8, I discuss the learnings from the implementation to-date and what the ideal model for the future could look like.

### 5.1 Establishing governance mechanisms

Oonchiumpa's board is chaired by Mbantua Traditional Owner, Karen Liddle, and comprises four strong Aboriginal women leaders who are also Traditional Owners and are well known in the community for their longstanding justice and advocacy work.

The board members come from two pioneering Aboriginal families (the Liddles and Bloomfields) who were instrumental in setting up the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service. Elders from multiple communities and language groups (e.g., Yuendumu, Utopia and Tennant Creek) play an advisory role to Oonchiumpa. Many of these elders hold or have held significant roles with government and community organisations in Central Australia and help widen Oonchiumpa's network of contacts.

The team is also supported by a Cultural Advisor (Karen Liddle), and a wider group of elders who give advice on cultural issues.

My role as child safety specialist has been embedded within the organisation, along with my role in mentoring and supporting Oonchiumpa with a range of operational, policy and governance issues. As discussed in section 4, this role will continue into 2025.

Oonchiumpa currently engages an external accountant for financial management and a financial auditor.

The Oonchiumpa director, Kristy Bloomfield, as the organisation's head, makes all key decisions about staffing, funding and operational activities but takes advice from and reports to the board about these as appropriate. The Director also takes advice from the Manager, lawyer Tanya Turner, and the external supporters noted above.

Oonchiumpa has worked closely with NIAA around project aims, strategic relationships, funding and expenditure, along with Territory Families case referrals from Operation Lunar and regarding case coordination activities.



## 5.2 Recruiting personnel and employment indicators

- Oonchiumpa is 100% Aboriginal owned and operated.
- A stable core team has been in place throughout the review period. More recently (in June), Oonchiumpa recruited Kirsty Bloomfield to the team to play a casework supervisory role. Kirsty has casework experience from her previous role with Tangentyere Council.
- All Oonchiumpa staff are local Aboriginal people along with the board directors.
- All employed positions are identified for Aboriginal people.
- Along with the Director, Kristy Bloomfield and Manager, Tanya Turner, Oonchiumpa has recruited 10 staff since it commenced operating in December 2023 (comprising nine (9) women and one (1) male).
- The case coordination and support team comprising 2 team leaders and 2 youth workers who report up to the Manager via the newly established Program Manager role occupied by Kirsty Bloomfield. Oonchiumpa has also engaged 2 trainee youth workers and a cultural advisor.
- A part-time payroll officer has been employed to manage staff salaries and entitlements, and acquitting expenditure on children and families in the program.

## 5.3 Financial and contractual matters

### 5.3.1 Extending the Agreement timeframe, budget and deliverables

During April, I met with Oonchiumpa to discuss its funding expenditure and how this was tracking. It was clear that the service brokerage funds allocated could not be expended responsibly in the allocated timeframe as time was needed to ensure that the potential service brokers had the necessary arrangements in place to demonstrate they were working towards becoming child safe organisations. (A requirement of the NIAA Agreement regarding service brokerage, and is consistent with Oonchiumpa's own commitment to good governance and child safety.)

In my view, it reflected well on Oonchiumpa that they did not expend the client support/service brokerage funds without being confident about the links to this expenditure and planned work with young people and their families. As well, the investments made by Oonchiumpa over the past six months have been mainly in the form of staff time involved in building relationships and connecting with young people, as a precursor to linking them to the right external programs. It's important that being supported by Oonchiumpa isn't seen as a way to 'get access to stuff for free' but instead, is about committing to making positive changes through deepening cultural connections and access to role models.

Oonchiumpa has also been keen to ensure that its small but productive team of workers was firmly embedded in the operating structure and that they clearly understood their child safe and wider support role with young people, before seeking to expand the team at a rapid pace. In any event, it was not feasible for Oonchiumpa to maintain the staff it has recruited, or in fact bring on new staff, with the current funding contract due to end in June 2024 – then only two months away.



For these reasons, Oonchiumpa approached NIAA in April to convey our shared view that we considered it more prudent to allow Oonchiumpa further time to deliver the commitments under the ASR model but within the same funding envelope, at least with respect to the initial cohort of around 18 young people, but potentially with a larger cohort.

A revised budget was submitted to NIAA in April 2024 and was further revised after a meeting with the Assistant Director, Engagement, and submitted on 20 May 2024. I am advised that this budget proposal was endorsed by NIAA. My child safe advisory, mentoring an evaluation role has also been extended to July 2025, allowing me to assist Oonchiumpa for a longer period as the service model continues to evolve and ideally, expands.

### 5.3.2 Enhancing financial support

The Oonchiumpa Director, Kristy Bloomfield, has been working with a local accountant to manage the budget and prepare accounts, as well as to create a register of assets. While this has been a useful process so far in terms of closely tracking expenditure, I suggested that it might be preferable to engage a firm with experience in acquitting and preparing reports for government agencies. It is likely that well credentialed NGO accounting firm – Accounting for Good – will be engaged to perform Oonchiumpa's accounting work and funding acquittals in future subject to a fee proposal.

### 5.3.3 Sourcing additional funding

NIAA raised the issue of Oonchiumpa seeking funds under the current Just Reinvest grant cycle, as it was suggested this could be a more sustainable ongoing funding source and given the crime diversionary focus of the service model.

I worked with Oonchiumpa in early May to submit a grant application for Just Reinvest to secure funding for a period extending beyond the life of the NIAA grant. If successful, it is likely that grantees will be notified in the final quarter of 2024 with funds becoming available around November 2024.

However, it is important to note that the pool of available funds under the Just Reinvest grant (cycle 2) is quite limited and represents less than the allocated funding amount from NIAA for the original six-month start up period of the ASR. Although there is no minimum or maximum grant amount, grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds in each financial year with a maximum amount of \$3.25 million available over the three years for projects during cycle 2.

Based on existing funding, Oonchiumpa will only be able to maintain its current sized team and will not be well placed to substantially expand its cohort of young people and intensity of casework. For example, it would not be possible to undertake the type of intensive work needed to engage with and support the 'Black Socks Girls' (around 12 young people) – currently only 2 number of these girls are in the cohort of 18.

If successful with the Just Reinvestment grant and NIAA funding ends, the funding would allow Oonchiumpa to operate for another two years, but not at an expanded level without any additional funding sources.





However, if additional funding was sourced, Oonchiumpa would be ready to expand the number of young people it is currently supporting and the intensity of its activities. Since starting in December, Oonchiumpa has been approached by multiple organisations, including the Courts, about taking on referrals outside of Operation Luna and more young people under the watch of Operation Lunar.

#### 5.4 IT systems

Oonchiumpa currently operates off a Microsoft 365 Office platform. Its system is fit for purpose given the current size of its cohort.

Oonchiumpa has developed a template for capturing information about the services it delivers and procures for young people and families involved in the ASR project. Over time, the intention is for Oonchiumpa to not only capture service delivery activities, but also the outcomes the program is achieving in collaboration with local partner organisations.

If resourced further, Oonchiumpa considers that building an integrated case management database would be a worthwhile investment to enable real time recording and tracking of the progress made by young people and to identify key risk flags such as frequent night note mentions.

#### 5.5 Child safe work

All Oonchiumpa's personnel have current NT Ochre Cards. No staff member is allowed to have contact with a child or young person without supervision by a holder of an Ochre Card if they are still waiting for their Working With Children Check clearance. One youth worker is on leave without pay while Oonchiumpa waits for his Ochre Card as the period covered under extension ended.

On 31 January 2024, Oonchiumpa arranged for potential service brokers to come together with them and meet representatives of NIAA and myself to explain the ASR project, and hear from me about the practical requirements of being a child safe organisation – a precursor for becoming an Oonchiumpa service partner.

During January-February, I developed a number of key child safe policies for review and implementation by Oonchiumpa, these include:

- Commitment to child safety (Oonchiumpa's promise to young people)
- Code of Conduct
- Child Safe Policy
- Working With Children Check Policy
- Risk Management and assessment template
- Complaints register

In accordance with policy developed with Oonchiumpa, the Oonchiumpa Manager (Tanya Turner) will physically sight and record the Ochre Card and expiry date when onboarding staff. The Oonchiumpa Manager will confirm the clearance via checking on the SAFE NT website using the 'Check status' function. Copies of the Ochre Card and clearance type (volunteer or employee) will be maintained on file. The Oonchiumpa Manager will store the clearance information in the WWCC Compliance Register to keep track of when clearances



are due for renewal. The clearance date for renewal will be recorded and an alert system will be established three months before all clearances are due for renewal. It is the responsibility of the Oonchiumpa manager to keep this register up to date.

Using the risk management and assessment template I developed, the Director and Manager performed some trial assessments based on overnight activities. By doing this, they shared with me what they learned about their 'child safe readiness' at the time they arranged the overnight trip with young fellas in early January. (This is discussed further in section 5.7.)

During my March 2024 site visit, I worked with Oonchiumpa to plan a child safety awareness workshop for potential brokers with involvement from NT Families, after it became clear this type of hands-on support would be needed to get organisations 'ready to do business' with Oonchiumpa.

On 20 March 2024, the child safety awareness workshop was delivered, with Andrew Walder, A/General Manager, Regional Services, Territory Families running a session in the morning on mandatory reporting requirements; the role of Territory Families and Operation Lunar; and NT specific child safe requirements; followed by an afternoon session which I delivered on implementing the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*. I then took the potential brokers through each of the key child safe policies we expect them to have in place before they partner with Oonchiumpa. 20 participants from 7 organisations attended the event, including Oonchiumpa's staff.

Oonchiumpa shared copies of its own 'model' child safe policies with the potential brokers at the event and continues to share these documents with brokers as new ones emerge – ensuring that the benefits of NIAA's investment in this policy work is shared by as many local Aboriginal businesses as possible.

In collaboration with NT Families, we have identified a suite of online child safe learning and development offerings to supplement the knowledge of potential partner organisations. For example, we have arranged access to Territory Families' online training sessions (via Andrew Walder) on various aspects of mandatory reporting. We will also promote the resources and online training available from the Australian Human Rights Commission and National Office for Child Safety. In relation to Oonchiumpa staff, I will continue to provide face to face child safe practice coaching to the team.

A child safety compliance certificate has been developed by Oonchiumpa for completion by service brokers before they partner with them. The certificate is modelled on similar versions used by government funding bodies.

In March, I held a briefing session with Oonchiumpa staff which involved them talking me through each of their cases, and discussing practical issues relating to child safety and reporting responsibilities. The staff also spoke about the type of support they were providing and how the young people they were working with were responding to this support, as well as input from local agencies.

In June, I conducted individual file reviews with Oonchiumpa staff which again incorporated discussion of any child safety issues to emerge.



A follow up child safety awareness session will be conducted with Oonchiumpa staff in the next six months, which will draw on case studies to test practical knowledge and application of the child safe policies.

### 5.6 Relationships with critical partners and cultural authority

As noted previously, Oonchiumpa's board directors have strong links to elders from multiple communities and language groups (e.g., Yuendumu, Utopia and Tennant Creek communities) and play an advisory role with the team. Many of these elders hold or have held significant roles with government and community organisations in Central Australia. As evidenced in the testimonials excerpted in section 7, the families of the young people who have received support so far under the ASR project and other grassroots community leaders have indicated their strong support for the value of the project.

