



Evaluation of Balit Ngulu

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

29 May 2020

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Glossary

Definition of terms

This report discusses a program that delivered legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria. Terms have particular meanings in this setting and in relation to these issues. The table below sets out commonly used terms, and how we use the terms in this report.

Aboriginal	'Aboriginal' is used when referring to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Victoria.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.
Community	'Community' refers to and acknowledges all Aboriginal people living in Victoria. 'Community' can be used to describe the entire Aboriginal community or smaller specific communities.
Country	'Country' for Aboriginal people is land with which Aboriginal people share a spiritual and cultural connection. Aboriginal people have custodial responsibility to care for their Country.
Cultural safety	'Cultural safety' refers to an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.
Elders	An 'Elder' is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. In some instances, Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders.
Family	Use of the words 'family' and 'families' is all encompassing and acknowledges the variety of relationships and structure that can make up a family unit, including family-like or care relationships and extended kinship structures.
Indigenous	'Indigenous' is used to refer to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Koori/Koorie	'Koori' or 'Koorie' is a term denoting an Aboriginal person of southern New South Wales or Victoria. 'Koori' is not a synonym for 'Aboriginal'. One cannot assume that an Aboriginal person who happens to be living in south-east Australia is Koori.
Mob	'Mob' is used to refer to a 'Nation', 'community', 'people' or local language or culture group.
Self-determination	'Self-determination' means Aboriginal people being able to make their own choices and live according to their own values and beliefs.

Executive Summary

Translated from the Wurundjeri language, Balit Ngulu means 'Strong Voice'. Balit Ngulu was established by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) in 2017, with \$277,000 of its own funding, to improve access to high quality legal services and holistic support and case management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who came into contact with the justice system and/or child protection. The program operated from July 2017 and closed in September 2018 after unsuccessful attempts to secure an ongoing funding source.

In mid-2019, VALS, in collaboration with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), engaged Nous Group (Nous) to evaluate Balit Ngulu. VALS wanted to understand and document the benefits that Balit Ngulu may have had for its clients and identify, through facilitated reflection and assessment, what matters for the delivery of effective, culturally-safe legal services and holistic support for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. VALS also intended that government and non-government services draw on the findings to inform funding decisions and the design of future legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

This report presents Nous' findings. We note that the evaluation was conducted in late 2019-early 2020, more than 12 months after the program finished. This affected our ability to interview a large number of program participants, staff members and associates in the justice sector. Some of the people we did interview reported they could not fully remember their experiences. These limitations mean Nous cannot give a comprehensive or definitive view of program quality and client outcomes, but the people we interviewed were generous. Their stories and views help bring to life – backed by existing literature – not only what mattered to them in Balit Ngulu, but what matters to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have access to high-quality legal representation and holistic support in future. We are therefore confident that this report makes findings useful to the design and delivery of future services.

What need did Balit Ngulu seek to fulfill? – Balit Ngulu's purpose and rationale

The **rationale** for the introduction of the program was the demand VALS observed for high-quality legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria. When Balit Ngulu was established in mid-2017, 17 per cent of all young people in detention in Victoria were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people, while Indigenous children in Victoria received child protection services at 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous children.

In many cases, VALS was unable to meet the demand for legal advice because a conflict of interest arose if it was already representing the parent, caregiver or family member of a child or young person who needed advice. An additional, and important, driver for the program was a desire, consistent with VALS' organisational objectives, to ensure that legal services were also culturally safe and holistic in the way they worked with clients.

The **purpose** of Balit Ngulu was therefore to give clients good legal advice and representation, address the drivers of their contact with the justice system and/or child protection services and support their longer-term recovery and resilience. In this way, the program was expected not only to contribute to reducing the over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system and child protection, but to help create conditions in which Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria are empowered and thrive. Balit Ngulu's founders wanted to assure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people "that they are not a lost cause and have a strong voice in their own affairs".