Oonchiumpa's cultural authority and justice advocacy work has also been recognised by universities and the Federal Circuit and Family Courts, including by hosting the Court's annual judge's conference on country and providing Aboriginal perspectives on tackling justice issues in Central Australia.

Outside of the ASR project, Oonchiumpa has a partnership with the ANU through its delivery of the *True justice through deep listening on country course* to 16 law students; the University of Canberra via its Indigenous leadership strategy; and Flinders University via the delivery of an on-country intensive workshop for their framing Indigenous Health post graduate course.

Over the past six months, Oonchiumpa has built strong working relationships with the key youth stakeholder agencies in Central Australia in delivering the ASR project. Oonchiumpa attends weekly case management meetings with these agencies to discuss potential referrals, issues facing young people and progress made. Service providers have told Oonchiumpa they have seen the positive changes in the young people they've worked with, including that the young people are showing greater respect to adults, and increased engagement with services across the board.

Under the ASR project, Oonchiumpa has helped to enhance the capacity of local Aboriginal businesses running programs for young people. And, through my engagement as external child safety advisor – Oonchiumpa has prepared model child safe policy documents and run two child safety awareness sessions with prospective partner organisations (as discussed in section 5.5).

### 5.7 Brokerage role

As noted previously, we recognised early in the project that in order to meet the requirement that Oonchiumpa only broker services from organisations that are working towards complying with the *National Principles for Child Safe organisations*, Oonchiumpa would need to allow the potential brokers time to demonstrate their compliance.

Because of the wide range of programs on offer from King's Narrative, and because it is already (according to their advice), 'child safe' compliant, several attempts were made to broker services for Oonchiumpa's young people during March to April. In particular,



Oonchiumpa was interested in King's Narrative delivering on Country overnight camp for young fellas who have returned from ceremony and one on one mentoring programs. Unfortunately, Kings Narrative were unavailable to accommodate Oonchiumpa's requests.

During the review period, there have been two brokerage activities, these are noted below:

- **Brokerage Activity – J&Ls Outback Experience**

- During 7 to 8 January (and before my engagement), the team took five young fellas on an overnight stay at the Big 4 Caravan Park where they undertook social and emotional wellbeing sessions and assessments, as well as participating in activities.
- The following day, the young fellas travelled to Tempe Downs – Kurruku Outstation to participate in J&L's Outback Experience – activities included learning to change a tyre and welcome to country.
- Although there was no safety incident, the young people were recalled to Alice Springs the same evening due to incomplete child safety documentation.
- Since then, Oonchiumpa has worked through the safety and risk assessment plan I developed for them to inform planning for all overnight trips and day activities with young people. We conducted a reflective practice session about the trip in March, and identified how planning could have been better handled.
- This experience early on was an important learning opportunity for the team and brought into sharp focus the need for all partner organisations to be able to certify compliance with child safety requirements, for Oonchiumpa workers to be present for first time activities or overnight trips, and planning events using the new risk assessment tool.

- **Atnarpa Station**

- The purpose of the trip to Atnarpa was to encourage the five young people who attended to connect to country, assist and be a part of the Red Earth program which includes non-Aboriginal young people, giving them the opportunity to connect with young people they wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to spend time with.

During the last three months, Oonchiumpa has been working actively with the following eight (8) local Aboriginal businesses which collectively offer a range of services for girls and fellas with a view to engaging them to broker services (subject to them submitting child safe compliance certificates).

- **Atnarpa** – provision of cultural camps at Love's Creek Station, mostly for girls
- **Arrernte Boxing** – provision of boxing training sessions, mentoring and accessing role models, mostly for young fellas
- **Infinity Boxing Academy** – provision of boxing training sessions, mentoring and narrative therapy, mostly for young fellas



- J & L Outback Experience – programs include local cultural walking tours, arts programs, campfire cooking, cultural ceremony; each activity is designed to provide an understanding of Aboriginal culture, for young fellas
- Jane Silverton – self-care, beauty and massage therapy, for the girls
- RDK Outstation program – deliver the “All Rounder Program’ which involves the Kunoth brothers drawing on their collective experiences and knowledge, to involve young fellas in camps which focus on station work, horse-riding, sports (AFL & boxing), mechanics, infrastructure, stable management and caring for livestock
- Young Yarning – is a social and emotional wellbeing and mentoring enterprise aimed at supporting young Aboriginal people within the community, who are experiencing challenging and complex mental health concerns and personal difficulties; services include counselling, goal setting, family support sessions, music and narrative therapy, for young fellas
- Black Doll – empowerment for girls through sports and physical activity
- Penangke Cultural Consultants – provide ‘Big Dreaming’ programs/camps aimed at teaching people to set life goals and aspirations through experiential learning and mentorship

As at the end of June, Oonchiumpa had received child safe compliance certificates from the brokers. Plans are underway to undertake activities with a number of young people in the Oonchiumpa group in the next quarter, including mentoring young fellas through boxing lessons, horse riding, DJ’ing workshops, and conducting empowerment sessions with several of the girls.

## 5.8 Case coordination and support work

In this section, I set out the processes and activities Oonchiumpa has engaged in during the period. Later sections discuss the impact of this work and learnings during the project’s rollout.

### 5.8.1 Setting up case management processes

A **client referral form** was settled by Oonchiumpa in conjunction with Operation Lunar agencies which will be used for all case referrals to Oonchiumpa. Unfortunately, this referral form was not settled and used by Operation Lunar at the commencement of the project.

A tailored **case plan** for each young person containing important details about their background, issues they’re facing, their support needs and how Oonchiumpa is assisting them has been developed. All 18 young people being supported have a case plan prepared by their allocated Oonchiumpa youth worker. This case plan was further refined after my individual case reviews with the Oonchiumpa team. Staff have been progressively working through all identified actions for the young person, subject to delays caused by the young person disengaging for periods.

A **monthly case summary** template was prepared for completion by Oonchiumpa caseworkers. The summary is a narrative driven document which:

- describes the young person’s circumstances over the period
- key issues they and their family are facing
- activities engaged in over the period



- positive shifts in behaviours, for example, re-engagement with schooling, accessing work opportunities, reduction in contact with police for anti-social or criminal behaviours, and
- progress towards stated goals and aspirations of the young person.

All 18 young people had a monthly summary prepared by their allocated Oonchiumpa caseworker which is checked monthly by the Oonchiumpa Manager. Monthly summaries were up to date as of end May. Following my case reviews in June, we decided to rationalise the casework documentation, and merge the summary content into a revised case plan which focuses on how the team are meeting the key milestones for each young person, including any services brokered and related outcomes by partner organisations.

Oonchiumpa has developed a **case closure summary** which outlines the exit strategy and the outcomes delivered by Oonchiumpa and brokerage services.

A **brokerage form** to support all brokerage referrals to culturally-led camps and other culturally-led activities has been developed.

### 5.8.2 Referrals to Oonchiumpa

When Oonchiumpa commenced operating, 47 young people were on the Operation Luna list. Referrals to Oonchiumpa were determined by Oonchiumpa and Territory Families (as the representative agency for Operation Lunar). Young people were selected based on:

- their previous interactions with Oonchiumpa
- the inability of other services to successfully engage with them
- the relationships they had with other young people (ensuring the right mix in the group re potential conflicts)

Initially, Oonchiumpa was asked to take on 22 young people; however, this number was reduced to 18, after consultation with me (based on my discussions with NIAA where it was agreed that building and testing the model was the priority in the first six months, rather than growing it quickly).

The core group of 18 young people being supported is split evenly between males and females; and are aged between 10 to 17 years. The young people come from the following cultural backgrounds – Arrernte, Luritja, Pitjijarra, and Walpirri. One young person has a diagnosed disability and is a NDIS participant.

All referrals were made verbally until the referral form was settled in June.

The work being carried out with these young people differs in intensity depending on their level of engagement at points in time, and their life and cultural circumstances, for example, absences from town when meeting cultural obligations – see the case studies in section 6 .

In addition to the 18 young people being supported by Oonchiumpa, there have been six other young people that agencies have attempted to refer (YOREOTS and Operation Luna), but they were declined due to Oonchiumpa being at capacity.

Although Oonchiumpa was unable to provide ongoing case management support to these six young people, they referred two young people to employment and training opportunities at McDonalds and Hardy Fencing; and met with the Acting Manager, YOREOTS and the Chairperson, Operation Luna to provide advice about suitable options to support the young





people involved (including alternative service options and methods of engagement, employment opportunities and referral contacts).

Oonchiumpa has also received three inquiries from Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre and Gap Youth Centre.

### 5.8.3 Referrals to Oonchiumpa

During the review period, Oonchiumpa made 81 individual referrals to services in relation to 51 fellas and 30 girls across the cohort of 18 young people.

The type of services that Oonchiumpa sought assistance from include:

- Education/schools (Centralian Middle School, Yipirinya school, Yirara College, Sadadeen primary school, St Joseph's Catholic School, Tiwi islands school, Kintore school)
- Health – Alice Springs Hospital, Congress Health Clinic (including optometry and dental), Congress – Back on Track (psychology appointments), Head Space, and NT Child and Adolescent Youth mental Health Service
- Centrelink
- Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Employment services (Saltbush Social Enterprise, Tangentyere Employment)
- Bail Accommodation (Saltbush Social Enterprise)
- Court support
- Youth Services (Gap Youth Centre, McDonnell Shire Youth Centre, NT Government, Right on Track))
- Housing (Territory Housing, Anglicare)
- NDIS
- Banking (Westpac)
- Sport and recreation (Cruisers basketball club,
- Child protection liaison
- Police liaison support
- School liaison support

The vast majority of referrals (62%) were made to schools (20), health services (19) and justice services (11).

Oonchiumpa staff have also played a critical role in transporting young people and their families to school, activities and appointments.

### 5.8.4 Service exits

There has been only one formal 'service exit' so far due to a refusal of the young person to participate. (The number of young people referred was 19 before this exit.)

Temporary exits (work continued with families while these young people were not actively engaging with Oonchiumpa):

- There have been two temporary exits due to the relocation of young people by Territory Families to Darwin – the young people were exited for a period of 2 weeks



before they returned to Alice Springs, at which time Oonchiumpa re-engaged with them.

- There have been six temporary exits due to young people being out bush for ceremonial reasons – exits occurred for approximately one month before they returned to town.
- One temporary exit was due to the young person being bailed to community for diversion.

At the time of writing, 4 of the 18 young people remaining in the cohort failed to meaningfully engage with the project.

### 5.8.5 Group activities undertaken with clients

During the review period, Oonchiumpa arranged a number of diverse activities, especially during the January and April school holidays – see **Appendix 1** for 'Oonchiumpa Good News Stories'.

- Other group holiday activities, day trips and events types include:
  - Oonchiumpa Christmas 2023 Lunch (December 2023)  
*I feel like I'm going to have a good day today! I'm going to have a good feed and good swim. I like working with you mob!!*
  - Oonchiumpa Fellas overnight stay at the Discovery Park (January 2024)  
*I really like my bag with my own stuff in it!!*
  - Oonchiumpa pool days (multiple times in January 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Girls' Lunch (January 2024)  
*I feel excited!! I don't know why but I just do!!*
  - Oonchiumpa Fellas Day Out – Standly Chasm (January 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Girls Day Out – Standly Chasm (January 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Young Fellas behind the scenes tour of McDonalds (January 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa AFL event (April 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Young Fellas Day Out – Reptile Centre (April 2024)
  - Congress Fun Day (April 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Young Fellas horse riding training programs with Riding for Disabled Association (RDA) – (April 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa girls Cinema visit – (April 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa girls ice skating visit – (April 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Friday Office dance day (7 June 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Basketball day (June 2024)
  - Oonchiumpa Friday Office dance day (14 June 2024)



There were 20 activities run in the review period (several more than once) with 80 per cent of young people participating on average. An additional 7 people outside of the core group (usually relatives or friends) also participated in activities.

#### 5.8.6 Client service support to families

During the review period, Oonchiumpa assisted 36 adults and young people using the client service support funding pool. These funds were used to help with expenditure such as:

- Clothing for young people, especially during seasonal changes when they were without warm clothes
- Clothing for young people to assist with them undertaking specific activities including camping trips and school excursions
- Purchasing blankets for young people without bedding at home
- Purchasing breakfast and lunches, and at times, dinners for young people after sporting activities when it was clear their families had little food available
- Assisting with transporting two young people to Pukatja to stay with an Aunt and attend school there.

#### 5.8.7 One-on-one case work

Outlined below are examples of the goals and strategies routinely developed with young people during case planning, and related activities and treatments.

##### Goals/strategies

- ☐ Fostering a connection between worker and young person
- ☐ Enhancing cultural connections
- ☐ Improve school attendance
- ☐ Improve school engagement
- ☐ Increasing motivation
- ☐ Developing a sense of motivation
- ☐ Developing a sense of responsibility
- ☐ Expanding their outlook and horizons
- ☐ Involvement in sporting and recreational activities
- ☐ Involvement in art/music
- ☐ Improving work readiness
- ☐ Transitioning towards independence

##### Activities/treatments

- ☐ Home visits and ongoing conversations with family [This should happen as part of settling the case plan and consent to participate in our program]
- ☐ One-on-one yarning sessions with young person [identify what they know about their cultural background, family, likes and dislikes, things they find hard etc]
- ☐ Referral for counselling (young person)
- ☐ Referral for counselling (parent/s)



- ☐ Referral to domestic violence support service [men/women]
- ☐ Emergency accommodation support
- ☐ Supporting family to make medical appointments
- ☐ Transport to and from medical appointments
- ☐ Transport to and from school
- ☐ Support with schoolwork [tutoring to get young people back into school, support in class etc]
- ☐ Referral to brokerage services [state which type e.g., boxing, self-care/grooming, overnight cultural camps, day camps, mentoring services]
- ☐ Involvement in Oonchiumpa group activities [e.g. day trips with other young people we support, movie afternoons, etc]

## 6 Case studies

The case studies in this section have been prepared based on my review of the daily/weekly case notes and monthly summaries prepared by Oonchiumpa staff about their engagement with the young person, combined with information about the young person contained in their case plan. I have also had regard to the 'night notes' provided by the Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Officers (YORETs).

The case studies describe the work undertaken with 8 of the 18 young people in the Oonchiumpa group, and well illustrate the complexity of the needs of these young people and the challenges facing them and their families.

A critical component of the casework is meeting with the young person early on to establish a rapport and trust, before working with them to identify positive attributes and areas where they require support. A case plan is developed with a series of strategies and actions to promote purposeful casework with the young person focused on supporting them with immediate essentials such as food and clothing, personal growth and cultural learning, addressing their health needs, supporting them to attend (and often enrolling them in) school, and lending support through court processes.

Many of the young people Oonchiumpa work with do not have any identification, so a priority is trying to obtain their birth certificate and for some, a Tangentyere ID card. For young people who are older, efforts are made to get them work experience opportunities, which are not easily identified in Alice Springs.

Close working partnerships are formed with other local service providers such as Saltbush and Congress, as well as with government agency workers from Police, NT Families and Education, along with the YORETs.

Schools, and Aboriginal Liaison Officers in particular within schools, are critical contacts for Oonchiumpa and vice versa. My review of the case work files shows that Oonchiumpa is regularly contacted when young people are not at school, and similarly, Oonchiumpa workers are constantly checking in with schools to see whether the young person is attending and engaging with learning. Although getting young people who have been



disengaged from school for lengthy periods to regularly attend is a challenge, every effort is made by Oonchiumpa casework staff to maintain a consistent focus on school engagement.

Time and effort is also spent with the young people's families to help support them to provide a more stable home life for their children. This often involves assisting them with making housing applications, especially when they are living in overcrowded and unsafe houses. And, ensuring that the person caring for the young person is receiving Centrelink payments for them – there have been several cases where the young person is not linked to the Centrelink profile for the family member actually delivering the day-to-day care for the young person.

All of this casework is carried out against a background of involving the Oonchiumpa young people in ongoing mentoring, sporting and cultural activities with others in the group – particularly during the school holidays, as outlined in section 5.8.5.

The real names of the involved young people have not been used in the case studies in this section.

### **Case study 1**

Henriette is a 15-year-old Arrernte young woman from Alice Springs. She was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about her at the time.

Oonchiumpa's initial discussions with Henriette identified the following strengths and aspirations:

- Henriette can speak two languages – Arrernte language and English. She has a great understanding of her culture and community as well as history relating to her great grandparents. Henriette would like to visit Santra Teresa and Harts Range Tennant Creek more regularly to spend time with elders and her family out on Country.
- Henriette wants to engage more in schooling. She wants the school to be more supportive of students who've previously been disengaged and be given the chance to be placed in a classroom with other students. She hoped to finish year 10.
- Henriette expressed an interest in getting a casual job and her licence.
- Henriette is keen to rejoin football with Alkamilya Football Club and wants to play another sport.

In relation to issues that need addressing, Oonchiumpa identified for Henriette:

- Grief and loss as a result of her dad passing away in 2022.
- Henriette has been involved in anti-social behaviour, bullying and physical altercations with other young people earlier the year.
- She would like to create a new group of friends.
- Henriette relies on relatives, family friends and support services to get food. Oonchiumpa and other service providers have assisted with food vouchers for Henriette and her family – she told Oonchiumpa, "I would like to have food and not beg for money to get food."



- Henriette mentioned on multiple occasions that she wants to live with her mother and two brothers, but needs more support from her family, and wants them “to get along”.
- Henriette told Oonchiumpa that she wants to live in a clean, safe home where there is no alcohol or drug use with some nice things around her.
- Creating a sense of safety for Henriette was a clear priority. One option, was for her to reside at ASYASS or TF supported Accommodation.

Despite coming from a big family on both sides, Henriette struggles to find people to show care for her. With the passing of her father, her home life became unstable, so she resides between her grandmother’s home and her mum’s place, as well as the homes of other relatives. Early on, Henriette told her caseworker that she doesn’t have a secure place to store her belongings and wants to have her own space. Although she’d like to live with her mum, there are problems with overcrowding, as well as alcohol and drug use at the property.

Oonchiumpa also identified that Henriette was not receiving any benefits from Centrelink via her family; her Oonchiumpa caseworker quickly helped her go online to get a CRN number and linking code which enabled her to receive the youth allowance/AbStudy. Oonchiumpa explained the requirements that Henriette would need to meet to keep receiving benefits. Henriette was very excited to be able to submit her own claim and start receiving her own payments so she could buy everyday essentials.

At the same time, her caseworker also helped Henriette obtain a birth certificate, Tangentyere ID card and assisted her with setting up a bank account. Henriette expressed an interest in sports, and in February, she was assisted to enrol in pre-season football training with client support funding used to buy her a new pair of football boots.

Although there was no formal diagnosis for Henriette, it soon became evident to Oonchiumpa that she was battling with significant mental health challenges and emotional trauma based on her escalating behaviours at school and childhood trauma, including losing her father at a tender age, requiring intensive support. Henriette is a frequent marijuana user and this is likely impacting her mental and emotional wellbeing. Her caseworker arranged for Henriette to have a Child Youth Mental Health Team assessment which she attended with her grandmother at the end of May. The team are awaiting a copy of the assessment report. It is a significant achievement that Oonchiumpa were able to secure an assessment of this type for Henriette when other agencies had not done so previously.

Henriette had disengaged from school but she told her caseworker that she wanted to go back to school. Several discussions took place with Oonchiumpa and local schools about enrolling Henriette. Henriette was turning up to Yipirinya school once or twice a week, but unfortunately was turned away and offered offsite school engagement starting at 10:30am and running to 1:00pm as she was not ‘classroom ready’ according to the school due to her poor attendance history, as well as concerns about her behaviours at school. Oonchiumpa persisted with trying to enrol Henriette at St Joseph’s school instead. Oonchiumpa succeeded in enrolling Henriette at St Joseph’s in early June and she was due to start attending by 13 June for two days per week off-site to allow the school to assess her reading and writing abilities with a view to returning her to the classroom. Unfortunately, the school did not collect Henriette from home on her first day of school and since then, she has gone out bush to avoid family disputes and fulfil cultural responsibilities. Henriette has stayed in





touch with her Oonchiumpa caseworker, but it is challenging for the team to support her while she is away from town.

Regarding culture, Oonchiumpa has worked with Henriette to document her cultural background on her maternal side and will explore her paternal side further along with her skin groups.

Henriette was regularly mentioned in the night notes at the time she started working with Oonchiumpa, but during periods when she was in Alice Springs her presence on the streets at night reduced.

## **Case study 2**

Meg is a 16-year-old Arrernte young woman from Alice Springs. She was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about her at the time.

Oonchiumpa's initial discussions with Meg identified the following strengths and positives:

- Meg can speak two languages – Walpiri language and English and is getting to know Arrernte.
- She has a great understanding of her culture and community as well as history relating to her great grandparents. Meg would like visit Santra Teresa, Harts Range and Tennant Creek more regularly to spend time with her elders and her family out on Country. Meg knows quite a bit about her cultural background on her maternal side. She is keen to learn more about her paternal cultural connections.
- Meg has the potential to be a future role model for siblings and taking on cultural responsibilities as a traditional owner. Her paternal family has a strong role in native title discussions as Traditional owners of Mbatua. Meg communicates well but uses her own mix of English/language.
- Meg had not been in trouble with police until after her father died. Her two aunts are her main role models.
- Meg pays close attention to her hygiene and dresses well – she cares about her appearance.
- Meg is friendly but a little shy. Once she gets to know you, she is chatty and likes a laugh.
- Meg has expressed an interest in working – and suggested two employment options (IGA and Hidden Valley Learning Centre); her challenge is that troubles with family and feuding keep pulling her in another direction. Meg has also expressed an interest in becoming a youth worker for girls with Oonchiumpa.

In relation to issues that need addressing, Oonchiumpa identified for Meg:

- Meg was born when mum was still serving a gaol sentence and had to live in gaol for a few months before being transferring to the care of her aunt.
- Mum has spent time in and out of custody for most of Meg's life.
- Her dad passed away in September 2023.
- She moves between three relatives' homes – all of them are over-crowded.