What did Balit Ngulu do? – Balit Ngulu's service design

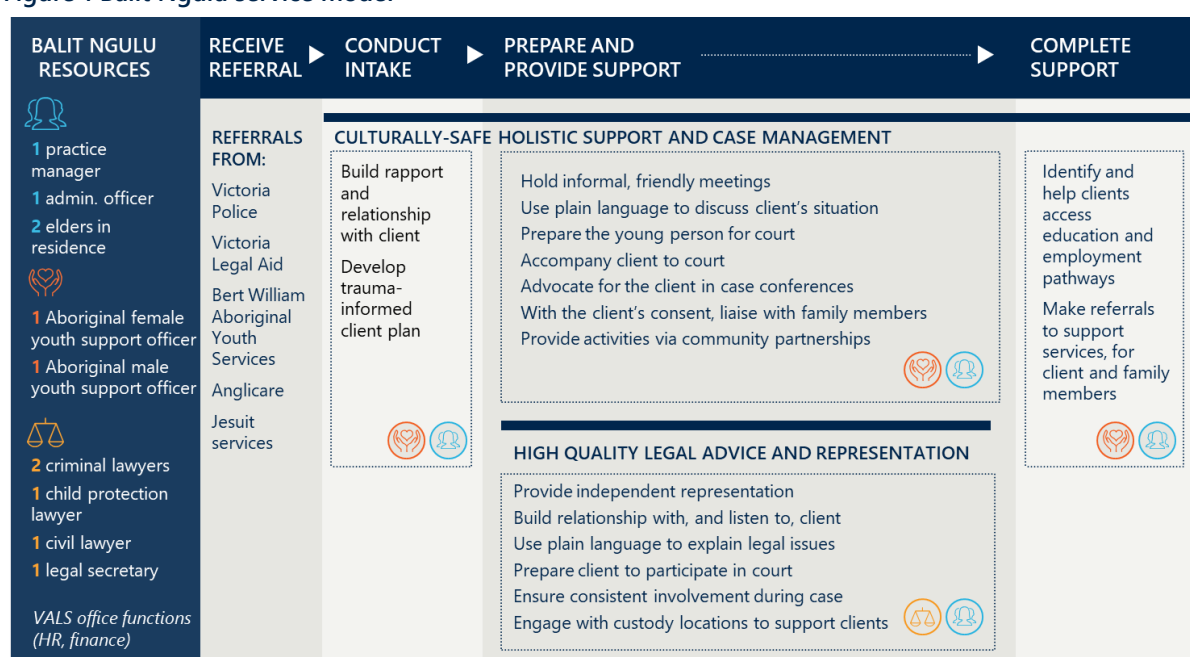
The program's core function was to provide clients with necessary legal advice and representation, but it also wanted to divert young people from the justice system and/or facilitate kinship placements and

support their empowerment and resilience. Balit Ngulu therefore put in place a **service model** (Figure 1) with two streams of support for clients before, during and after their legal proceedings:

1. **Culturally-safe, holistic support and case management** was provided to ensure children and young people felt seen, heard, connected and secure, and that they had positive pathways forward.
2. **High-quality legal advice, assistance and representation** was provided to ensure that children and young people were adequately and independently represented to facilitate just outcomes.

Balit Ngulu's ways of working in this service model were designed to embed four principles for delivering effective services for Indigenous peoples, as well as a core principle of legal practice excellence: embed self-determination, be culturally safe, take a holistic approach, and prioritise and value youth participation.

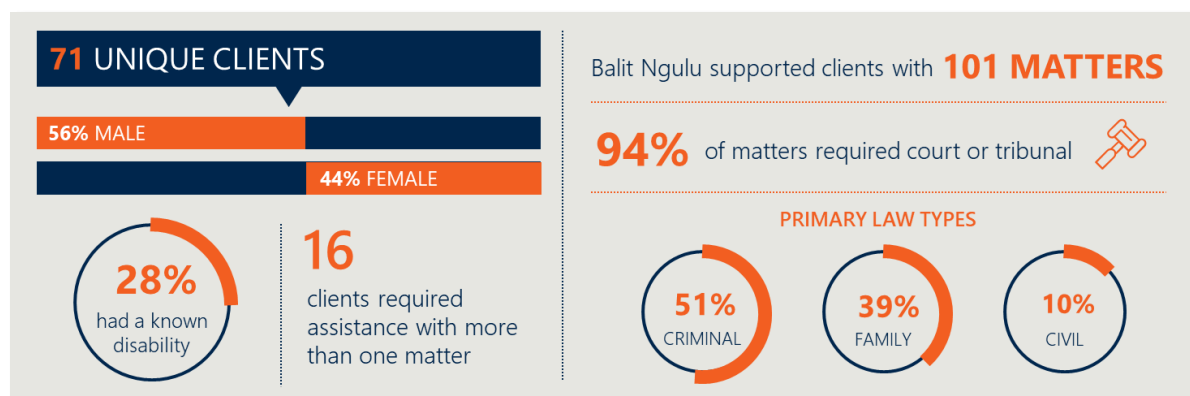
Figure 1 Balit Ngulu service model



How well did the program deliver, with what benefits? – Balit Ngulu's reach and outcomes