- Meg expressed feeling unsafe due to the overcrowding in the homes she was staying in and exposure to potential violence and drug use.
- She raised concerns about people taking her clothing and other belongings and a lack of privacy and own sense of space.
- She is keen to move towards independent living so transition to work opportunities will be explored.
- She is still exploring her cultural background more fully.
- Meg had a birth certificate taken out by a service in Yuendumu which was later defunded, so her family were unable to retrieve the details.
- Meg requires a cognitive and social & emotional assessment.
- Meg is facing challenges with family feuding which she gets caught up in and makes it hard for her to pursue her own goals.
- Meg will require support with her court matter.

Meg's Oonchiumpa caseworker met with her a few times before Christmas 2023, but she then went bush and unfortunately was arrested and appeared in court in January 2024. She was taken into custody for two weeks in Darwin and then released with an ankle monitor and curfew conditions. After breaching her bail conditions shortly after, her Oonchiumpa caseworker assisted with getting Meg transferred to bail accommodation at Saltbush. Her caseworker worked with Saltbush to help Meg obtain a Tangentyere ID card.

Oonchiumpa provided support letters for Meg's court matter and was instrumental in getting her bail varied to allow her to reside on bail at home in two places – Yuendumu and in Town. Meg received a good behaviour bond with no conviction recorded relating to her recent court matter and this was due, in large part, to the support of her Oonchiumpa caseworker through the court process and more generally. Meg attended all of her court appearances between January to June.

Meg had disengaged from school at the time of her referral, and made clear she didn't want to return to Yipirinya as she thinks it's "for young kids". Oonchiumpa arranged an enrolment with St Joseph's and met with the principal (her Saltbush worker also attended).

Oonchiumpa completed her enrolment form with the consent of Meg's aunt. Meg started attending school in 2024 on a trial partial attendance basis via an outreach class. However, Meg was finding it hard at school because the kids were often younger, or she didn't fit in or have friends, and this was making her unhappy. Because she's now over 16, Oonchiumpa decided it was better to try and support Meg to get work. Centrelink has referred Meg to Tangentyere for employment services.

It was identified that Meg was not receiving any benefits from Centrelink via her family, despite one of her aunts having her listed on her CRN. Her other aunt had been helping her with food and essentials, but she was not receiving an allowance for Meg. Oonchiumpa sought to rectify this.

Oonchiumpa helped Meg with obtaining a birth certificate. Oonchiumpa inquired with Births, Deaths and marriages about how to obtain a new birth certificate, and then worked with Meg's mother to complete the application. Client service support funds were used to pay for the birth certificate.



Meg told Oonchiumpa that she did not have a secure place to store her belongings and asked if Oonchiumpa could give her something to lock up her things as her clothes were being taken. Oonchiumpa used client service support funds to purchase a travel bag for Meg and a padlock for the cupboard to secure clothes and other belongings.

In relation to Housing assistance, Oonchiumpa made a referral in April to Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Service (ASYASS) because Meg did not want to return to Hidden Valley. However, ASYASS refused to take her because of the nature of the criminal charges pending against her (violence related). Her mother is on the waiting list for Territory Housing which is very slow moving. Oonchiumpa took mum and Meg to NT Housing to get Meg added to her mum's application which they assisted her to complete.

In relation to her mental and emotional wellbeing, Oonchiumpa supported the Child Youth Assistance Team (CYAT) at Congress to make contact with Meg so they could undertake an assessment with a neuropsychologist to identify if she has any cognitive issues particularly due to her mum's substance misuse during pregnancy. Unfortunately, due to her own substance use, the assessment was unable to occur. Follow up work is happening to try and stop Meg from misusing substances. A further referral will be made when appropriate.

Meg left Alice Springs for a period to escape feuding between other Walpiri families, so casework has stalled during this time, but on the positive side, Meg has remained in contact with her Oonchiumpa caseworker. Meg is still dealing with a lot of issues connected to conflicts within her wider family, and as she gets older, these issues impact on her more acutely. The focus in future given her age, will be more likely on trying to find Meg employment.

Oonchiumpa has completed an application to obtain a tax file number for Meg which will be submitted with Meg when she returns from out bush. Meg decided to go bush to escape violence between family members over royalties.

Regarding culture, Oonchiumpa has worked with Meg to document her cultural background on her paternal side, and will explore whether her maternal side are Traditional Owners in Yuendumu. Further work will also be done to explore her skin groups.

Meg was frequently mentioned in the night notes when she first started Working with Oonchiumpa, but this reduced over the last few months.

### **Case study 3**

Sally is a 15-year-old Luritja young woman from Alice Springs. She was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about her at the time.

Oonchiumpa's initial discussions with Sally identified the following strengths and positives:

- Has a great connection with her siblings and mum; and loves spending time with them.
- Sally loves spending time in Kintore and Papunya with family.
- Sally speaks language, her first language is Luritja, but she also speaks English well.
- She takes care of her appearance and hygiene.
- Engages well with the Aboriginal Liaison Officers at Yipirinya school.



In relation to issues that need addressing, Oonchiumpa identified for Sally:

- Overcrowding in her home – there are even more visitors in the home when family are visiting from bush.
- The family has no transport which affects her ability to get to school when she misses the school bus.
- Sally has missed a lot of school because she spent most of last term at Kintore and Papunya for cultural duties.

Sally lives with her mum and a number of other family members, including her older sister, her partner and their baby, her twin sister and two younger brothers as well as other relatives from time to time. Her home is overcrowded. She told her Oonchiumpa caseworker that her mum padlocks the gate every night to stop drunks from coming into the yard.

Sally was enrolled at Yipirinya school when she started working with Oonchiumpa but due to her absences for cultural duties, she has been placed in the outreach class, which she does not enjoy, as she would rather spend time in the classroom.

One of the main challenges for Sally is that her sister goes to boarding school, so her mum relies on her for support, and experiences a continual pull towards staying home with mum rather than engaging in school. Sally also takes her community responsibilities seriously – such as Sorry business and being there for elders – these traditional obligations can conflict with school and work life. But at the same time, a strength for Sally is that she is family oriented and takes her family obligations seriously, however, these obligations mean that persisting with school engagement is unlikely to yield results for Sally, so the team plans to shift to supporting her as a young adult.

Employment options are currently being explored with Sally given that she is almost 16 and has not been fully engaged with school. Sally was born in South Australia and does not have a birth certificate. Oonchiumpa are trying to obtain a birth certificate for her and will also obtain a tax file number shortly.

Prior to engaging with Oonchiumpa, Sally had been frequently been mentioned in the night notes and would be out most nights on the street, but since Oonchiumpa have been working with her, sightings of her on the street have been limited with no mentions at all in June.

#### **Case study 4**

Letisha is a 12-year-old Luritja girl from Alice Springs. She was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about her at the time.

Oonchiumpa's initial discussions with Letisha identified the following strengths and positives:

- Letisha loves spending time in Kintore with her grandfather; she enjoys living out bush more than living in town, she also enjoys hunting. She knows a lot about her cultural background because of the time she has spent with family and living in Kintore.
- Letisha speaks language fluently – she speaks Luritja but also has a connection to Arrernte language through her Mum which she wants to learn.



- Letisha loves listening to music, and making Tik Tok videos with her siblings and cousins who she considers her best friends.
- Letisha communicates well – using a mix of English and language – she is sometimes shy but always friendly –and takes good care of her appearance and dresses well.

In relation to issues that need addressing, Oonchiumpa identified for Letisha:

- Letisha and her family have a house in Kintore, but they are currently in Alice Springs waiting for her father to be released from prison. Since working with Oonchiumpa, Letisha's dad was released from prison after a lengthy sentence but after only three weeks on the outside was incarcerated again due to violence against her mum. The family will remain transient until dad is released again from prison.
- Letisha and her family have been staying in other people's homes which are over-crowded. Letisha has told her caseworker that other family members stay at the home and party; drinking and playing music late into the night. Police are often called to the houses she's staying in and the children are exposed to violence.
- Letisha told her caseworker that she and her siblings do not get any sleep, and don't feel safe staying in these houses.

Letisha's caseworker has focused on several areas to help provide her with a more solid and secure foundation given her living circumstances remain fluid. Fortunately, Letisha's mum is receiving Centrelink benefits which provide for her and her siblings.

As a result of her unstable living circumstances, Letisha was being sighted on the streets in town for most of the year, but pleasingly, over the last month Letisha has not been sighted on the streets.

At the time of her referral, Letisha was not attending school every day, and missed a large amount of school because she was out bush to fulfil cultural commitments in Kintore for a month. Her Oonchiumpa caseworker has been focusing on encouraging Letisha to attend school which has been bearing fruit, with her term 2 attendance improving significantly. Letisha went to school almost every day in term 2 – missing only a couple of days. She told her caseworker that she's been enjoying going to school and really liked the school sports day this term. Letisha has received well-earned praise for this achievement. Letisha has also been participating in afternoon programs with Gap Youth Centre.

Letisha's Oonchiumpa caseworker also identified that she had a sight problem after Letisha complained about things "being blurry" and not being able to "see things". Her caseworker booked her in for an appointment with an optometrist.

Letisha has gone out bush again but remains in touch with her Oonchiumpa caseworker.

### **Case study 5**

Zach is a 16-year-old Western Arrernte young man living in Alice Springs with ties to the Ntaria community (Hermannsburg). He was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about him at the time.



Zach is cared for by his grandmother and mother and has a younger sister. He usually lives in his grandparents' home with a number of other family members but at the time of writing, was residing in Saltbush Bail Accommodation.

He enjoys playing football, listening to music, travelling out bush, going for drives and spending time with family. As a young Aboriginal man, Zach now has an increasing number of cultural responsibilities and obligations.

Zach has a mental health condition – for which he is now receiving counselling – and shows signs of cognitive impairment. Both of these factors are linked to how easily Zach can be persuaded into engaging in antisocial and unlawful conduct. Zach also struggles with speech difficulties; and has low iron levels requiring blood transfusions. Zach is an NDIS recipient.

When first meeting Zach in late January, his Oonchiumpa caseworker spoke to him about his bail conditions and explained that he could support him through his court process. He also took him to Kmart to buy clothes as he had very few personal items.

Zach did not attend school until later in term 1 due to ceremonial duties. Meetings with Zach and his family focused on getting him back to school and re-enrolled, and supporting him to comply with his bail conditions. Zach's caseworker continually reinforced that he needed to reside at his approved bail address rather than the homes of other relatives, and he engaged Zach in activities such as an upcoming trail walk at Simpson's Gap to keep him occupied.

Zach's caseworker attended court to support him during all appearances. His caseworker also remained in touch with Saltbush Bail accommodation to make sure that while reading there, Zach had sufficient clothing and was encouraged to undergo a health check and ongoing counselling. A critical concern for his caseworker was encouraging Zach to get a blood transfusion as to-date, he had been refusing to do so. His caseworker offered to be present with him in hospital while he underwent the procedure which made a big difference. According to Saltbush workers, if Zach's Oonchiumpa caseworker hadn't been there with him during the transfusion, he wouldn't have gone through with it. His caseworker stayed in touch with Zach's mum to let her know how the procedure went, and also made sure that he was eating correctly to keep up his iron levels.

In late March, Zach got involved in damaging property with some other young people. His caseworker encouraged Zach to hand himself into police, noting that he'd been identified by CCTV. He also suggested that he go back and stay in Saltbush to avoid getting caught up in family feuding in town. Zach wasn't interested in either option. In the meantime, his caseworker worked alongside Zach's lawyer and his NDIS worker to prepare for Zach ultimately being dealt with by police and the courts. Both workers were keen to present the Court a picture of Zach being easily persuaded by others, and that his mental health and cognitive issues are strongly linked to his poor choices. Their aim was to have Zach undergo a mental health assessment to support his court appearance and enrolling him in the Saltbush program to help provide him some life skills and work experience.

Zach's mum asked if Oonchiumpa could enrol Zach in Yirara College (boarding school for Aboriginal students) to remove him from negative influences, which Zach's caseworker agreed to look into for her.





Zach entered a more positive phase over the next few months. He started engaging with Saltbush including attending bush trips; he joined a football team again; was attending counselling sessions; and was being careful to eat the right foods and avoid eating Maccas. His Oonchiumpa caseworker was attentive in ensuring that Zach was receiving appropriate mentoring time with Saltbush workers when this appeared to fall away. Zach attended school every day as part of his participation in the Saltbush program.

Unfortunately, in the later stages of the review period Zach struggled to settle and now has other ongoing court matters. His Oonchiumpa caseworker remains dedicated to supporting him and helping transition Zach to independent living and away from negative influences as much as possible. Significantly, Zach's caseworker was able to enrol him in Yirara College for term 3. Zach's caseworker will also explore obtaining work experience for him and is in the process of obtaining his birth certificate. His caseworker will encourage him to get his driver's licence at the appropriate time.

### **Case study 6**

Richie is an 11-year-old Arrente fella from a large family in Alice Springs. Oonchiumpa has identified that Richie also has ties to the Santa Teresa community.

He was referred to Oonchiumpa by Operation Lunar in late December 2023 without a referral form so little was known about him at the time, apart from the fact that he was frequently being mentioned in the night notes after being observed by YOREOs workers walking the streets late at night. Richie had also been seen at the youth centre on Brown Street, so that's where his Oonchiumpa caseworker went to talk with him about the program, and find out why he was roaming the streets.

In initial discussions with Richie, he made clear that he was happy about engaging with Oonchiumpa and attending activities. He spoke about enjoying playing basketball, bike riding and bush and trail walking. Richie was experiencing a number of challenges at the time of his referral affecting his wellbeing and which contributed to him being out late at night.

Richie lives with his grandparents in house which regularly includes many of his wider family members who come and go which affects Richie's ability to get a good rest. Richie told his Oonchiumpa caseworker that he is often without food and a blanket at night. According to his school and family, Richie can become easily distracted and persuaded.

Richie's mother is the subject of a no-contact order and is not allowed to visit Richie or his grandmother. On many occasions Richie's mother has reportedly breached this order and has threatened and assaulted his grandmother and damaged property. Richie attends Sadadeen primary school and receives support from the Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO). Robie's caseworker made sure that the school was aware of his mother's no contact order.

Initially, Richie's Oonchiumpa caseworker met with him for lunch along with elders, Johnny Liddle and Syd Maloney, to introduce himself and explain the program and activities that Oonchiumpa offers, such as the upcoming camping trip to Uncle Johnny's property and possible work experience skills with Uncle Syd. Later that day, Richie joined his Oonchiumpa caseworker and other young people in the Oonchiumpa group for a swim at Emily's Gap, where all the young people who attended got along well. In the same month, Richie's



caseworker took him out for lunch and swimming with other fellas at Alice Springs pool. The following day, Richie and several other young people had lunch at and a tour of McDonalds.

In early January, Richie went shopping for camping 'work wear' with his caseworker for the upcoming camping trip to King's Canyon. On 6 January, Richie participated in the camping trip at the Big 4 Caravan Park at King's Canyon where the boys enjoyed swimming and making their own pizzas for dinner. Richie's caseworker's son, Fred Jnr, came and spoke to the fellas about his career with the Australian Army, and shared photos of his platoon and explained possible future pathways into the Army to the group. The fellers really enjoyed listening to him and seeing his photos.

Richie became scared during the night and woke his caseworker several times saying he wanted to go home. By the morning, he seemed ok. Richie and the others packed lunches and set off for the camping trip on Uncle Johnny's property at King's Creek. Unfortunately, Richie was encouraged by the other fellas to 'act sick' while they were out bush and later that evening, he and the other fellas were brought home early. The other fellas later blamed Richie for the camping trip being cut short. Richie participated in a number of other activities with Oonchiumpa during the Christmas holidays.

In late January, Richie's caseworker brought him a birthday cake which made him very happy. Richie's caseworker made sure he was ready for the new school year by purchasing him clothes and shoes and arranging health checks. During February, his caseworker spoke to him about his school attendance, the activities that Richie could become involved in, reminded him of upcoming health checks and after school programs such as soccer and basketball – encouraging him to take up some of these activities. He also checked in on Richie and picked him up and dropped him off from home so he could attend basketball, and always took him for dinner after the game.

Richie's caseworker noticed that Richie wasn't eating all of his food, and said this was because he was "saving it for breakfast" and told his caseworker that he'd hide food under his pillow so people wouldn't take it. Richie asked his caseworker if he could help him and his grandmother find a place of their own to live.

Richie's caseworker met with Territory Housing to understand the application requirements. Richie's caseworker spoke with Richie's grandmother about the housing application (away from the family to avoid any potential conflict). He went through the information she would need to make the application which included tenancy statements, bank statements, Centrelink statements, references from service providers, evidence as to who was receiving Centrelink payments for Richie. Richie's caseworker explained to her that if she moved out with Richie, this could make it difficult for their current tenancy to be sustained by his other grandmother as they share the rent. Richie's grandmother was keen for Oonchiumpa to progress the housing application after Richie's caseworker explained that he would also help the other grandmother. Richie's caseworker arranged a meeting with Back on Track (Congress) to provide support to Richie's other grandmother (which he also attended) about her own housing application.

During the first term, Richie's school attendance was excellent and he was regularly encouraged and rewarded for this. During March, Richie engaged in a number of



Oonchiumpa-led activities. His caseworker arranged for him to visit the boxing gym because he'd shown an interest in boxing; and he also took him to a weekly bike repair and riding program.

During a case management meeting about Richie with Congress and another service, it was discovered that Richie was being given Ritalin at school. As his caseworker had not been made aware of any prescribed medication for Richie, both he and Congress were concerned about whether the medication and/or the dosage/routine was appropriate as it had been two years since his last evaluation. His caseworker spoke to the school, who assured his caseworker that the medication was being issued to help Richie concentrate in class. His caseworker recommended that Richie receive an updated health evaluation before he entered middle school.

Richie participated in a number of activities with other young people in the term 1 April school holidays organised by Oonchiumpa (including, having breakfasts and lunches, walks around the Telegraph Station, Anzac Hill climbs, a tour of McDonald's, the AFL school holiday program, a trip to the reptile centre, the Congress Colour Run event, Gap Youth Centre activities, and haircuts from King's Narrative barber ) – Richie was happy being with the other young fellas – including Jonnie and Andy who are discussed in the next case study.

By May, Richie was seen in the CBD late at night with Jonnie and Andy. The caseworker for all three fellas spoke to them about their recent behaviour and why they were running around at night, and encouraged them to stop doing it.

Richie's caseworker stayed in touch with his ALO, who told him that Richie was due to attend a school camp, and families were given a list of required items that the students needed to bring with them. Richie's caseworker spoke to his grandmother and assured her that he would make sure that Richie had what was required, for example, long warm pants and a torch. He also packed Richie's bag for the camp.

Richie's behaviour started to change later in the month. There was an occasion where Richie got sick at school but the school had trouble finding any family to pick Richie up and take him home – they called his Oonchiumpa caseworker who stepped in. Richie's caseworker also regularly checked in during May with the school ALO, who told him that Richie had started coming to school late and that his attendance had dropped back. He then visited with Richie's family to see what was happening. It turned out that Richie's older brother had been bringing mates back home and they were interrupting Richie's sleep, causing him to become very tired, so his grandmother kept him home. Richie's caseworker regularly stayed in touch with Richie during May and encouraged him for any positive behaviours, and kept stressing that he needed to stay off the streets at night.

In June, Richie's caseworker contacted the school ALO after learning that Richie hadn't been at school for a couple of days. Richie's grandmother told his caseworker that Richie had not been home for a couple of days and had been hanging around older kids. Richie was sighted in the night notes on several occasions in June. His caseworker continued to check in with Richie during the month. On one occasion Richie told his caseworker that he wasn't sleeping at his usual home because he had no blankets as people kept stealing them, so he took Richie to Kmart to buy him a pillow and blanket as well as a hat. Richie promised to



start going to school. Richie's caseworker attended his monthly case management meeting with Back on Track, the Department of Education and Sadadeen primary school to review Richie's case plan. A critical outcome from this case management meeting was a commitment for the service providers to write letters in support of Richie and his grandmother's application for new housing, so that he can remove himself from the negative influences in his current living environment.

### **Case studies 7 and 8**

Jonnie is a 12-year-old fella from Anthepe Camp, who has ties to the Papunya, Tempy Downs and Pukitja (Ernabella SA) communities.

His languages are Luritja and Arrernte. He loves playing footy and listening to music and even singing a few notes. He is very open and easy going. His caseworker thinks he's a natural leader. Some of Jonnie's challenges include him not engaging with services, and when this happens, he tends to get up to bad things and stays out late in the CBD with frequent mentions in the night notes, and patchy school attendance. He can become easily distracted and adversely influenced by older fellas. Jonnie told his Oonchiumpa caseworker that he is very frustrated about regularly not having food at home.

Andy was not on the original list but is the younger cousin of Jonnie (aged 12) and lives in the same home with Jonnie's mother so was brought into the Oonchiumpa group in early January. Andy has ties to Papunya/Tempy Downs/Pukitja (Enrabella in South Australia). His languages are Western Arrernte, Arrernte, Luritja and English.

Andy is well-mannered, respectful, gentle and always greets Oonchiumpa staff with a big smile. He likes sports and is naturally talented in this area; he loves music and can both sing and rap, and makes recordings of his singling and rapping. Andy shows an interest in his culture and ceremony and respects his elders. Like Jonnie, Andy can become easily persuaded by others, he has infrequent school attendance, and has also been seen out late at night without adult supervision despite his young age. Andy has been identified in the night notes by YORETs.

In January, both Jonnie and Andy were part of group of young people who broke into the home of an older woman, then assaulted her and stole her vehicle. Andy was not on the Operation Lunar list but because the two cousins were always together, Oonchiumpa considered it important to work with both of them.

Jonnie's mother was very happy for Oonchiumpa to provide support to both fellas. The Oonchiumpa caseworker got to know the fellas' mum/aunt, and grandfather well, established trust and a strong rapport with them.

Jonnie's caseworker had a similar conversation with him along with elders, Johnny Liddle and Syd Maloney where he introduced himself and explained the program and activities that Oonchiumpa offers. Both Jonnie and Andy participated in various school activities run by Oonchiumpa (as described in case study 6), including attending the overnight camping trip at the Big 4 Caravan Park. Both fellas were also looking forward to the trip to Uncle Johnny's homestead until it was cut short.



During the rest of the January holidays, Jonnie's Oonchiumpa caseworker made sure that he spent time with both fellas during the day, taking them for swims at the Alice Springs pool, lunches, visits to the cinema, camping trips and to Gap Youth Centre. Both fellas were reportedly always pleased to see their caseworker and to do something with him. Since working with Oonchiumpa, there was a decline in contact by both fellas with police.