From the Balit Ngulu program office in Broadmeadows, the program operated across North-West Metropolitan Melbourne and the Goulburn Valley Region. Figure 2 shows its **service reach**.

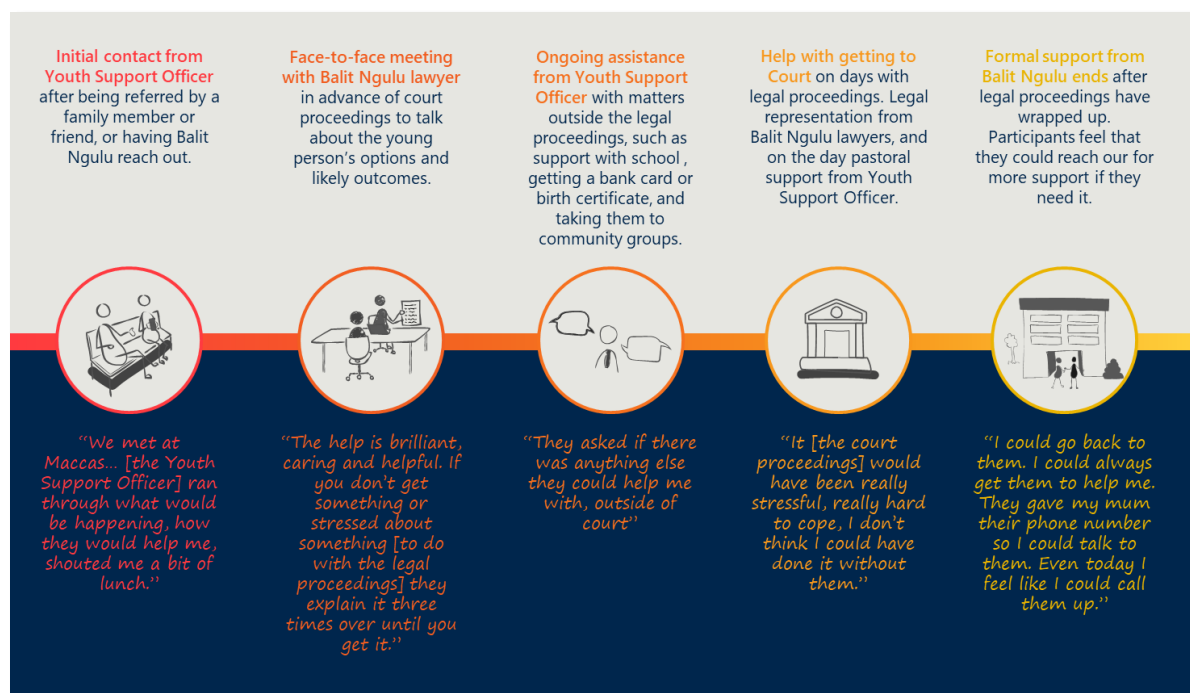
Figure 2 | Balit Ngulu client and service data



The feedback Nous received on Balit Ngulu's **service quality and outcomes** was overwhelmingly positive. Nous spoke to four Balit Ngulu clients who shared their stories about their experience with Balit Ngulu and

what they liked, or did not like, about the support they received. Young people who participated in the program said they felt supported by experienced staff who demonstrated they cared about them and whom they could trust. They said this support helped them manage stress, participate in court, feel stronger in their family and community, and start re-establishing their lives. These outcomes were very valuable to clients. Their experiences in Balit Ngulu are illustrated in the 'service journey map' at Figure 3.