In February, Jonnie's caseworker helped him get school-ready by purchasing him school clothes and shoes. In term 1, Jonnie had been attending Yipirinya school regularly. He was then enrolled at Kintore school during ceremony time. Unfortunately, his school attendance was poor at Kintore and very patchy when he returned to Alice Springs after mid-March.

Because Jonnie has been living between houses due to overcrowding, his caseworker initiated a meeting with other service providers involved with Jonnie to express his concern about Jonnie's living arrangements, and prompted them to explore more suitable housing options for him. His caseworker also supported Jonnie and his family with buying groceries due to the lack of food in the home.

Jonnie was staying with his grandfather at Anthepe Camp while his mother was out bush in Kintore. Jonnie's grandfather was pleased to have Oonchiumpa involved with Jonnie and always called Jonnie's caseworker if he wasn't sure where Jonnie was. While his caseworker was supporting Jonnie in February, his school attendance in town was good.

Jonnie was then called out bush by his mother to help with ceremony business (his older brother was already there with his mother). His caseworker kept in daily contact with Jonnie and checked in to make sure he was attending Kintore school. He also continued attending case management meetings with YORETs and the On the Right Track program. Jonnie's caseworker visited with both fellas and their grandfather in February when they came back into Alice Springs/Anthepe Camp. Unfortunately, after Jonnie returned to Kintore, he had missed school and was becoming involved in antisocial behaviour.

In March, Oonchiumpa had difficulty locating Jonnie and Andy; they still weren't attending school and it transpired that mum wasn't focused on making sure they attended school in Kintore. Their caseworker contacted the school regularly to check on their whereabouts and stayed in touch with Jonnie's grandfather. He also visited the boys' grandfather at Anthepe camp to identify if mum had any other contact numbers as she wasn't returning calls and to see if the fellas had returned to Anthepe.

Fortunately, by mid-March Jonnie had returned to his grandfather's place at Anthepe. The fella's caseworker visited with them and told them he'd pick them up the following day to take him to school. When he arrived neither of the fellas were there or at school. The fellas later called their caseworker to tell him they had no food at home and wanted help with groceries, so he picked them up and took them shopping. Their caseworker regularly contacted Jonnie's grandfather and mum about how they were going and encouraged them to get the fellas to school.

The fella's caseworker learned from Jonnie's mum that Andy had a birthday when he was in Kintore community, but none of the family bought him anything to celebrate, so he bought Andy a cake from Oonchiumpa to celebrate his birthday with his family. The fella's caseworker also spoke to mum about taking on legal guardianship of Andy given his birth





mum was living in SA. He told her he would look into making a Centrelink application to have Andy put against her name.

The fella's grandfather was invited to attend an event Oonchiumpa held with the senior men from the families involved in the program along with the fellas. He agreed to participate.

The fella's caseworker stayed in regular contact with them to see how they were going, and the fellas would contact their caseworker when they had no food. Oonchiumpa contacted Yipirinya school to see if the fellas were attending school in April, but were told that they were not and that they were enrolled at Kintore school. After speaking with the fella's mum about the fellas not attending school, their caseworker arranged for her to attend Yipirinya school with him to enrol the fellas in school there. At the same time, Oonchiumpa arranged for the fellas to attend a mentoring program with Riding for the Disabled (RDA). The program allows young people to work and spend time with horses, before learning to ride, to teach them responsibility and bonding, as well as a new activity. The fellas were excited about the opportunity, and said they'd like to go back to school.

Their caseworker stayed in regular contact with both fellas during April. He was given reports whenever they were sighted on the streets at night and always followed up with them afterwards. He made sure that both fellas were involved in the Oonchiumpa April school holidays program (the activities are outlined in case study 6). Both fellas were also taken by Oonchiumpa to RDA in the holidays, where they enjoyed working with the horses, cleaning up stables, choosing their own horse and then taking it for a walk. The fellas returned to school, and were happy about attending an upcoming school excursion.

Despite several steps forward, both fellas continued to stay out late at night in the CBD. Mum told Oonchiumpa that she was concerned about the Gap Youth Centre allowing the kids to leave the centre, and that they should be making sure they can't leave until it's time to drive them home in the bus. Oonchiumpa took up this issue with the youth centre. Mum asked Oonchiumpa to speak to both fellas about not going to Gap Youth Centre after school and staying out late at night, which he did, emphasising the dangers and the worries it caused their mum and grandfather. Their caseworker also encouraged the fellas with their ongoing horse lessons, reminding them they had only one more session to go before being taught how to ride the horses. The fellas appeared to take on board their caseworker's advice, but unfortunately, they returned to staying out late in the CBD and not going home.

Mum then spoke to Oonchiumpa about assisting her to get both fellas to live with her sister in Pukitja S.A (Ernabella Community). Oonchiumpa agreed to transport the fellas to Ernabella and bought them food and packed their clothes for the trip. Their caseworker also spoke to their aunt who'd be caring for them about ensuring the fellas attended school regularly. She assured him that she would be pushing for this to happen. The fella's caseworker told aunt that he'd stay in regular touch and check in about school. Not long after arriving at Ernabella, the fellas were able to go on an excursion to Adelaide, which they were very excited about. According to their aunt, the fellas were enjoying living out there and had made new friends at school, which they were attending regularly.

The fella's caseworker stays in regular contact with the fellas and their aunt and is planning to travel to Ernabella to develop a renewed case plan. During the period Oonchiumpa





supported both fellas, they did not come to the adverse attention of police, which is significant, given that they had been involved in a serious criminal incident at the time of referral.

## 7. What people have said about the value of Oonchiumpa's work

During the trial, feedback was sought from a variety of stakeholders about the value of Oonchiumpa's work with at-risk young people and their families, including from local community leaders, legal experts, service providers, and importantly, families of children involved in the program, along with one young person who wanted to speak up on Oonchiumpa's behalf. All were very keen to share their thoughts and provided written testimonials – quotes from these testimonials are extracted below. (The names of children have been changed to keep their identity confidential.)

It would have been beneficial to also have feedback from government partners and local service providers, however unfortunately, in seeking to arrange meetings for me to obtain such feedback, Oonchiumpa was advised that government and NGO funded service providers were not authorised to give references of this type. At the time this feedback was requested, a local community service provider had attracted negative media and this may have been a factor contributing to the approach taken. As discussed in section 8, arrangements to obtain direct input from partners to inform the Stage 2 evaluation should be settled.

### *Family/kin*

*Oonchiumpa has supported my daughter; helped us get food from Coles; helped us with our housing application and taking us to Housing... I think the program should be ongoing. I think it's good. I tell my daughter they are there to support her and she should listen to them – local mum*

*My experience with Oonchiumpa has been very positive. We are both happy to work with them. Oonchiumpa has helped me and my granddaughter with so many things, like Centrelink, Tangentyere ID cards, medical appointments and transport... Since my granddaughter has been working with Oonchiumpa, she has been home safe at night and not out on the streets... They are traditional Owners and are all Aboriginal workers – local grandmother*

### *Service providers*

*Oonchiumpa has kept the boys engaged and positive... they've taken the boys on camping trips and horse-riding... The boys have stayed out of trouble for a long time now and they encourage each other to stay out of trouble. There should be more services like Oonchiumpa because there are a lot of kids around town who need this program – local service provider*

*Johnny is always happy to engage with Oonchiumpa. They encourage and support Johnny with health checks, clinic appointments and school. Johnny has gone to basketball games, team building, horse-riding, general clean-up work, and attending his health checks. Johnny is not getting into trouble and is going to school everyday – he's making the right choices. I've asked if other family members can work with Oonchiumpa.*

*Oonchiumpa has helped with supporting my family with medical appointments, housing assistance, and involving Mykol in activities like cultural awareness and horse-riding. Oonchiumpa needs to be a 'big company' to help all those kids and families.*



### **Young person involved in program**

*I like working with Oonchiumpa and I want to keep working with them. They do good work with young people.*

### **Service brokers**

*My company (J&L's Outback Experience) recently had the pleasure of working closely with Oonchiumpa and Aboriginal youth caught up in the criminal justice system. Since their inception, they have been at the forefront of developing solutions and working with our at-risk youth. They have done this with dedication and commitment to better outcomes for the youth involved and the general community of Alice Springs...This would not occur if the whole team at Oonchiumpa were not totally dedicated to working closely with our youth in a culturally sensitive and caring manner...It is my observation that the youth involved, understand and appreciate this fact and it is a major factor in their success...A most important factor is their background and cultural skills and knowledge, without this the programme would not have been received so well by their clients and community. The subject of dealing and delivering services to youth at risk requires specific and specialised skills...It is a service that is kicking goals in the community and it needs continuity to see longtime results...We look forward to this program receiving ongoing funding.*

*My overall experience with Oonchiumpa has been positive. These are lovely people with genuine big hearts who want to ensure people working in this space are equipped with the right skills to be able to work and get the best outcome they can with each cultural encounter...We have helped each other out by providing shared cultural expertise and it has been a great combination of cultural blending...Oonchiumpa are providing a space to be able to come and talk to young people from diverse backgrounds. Providing cultural mentoring and cultural guidance to young people is a hard space to work in, but I know from positive stories that Oonchiumpa is filling the gap that is needed to ensure things are understood and actioned in the right way. They are ensuring that the right information is being shared to create the right understanding to really work in between the two worlds...They are doing a fantastic job and need to be supported to continue to do an excellent job.*

### **Local business and Chamber of Commerce**

*I see Oonchiumpa delivering positive outcomes through their engagement with young people through showing mutual respect, offering cultural safety and self-determination...They have helped me work with cultural integrity... Oonchiumpa has a critical role to play as Traditional Owners. They know how to work within the boundaries of traditional lore and organisational protocols. Oonchiumpa has a mutually understood cultural authority and they understand the delicate interconnections within community – relationships, history, reputation and hierarchy.*

### **Local community leader and justice advocate**

*In my view, the timing is right for the Oonchiumpa program. It is a great thing for the kids and their families. I believe this program will work well; it's good that Aboriginal people are stepping up. Our kids need this, they need that guidance, and it is very positive especially for young fellas having a cultural man to support them...Oonchiumpa understand the kinship connection and are recognised as family with the necessary connections to young people, which is very important....This will benefit Alice Springs as Oonchiumpa are local home-grown people. We must have this program ongoing because Aboriginal people need to lead these young people – Lajamanu and Walpiri woman, and expert in Aboriginal law and justice.*

### **Academia**

*I write in my academic capacity as an Associate Professor at the Australian National University College of Law and in my capacity as a Special Magistrate and Acting Judge in the Australian Capital Territory. My observations are based on my history of engagement with Oonchiumpa in the delivery of Indigenous led intensive on-Country justice education courses for ANU law students and for Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia Division 1 and 2*



*judges....Designing and delivering the course was a challenging process both in terms of content and logistics, with the course beginning in Mbatua, travelling to an outstation near Tempe Downs and ending at Uluru. Kristy and Tanya excelled in all aspects of delivery, demonstrating their capacity to draw on relationships across Central Australia to deliver a ground-breaking course which opened the hearts and minds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, providing them with a foundation to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities in future... Perhaps most critically, a core focus for the course was understanding the experiences of young people in Central Australia, a critique of the ineffectiveness of legal responses to their circumstances and the need to find a better way that leverages existing and long-term relationships of Traditional Owners and other Australian peoples of Central Australia...Following the establishment of Oonchiumpa Consultancy, Kristy and Tanya delivered two further outstanding Indigenous-led on-Country courses in April 2023 and April 2024. On the last occasion I had the privilege to observe, for a brief period, the relationships between young people and employees of Oonchiumpa. As a course group, we were also privileged to get a deeper understanding of the work that Oonchiumpa is doing with young people, hearing stories of positive impact...Having worked as a lawyer for Aboriginal young people in Central Australia and as an academic and judicial officer with a significant understanding of the experiences of young people in the criminal justice system, I have been truly struck by the wisdom of Kristy and Tanya when speaking about what works and what doesn't work when it comes to assisting young people to steer a path away from or out of the criminal justice system.*

## **8. Observations about the implementation of the ASR program**

While it would be unrealistic to expect that Oonchiumpa could turn around the lives of young people and their families living in such tough circumstances where others before them had failed in a mere six months, the case studies show that Oonchiumpa's caseworkers have provided consistent, dedicated, and practical care and support for these young people and are laying a foundation for many of them to make positive changes in their lives and better decisions.