Figure 3 | Balit Ngulu through the eyes of participants



Nous also spoke to three people who had been Balit Ngulu or VALS staff, and five people working in the justice system who had worked with, or had visibility of, Balit Ngulu. All interviewees strongly supported Balit Ngulu's dual-focus service model, identifying similar client benefits as had the young people we interviewed. The interviewees believed Balit Ngulu's organisational strategies enabled those benefits:

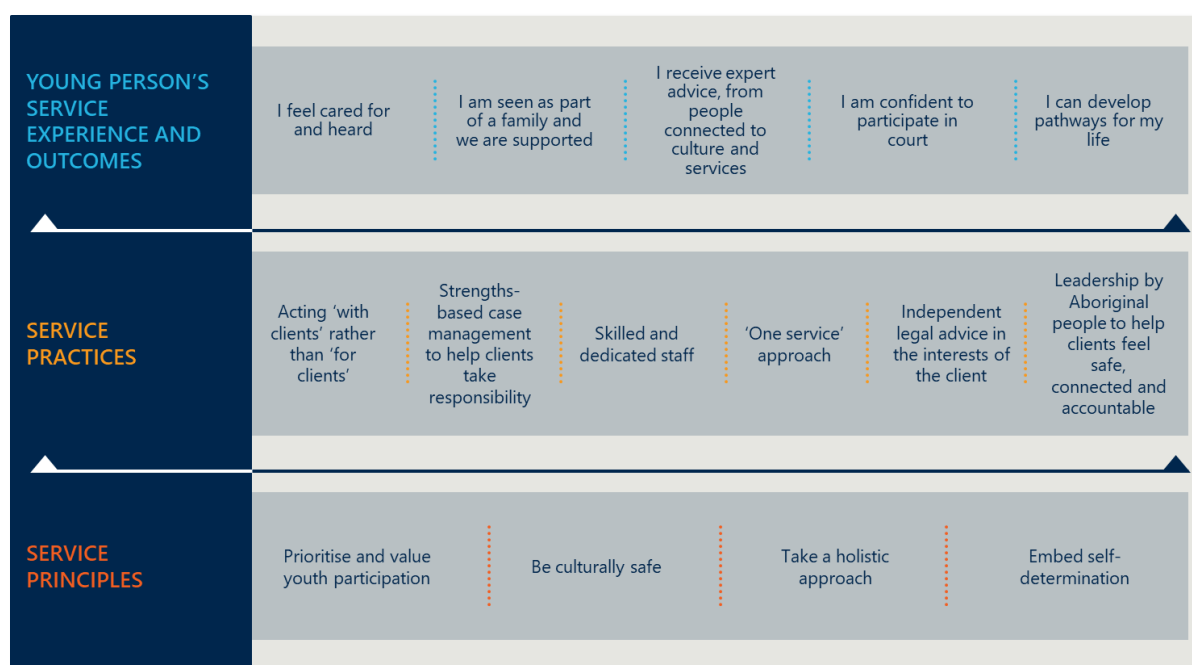
- It had a 'one service' approach which meant clients need only 'tell their story once' and lawyers and support staff coordinated their work with the client.
- The program was led by Aboriginal people, which signalled self-determination to clients and meant the service was well-connected and could help connect or reconnect clients to community.
- The program employed skilled and dedicated staff, an outstanding aspect of the program in the eyes of justice sector stakeholders. A key challenge was the ability to recruit and retain enough qualified staff with experience with similar client cohorts. Several interviewees noted the distinction between Balit Ngulu and VALS staff could also have been clarified when staff had worked across both services.
- Staff members provided independent representation that recognised the distinct legal needs of children and young people. They acted 'with' clients rather than 'for' them. Being 'with' the client, 'in their corner', did not mean absolving them of their responsibility but rather accompanying them by preparing clients for court, supporting their voice in court and advocating effectively for clients.
- The program used strengths-based case management to help clients take responsibility and re-engage with family, school, sport and community. Stakeholders saw the youth support officers' role as to "walk through doors that had been shut [in young people's] faces" and to express confidence in clients' ability to take responsibility for their actions and circumstances now and in future.

Lessons and opportunities

The major constraint on Balit Ngulu was the volume of the initial pilot funding and the inability to establish a secure ongoing funding model, which led to the program's closure in September 2018. There continues to be a real need and strong demand for legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria. The Victorian Government is taking intensified action to address service gaps and reduce young people's contact with Victoria's justice system and child protection, as part of its renewed policy priorities set out in its response to the 2016 Youth Justice Review, the *Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4* and the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023.