As noted in the case studies, Oonchiumpa took on the young people in their group without any formal referral information so they had to spend time finding out about and recording the life story and experience of each young person, as part of supporting them.

The case studies in my view bring into sharp focus the importance of these young people having someone in their life who is not only a consistent and reliable presence, but also a role model who can help them shape a different pathway and open their eyes to opportunities they hadn't considered possible before.

Most of the children in the group according to the Oonchiumpa team, were not used to thinking ahead about their future when they were focused on basic things like getting food and a decent night's sleep. As Aboriginal people who have been born and bred in the local community, the Oonchiumpa staff themselves symbolise that it is possible – with the right supports and commitment – to remain deeply connected to culture while at the same time living successfully in the Western world. The Oonchiumpa caseworkers and the team generally, have become part of the circle of support around these young people, and are well known in town as trusted adults with cultural authority who can both help and guide them.

While there is much that is positive in these case studies, with progress made in getting young people enrolled in school, health assessments, identification and financial supports;



reducing adverse police contact; they also make clear that the reality of working with young people from challenging backgrounds often involves several steps forward quickly followed by several steps backward, but what matters is, hanging in there for these young people and walking alongside them to show them a brighter future and a way of living in their 'two worlds'. There is no 'quick fix' or 'silver bullet' to help these young people, and camps and activities alone, will generally make only short-term impacts which is why the team decided that ongoing casework and wraparound supports were needed to make any sustained changes.

One of the most problematic issues impacting Oonchiumpa's work is access to safe housing. While Oonchiumpa has been proactive in making applications for several families for housing, waitlists for both public and community housing are significant, according to Oonchiumpa it can take up to 12 years for housing to become available. When many of the young people involved in the Oonchiumpa group are living in overcrowded homes which are often unsafe, disruptive, and expose young people to negative influences, it can be very challenging for the team to change their trajectory and that of their immediate caregivers.

Despite the challenges, an important achievement of Oonchiumpa and key objective, has been reducing the presence of many of the young people in their group on the CBD streets late at night, and helping to reduce or divert them away from antisocial and criminal activity. The diversion of Jonnie and Andy from negative police attention is particularly significant given they're involvement in serious criminal activity when they were referred.

## 8.1 Learnings and future opportunities

In terms of the next phase of the program, there are a number of learnings and opportunities to strengthen the case management support and better integrate service delivery for the young people and their families across agencies in Alice Springs, and importantly, promote the implementation of the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* among Aboriginal enterprises offering programs to vulnerable young people.

### 8.1.1 How the program unfolded and how to strengthen the ongoing rollout

It is difficult to describe the implementation issues which were faced during the program's rollout and how the team responded to these without setting them out sequentially to illustrate how each issue or event influenced the next step. I've set out the evolution of the program below and decisions made along the way.

- The Agreement between Oonchiumpa and NIAA ran for six months and was entered into in December 2023. The Agreement did not include a lead-in time to allow the team to establish operating systems, bed down referral and information exchange processes with government agency partners and local funded services, or time to assess and work with Aboriginal enterprises around their child safe readiness before brokering potential services.
- My engagement as child safety specialist, mentor and evaluator did not occur until later in January 2024 (one month into the six-month period). This meant that the team, which was keen to arrange a cultural camp early in the Christmas/January holidays, did so before I started supporting them and had I been engaged by then,



would have assisted them to conduct a formal risk assessment of the planned activity. As noted previously, the camp was cut short unexpectedly on the first night after it was identified that WWCCC checks were not in place for all involved in delivering activities at the camp.

- Ideally, there should have been greater clarity around precisely which safeguards needed to be in place before the team embarked on their first overnight trip with young people via a brokerage service, and perhaps more realistic expectations could have been set around the child safe readiness of Oonchiumpa and potential brokers at that stage. Oonchiumpa was understandably keen to meet government expectations around delivering holiday activities which had already been promoted in the media, but rolling out a new program of this type right on Christmas made it difficult for Oonchiumpa to access the necessary advice and support.
- As noted previously, I have since worked with the team to develop a risk assessment template for use when planning various activities. The team indicated they learned a lot after working through the risk questions in the template by using the January camp as the test activity. They have acknowledged that several safeguards and precautions should have been planned for before they embarked on that trip. At the same time, the team pointed out that different risks emerged when they were called back early which involved them driving back with the fellas to Alice Springs late at night. That first camp was a good learning opportunity for all involved. Fortunately, the camp at J&L's experience was at least preceded by a successful overnight stay near town at the Big 4 Caravan Park supervised by Oonchiumpa caseworkers.
- In relation to potential service brokerage, it was clear that the majority of Aboriginal enterprises identified as potential brokers did not have in place the expected safeguards outlined in the National Principles for Child safe organisations. For example, key child safety policies, a clear understanding of who requires an Ochre Card in what circumstances, and evidence of risk assessments being conducted. Having said this, it's important to stress that many of the individuals leading these enterprises have worked with young people for many years and have raised their own children and grandchildren, giving them a very good and practical understanding of safety and risk. Nonetheless, it was important that various technical requirements and checks and balances were in place within their organisations to satisfy the test that they were working towards being compliant with the National Principles before they embarked on brokerage activities with Oonchiumpa.
- My initial priority was working with Oonchiumpa to develop relevant child safe policies and related structures and processes, before they entered into service brokerage partnerships. A challenge however was that the clock was ticking for Oonchiumpa to get some runs on the board on the service brokerage front, with the project due to run for only another five months by the time of my engagement.
- Against this background, we decided to hold a child safe awareness training event in March (following on from the initial expression of interest event with enterprises and NIAA in late January) to step the interested enterprises through the key policy





requirements. This approach allowed me to develop and implement a suite of child safe policies within Oonchiumpa first, and with their consent, share their policies and procedures with other local enterprises during the training session. As noted previously, NT Families also lent support by delivering a training session to the group on mandatory reporting.

- Oonchiumpa made clear that it would not enter into service brokerage arrangements with enterprises unless they could comply with the necessary child safe requirements and provide a written declaration that they were compliant (a compliance certificate was also developed around this time by Oonchiumpa). We considered it more important in the early stages of the program's rollout to focus on building child safety awareness among the potential brokers rather than rushing into a series of brokerage activities with them if they were ill prepared.
- Another very important learning from the first camping trip which was prematurely aborted, was that the fellas were happy and mostly settled the night before when they stayed with Oonchiumpa staff at the Big 4 Caravan park, but once they were handed over to people they didn't know to stay on Country in an unfamiliar place, this was confronting for them, and some of them became scared and nervous, especially after a Welcome was given in language, and some wanted to come home. This helped to crystallise for Oonchiumpa how important it was going to be for them to build trust and a rapport with the young people in their group before expecting them to participate in activities run by people they didn't know. It also showed that Oonchiumpa staff would need to accompany them, at least initially, during brokerage activities.
- Oonchiumpa remained acutely aware of the expectation that they enter into service brokerage arrangements, but in my view, the team acted sensibly by focusing their attention on dealing with some of the challenges closer to home for young people in the first few months, and keeping the young people occupied with rapport building activities in town and the Alice Springs surrounds. During this early stage, building solid connections and relationships between Oonchiumpa staff and young people was far more critical than involving the young people in multiple activities.
- It was during these first few months that Oonchiumpa's sense of its case coordination and support role matured. They could see the value of combining an activity-driven approach with purposeful case planning for each young person in collaboration with other service providers with a view to delivering wraparound supports. Mid-way through the program, Oonchiumpa agreed with my suggestion that rather than seek to deliver as many activities to as many young people as possible through brokerage arrangements, it made more sense to request an extension of time to deliver the program within the same funding envelope. This in turn would enable the team to meaningfully and more intensively engage with the young people already involved and at their pace. As illustrated by the 8 case studies, working with young people with complex needs takes time.





- In relation to its own casework procedures, I have had the opportunity during my four site visits and from reviewing all case records to identify areas of strength as well as areas that could be improved.
  - At the outset, Oonchiumpa understood the need to record the type of activities it was undertaking with young people, accompanied by great photos of the young people at various events. These documents have been filed under 'Oonchiumpa Good news stories' and were regularly shared with NIAA. During the review period, a spreadsheet has also been established to more systemically track in one record which young people have attended each activity.
  - A separate spreadsheet will be established for the service brokerage activities as distinct from those hosted by Oonchiumpa.
  - A spreadsheet collating all service referrals has been established noting the referral types for each young person.
  - Work was also carried out early on to ensure that staff were recording all interactions with young people on a day-by-day log sheet; a monthly summary was prepared with observations about progress and key developments; and a case plan to guide the work with the young person.
  - During April I reviewed all case documentation available to identify any areas for improvement.
  - In June, I conducted one on one file reviews with Oonchiumpa staff. During these sessions, we developed a new case plan which focused more strongly on specific strategies and actions, and how these were tracking with more analytical, rather than descriptive information, about the young person's progress over time. This more focused and detailed case plan effectively made the previous monthly summaries redundant, so going forward, only two key case management records will be used.
  - While there remains room for further improvement regarding the level of detail contained in the case plans, and ensuring it is used as a tool to guide casework, I was impressed that the team were so diligently recording their interactions and outcomes achieved in their file notes.
- Regarding Oonchiumpa's caseload capacity, while I agreed with initial concerns about the team taking on more than the core group of around 10 young people, I now consider that Oonchiumpa has capacity to take on more referrals, especially as my review of cases records and discussions with Oonchiumpa staff has shown that many of the young people fall in and out of actively engaging with the program when they go bush to fulfil cultural duties or to avoid feuding between families in town. It is essential in my view, that young people are not exited from the program when they leave town periodically, as the cases reviewed show that when they're back in town, that's when supports are once again needed and Oonchiumpa being a consistent presence for these young people is critical to making longer term change. These young people can be distinguished from the four young people who did not engage at the outset of the program.