The Government's renewed commitment to advance outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including young people, is grounded in the recognition of self-determination as a guiding principle. Nous has drawn on the feedback received on Balit Ngulu, as well as from relevant literature, to propose a framework (Figure 4) that can shape the design and delivery of future legal services that effectively give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people "strong voices".

Figure 4 | Framework for legal services that give Indigenous children and young people 'strong voices'



Ideally, all organisations delivering legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people – public, private and community-based – would deliver services that reflect the principles and practices Balit Ngulu illuminated. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, in particular, have an important role in delivering such services in a justice system that prioritises self-determination.

For any future service, early and sustained consideration should be given to securing multi-year funding, and collaborative planning with others in the sector should be undertaken. The importance of achieving financial sustainability for youth legal services cannot be stressed strongly enough, if the goal is to contribute to a substantial and systematic improvement in the outcomes Victoria's justice system delivers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

1 Balit Ngulu's purpose and rationale

Balit Ngulu was established by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) in 2017 to improve access to high-quality legal services and holistic support and case management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who came into contact with the criminal justice system and/or child protection services. Translated from the Wurundjeri language, Balit Ngulu means 'Strong Voice'.

The **rationale** for the introduction of the program was the demand VALS observed for high-quality legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria. In many cases, VALS was unable to meet this demand because a conflict of interest arose if it was already representing the parent, caregiver or family member of a child or young person who needed advice. An additional, and important, driver for the program was a desire, consistent with VALS' organisational objectives, to ensure that legal services were also culturally safe and holistic in the way they worked with clients.

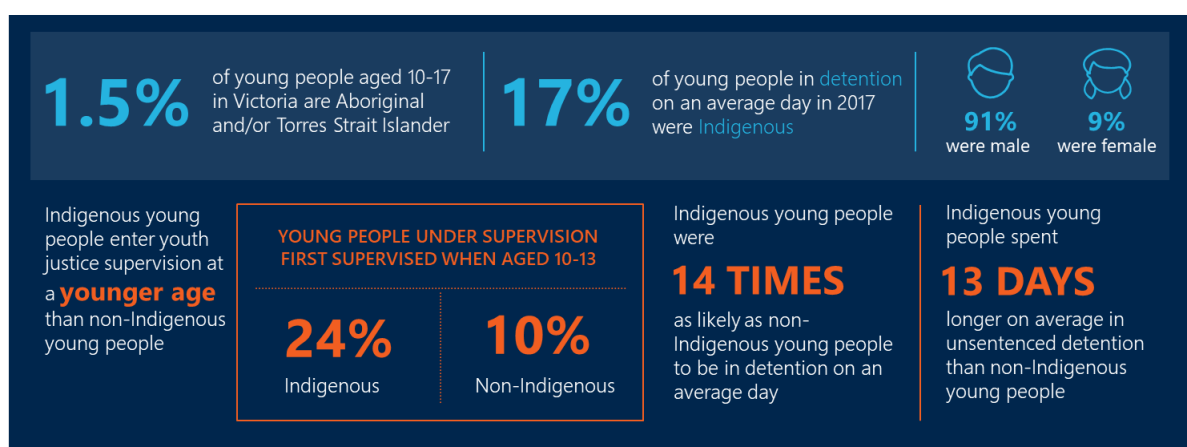
The **purpose** of Balit Ngulu was therefore to give clients good legal advice and representation, address the drivers of their contact with the justice system and/or child protection services and support their longer-term recovery and resilience. In this way, the program was expected not only to contribute to reducing the over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system and child protection, but to help create conditions in which Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria are empowered and thrive.

This section describes the context in which Balit Ngulu was established and VALS' purpose and rationale (also summarised in the program logic model at Appendix A).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are over-represented in Victoria's justice and child protection systems

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have high rates of contact with Victoria's youth justice system and with child protection services, relative to all young people in Victoria. When Balit Ngulu was established in mid-2017, 17 per cent of all young people in detention in Victoria were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people. An independent review of the state's youth justice system in 2016, the first in 16 years, found that the over-representation of Koori young people was worsening over time, in real and proportional terms;¹ data on the high contact rates is shown at Figure 5.

Figure 5 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's contact with youth justice in Victoria²



¹ P Armytage, J Ogloff, *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Youth justice in Australia 2016-17*, AIHW, Canberra, 2018.