- In relation to partner agencies supporting Oonchiumpa's case coordination and support role, there were and continue to be a range of areas that could be improved on – these are outlined below.
  - The ASR referral diagram depicted in section 3.2.2, in practice, was not implemented as intended.
  - Although Oonchiumpa generally shares a good working relationship with NT Families, several procedural issues were not settled early on in the program's rollout, and it took some time for them to be addressed after they were raised by Oonchiumpa.
  - A referral form was not settled between the partner agencies and Oonchiumpa at the outset and this should have been a priority.
  - Clients were discussed with Oonchiumpa at Operation Lunar meetings, but referrals were made without the backing of a completed referral form. This meant that known information about the young person's schooling and attendance, engagement with other local services/government agencies and names/contact details for workers, known medical history, disability status, police/YORET contacts, and current court matters, remained largely unknown to Oonchiumpa.
  - Oonchiumpa staff had to spend time developing their own picture of the young person's background which no doubt duplicated the efforts of others, and meant they were flying blind regarding any critical health or other issues facing young people (for example, known suicidal ideation) or any safety risks that staff may face when entering people's homes.
  - From my review of the case files records, it's clear that non-government organisations have an important role to play in the ongoing delivery of the program. For example, Saltbush and the various clinical teams and programs within Congress are critical partners for Oonchiumpa. Local non-government schools are also critical as most of the young people involved in the ASR attend non-government schools such as Yipirinya or St Joseph's.
  - The 'night notes' prepared by YORETs which record which young people have been sighted on the streets each night, the location/s they were sighted, comments about their behaviour, and who they were with, were intended to be shared with Oonchiumpa on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the night notes have not been shared as frequently as required (usually every two weeks), making it hard for Oonchiumpa caseworkers to quickly deal with any problematic behaviour involving their cohort.
  - Although I have not sighted the document, I understand that a separate 'night-tracker' tool is also maintained which collates the information from the daily night notes against dates/names of young people. While Oonchiumpa should only receive information relevant to the safety and wellbeing of the young people it is supporting (including who they may be spending time with on the streets at night), it would seem to make sense for the team to be receiving an extract of the Night Tracker on a regular basis, combined with copies of the night notes as they become available.



- More generally, there would be benefit in developing more formal arrangements with both government and non-government organisations to clarify their role in supporting the implementation of the ASR. In this regard, it would make sense for each young person to have an overarching case plan shared with all agencies working to support them and their family, with an appointed case coordination lead, which in many cases, could be Oonchiumpa; whereas, for some young people, Oonchiumpa may only be involved in supporting the young person with discrete activities.
- Oonchiumpa staff were not always able to access timely and relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of young people in their cohort from other organisations. These organisations did not have a clear sense of what type of information Oonchiumpa was entitled to receive.
- In addition, relevant information to inform this stage 1 evaluation was not readily accessible via Oonchiumpa. For example, despite engagement in education being one of the performance reporting milestones for Oonchiumpa under the Agreement with NIAA, it did not have access to school attendance, suspension and engagement data from the various schools where young people were enrolled to enable benchmarking before and after their involvement in the ASR, and to track progress along the way. The same challenge exists in relation to child protection and crime data for young people (also qualitative measures under the Agreement).
- I consider it critical for work to be carried out as soon as possible to clarify the information sharing rights and responsibilities of Oonchiumpa and other local service providers working with children and young people in Alice Springs. An organisation and some people can share information about a child or family if it relates to the child's safety and wellbeing, provided they are an 'authorised information sharer' (AIS). An AIS can share certain details under part 5.1A of the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* (Northern Territory).
- In order for an integrated and well targeted service delivery model for young people at risk and their families to be implemented, it is essential that lead government agencies and non-government partners, are sharing critical risk related data to form a collective picture of the young people and families who are most in need of support, and which providers are best placed to coordinate the delivery of such support. The extended rollout period for the ASR will allow this issue of integrated service delivery to be more carefully examined.

## 8.2 Priority actions for the Stage 2 evaluation

- With the Stage 2 developmental evaluation of the ASR due to be completed in July 2025, it will be necessary for me to work with Oonchiumpa and partner government and non-government agencies to settle the necessary data required to properly assess both quantitative and qualitative measures relevant to the program, such as ongoing engagement by young people involved in the ASR in employment or education; rates of recidivism and whether rates of child abuse and neglect have



reduced during the program. (This exercise is separate but related to the ongoing sharing of client data with Oonchiumpa and partner agencies for operational purposes which is aimed at promoting the safety and wellbeing of children in its cohort group.)

- With several brokerage arrangements now in place, the Stage 2 evaluation will also allow for an assessment to be undertaken of the quality and diversity of culturally-led support options and activities available in Alice Springs.
- As NIAA is aware, Oonchiumpa was encouraged with my support to submit a grant for Just Reinvest Central Australia. The outcome of this grant is not yet known. If successful, Oonchiumpa would like to extend its case coordination and support model to a larger cohort of young people, and in doing so, take on more referrals with a justice focus, including provision of court support and support to young people in the community subject to bail/parole restrictions. Oonchiumpa also considers it a priority going forward, to identify a street front location to establish its presence more visibly in the community and provide young people and families with practical support to access services.

### 8.3 Recommendations

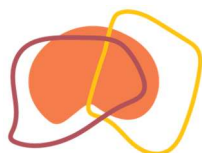
- (1) I recommend that a meeting takes place in the final quarter of 2024 between the four partners involved in the delivery of the ASR – that is, NIAA, NT Families, Oonchiumpa and Demetrius Consulting, to discuss:
  - a) the information required to better support the ongoing delivery of the ASR and the Stage 2 evaluation process (including policing, child protection, and education data; regular provision of night notes, and commitments to participating in evaluation interviews with partner agencies)
  - b) the merits of further clarifying expectations of all parties under the ASR partnership including settling clear escalation processes across the partnership when issues can't be promptly resolved between the parties
  - c) the benefits of extending the partnership arrangements more formally to other government and non-government agencies
  - d) systemic issues or barriers identified through the rollout of ASR (such as housing application waitlists and classroom readiness and re-entry requirements), and whether these can be more effectively addressed
  - e) if Oonchiumpa is successful, the outcome of the JR funding grant and how the delivery of any service model under Just Reinvest can leverage the ASR and extend the reach of the combined programs.

Julianna Demetrius

**Director, Demetrius Consulting**

9 August 2024





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*"Two Cultures, One World, Working Together"*

## *Good News Story Oonchiumpa*

The girls enjoyed an afternoon out with Katrina watching the semi-final for under 16 cruiser boys.

The girls have now expressed their interest to play basketball next season. This was an opportunity for the girls to try something new and be apart of the local competition and the basketball community. This was the first time that some of the girls have ever been inside the basketball stadium, Katrina had 5 girls who are on our Oonchiumpa team/list and 1 who is the sister of one of the girls.





Barber Black Kings

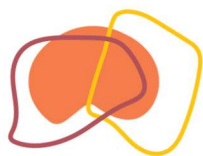
## *Blak Barbers – Grooming Session*

Oonchiumpa school holiday participations.

After the reptile centre the young fellas attended a grooming session with Black Barbers at the Congress family day. 4 young fellas had their hair cut and styled. This was a unique experience for the young fellas and they left feeling proud and good in themselves have a fresh haircuts.







## Good News Oonchiumpa

### Oonchiumpa Christmas Lunch

I feel like I'm going to have a good day today! I'm going to have a good feed and good swim.

I like working with you mob!!



#### Oonchiumpa Christmas Lunch

You and your family are invited to the

Oonchiumpa Christmas Lunch

When: Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2023

Where: Gap View

Time: 12 noon - 3pm



Please bring your swimmers!



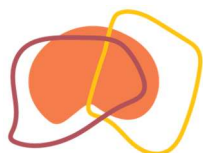
### Oonchiumpa Girl Lunch

I feel excited!! I don't know why but I just do!!

### Oonchiumpa Fellas – Overnight stay at the Discovery Park

I really like my bag with my own stuff in it!!





## Good News Story

Oonchiumpa hosted and self-funded My Mbantua Youth Fun Day during the June/July school holidays.



What a great turn out today for My Mbantua Youth Fun Day.

Special Guest Nathan Jawai - The First Indigenous NBA basketball player all the way from Bamaga Community in Far North Queensland.

Deadly Sounds from Shilo DJ Lazy Dom.

Hip Hop Workshop by Rhys got the kids dancing showing off their moves.

Thanks to the Deadly Oonchiumpa Crew for the BBQ lunch.

Plenty of Fairy Floss for all the kids to enjoy and beautiful faces from Beck our local face painter.



Thank You to our community organisation CAFLU, CAWLS, Akeyulerre, CAAMA, Talia from Common Ground, Rock City, Alice Springs Cinema, McDonald's and members from the Southern Community Resilience and Engagement Command (CREC) and Southern Dog Operations Unit for being apart of the fun.

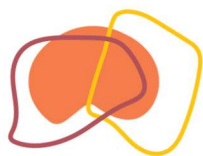
Thank You to Miss Clarke (Shannon Clarke) for being our local deadly MC and keeping the day flowing.

On behalf of Oonchiumpa we hope you all enjoyed your day and had just as much fun as we did at My Mbantua Youth Fun Day hosted by Oonchiumpa Consultancy and Services who are traditional owners of Mbantua 🤍🤍

We had 4 fellers and 4 girls of our Oonchiumpa clients who attend plus an extra 7 family members. Many of the young people said that it was "suit" meaning it was deadly. They are all asking when the next Fun Day will be.







## *Good News Oonchiumpa*

Our Oonchiumpa team keep busy during the school holiday and took the fellas to the Congress community event colour smash at Anzac Oval.





## *Good News Story*

### Oonchiumpa Fellas Day Out – Standly Chasm

Fred and Tyrone took Darius Ross and Jayden White out on country to Standly Chasm.

Standley Chasm is on western Arrernte country where you can hear first-hand from Aboriginal tour guides about the cultural stories of the area and see cultural significant sights.

This was a great activity/opportunity for the young feller to hear from Aboriginal tour guides and see Aboriginal staff serving in the local café leading the way of what many Aboriginal People can do on the own lands.





## *Good News Conchiumpa*

RDA (Riding for Disable Association) is and program that Oonchiumpa have partnered with for our young people.

This program is every Wednesday from 9am – 12pm our team are 3 weeks in and have very much enjoyed their sessions out to RDA and would like to continue to be a part of the program.







## *Good News Oonchiumpa*

Our Oonchiumpa fellas enjoyed another session at RDA they have one more week of training and then they will be able to ride the horses. They are super excited to start riding!







## *Good News Story*

### Oonchiumpa Girls Day Out – Standly Chasm

Katrina took the girls out on a cultural activity to Standly Chasm.

This trip allowed the girls to get out see the great work that other Aboriginal traditional owners are doing on their own land and making them feel empowered that they too can achieve the similar goals.

This day was a very hot day; however, it was a great opportunity for the girls to open about how they are feeling.

There were 4 girls out of the 9 who participated in the trip.





## *Good News Conchiumpa*

A big thank for Matt and Chloe for giving our young fellas a tour of the McDonald's store and an opportunity to make their own lunch. This experience made them feel welcomed and they enjoyed making their dessert.

This opportunity helped create connections between our young people and the amazing owners, management and staff at Mcdonalds.

We had 3 of the young fellers out of 9 who participated in the work experience tour.







## Good News Oonchiumpa

During the school holiday OUR Oonchiumpa team took the young fellas to the Reptile Centre. This was the first time that they have been and they all enjoyed themselves.