Victoria had the lowest rate, in 2017, of all states and territories, of Indigenous youth detention: it was 14 times the incarceration rate of non-Indigenous young people in Victoria, rather than 24 times, which is the average difference across Australia.³ That incarceration rate is still disproportionately high, however. The Victorian rates contribute to making Aboriginal overrepresentation in the criminal justice system and in prisons one of Australia's most enduring social issues, nearly 30 years on from the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

In addition to being disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria are disproportionately involved in child protection services: in 2016-17, Indigenous children in Victoria received child protection services at 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous children, and they received more services than did Indigenous children in any other State or Territory, at a rate of 250 per 1,000 children. This contact is shaped by a range of factors, including Victoria's early intervention and prevention approach as well as crisis response, and a high proportion of children were placed in kinship care.⁴ However, there are still serious individual and community impacts of high rates of interaction with child protection.

Figure 6 | Aboriginal and Torres Islander young people's contact with child protection in Victoria⁵



The costs of over-representation are high, and the drivers are historical and complex

The involvement of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice and child protection systems comes at a substantial financial cost to the Victorian community. In 2016-17 the average daily cost, per young person subject to community-based supervision and detention-based supervision in Victoria was approximately \$160 and \$1,300 respectively.⁶

These figures exclude the even more significant human costs of over-representation. Incarceration and removal from kin results in the loss of culture, isolation, marginalisation and absence, costs which are felt by young people, their families and communities, and which diminish the wider Victorian community. It is well-established that detaining children is harmful to their mental, social and emotional wellbeing; it also constrains their future job prospects and increases the likelihood of recidivism. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people these harms are compounded by dislocation from community, culture and identity – strengths which would normally serve to guide young people away from the justice system.⁷

Over-representation in justice and child protection systems risks not only the perpetuation of these harms but is driven by them. High rates of offending and removals from family are, in part, manifestations of the destructive impacts of historical assimilationist policies, intergenerational trauma and ongoing

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Youth justice in Australia 2016–17](#), AIHW, Canberra, 2018.

⁴ SVA Consulting, [The economic case for early intervention in the child protection and out-of-home care system in Victoria](#), Berry Street, 2019. Note: Early intervention for families and children is a broad concept. In effect, every intervention in a child's life can be considered early intervention, including prior to a child's birth.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Child protection Australia 2016–17](#), AIHW, Canberra, 2018.

⁶ Productivity Commission, [Section 17 Youth Justice Services - Report on Government Services 2020](#), Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2020.

⁷ PwC's Indigenous Consulting, [Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers, Australia, 2017.

discrimination and disadvantage. The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* Report made the public aware of the impacts of the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

high levels of unemployment, poverty, ill health, homelessness, and poor educational outcomes [seen today] arise from the intergenerational effects of earlier assimilationist policies, as well as being the direct outcome of dispossession and marginalisation...The devastating experiences of Aboriginal parents and their families brought on by the removal of their children, the loss of control over their own lives, powerlessness, prejudice, and hopelessness have left many problems to be dealt with today.⁸

VALS established Balit Ngulu to improve young people's access to high-quality legal services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people involved in the justice system and/or child protection services require good legal advice and representation. The 2016 youth justice review found that the majority of young offenders rely on publicly-funded legal services for advice and advocacy.⁹

Additionally, in 2016-17, Victoria Legal Aid saw increasing demand for legal services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a 30 per cent increase in the civil justice program and 20 percent in the family, youth and children's law program.¹⁰ Together, these trends are likely to indicate strong demand for legal services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people when Balit Ngulu was established.

VALS identified the increased provision of referrals, advice, information, duty work and case work assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as a priority fitting its mandate as an Aboriginal-controlled legal service. While VALS did represent children and young people who required advice, it was unable to do so in many cases because it already represented the parent, caregiver or family member of a child or young person who needed advice, and this created a conflict of interest. In these cases, VALS referred clients to Victoria Legal Aid and private practitioners.

While mainstream services are crucial in a system of public services, VALS established Balit Ngulu to provide a targeted and Aboriginal-led legal service that would give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people an independent voice in family matters. VALS intended that the legal advice and representation would not only deliver legal practice excellence but give continuous service to children and young people, with full respect for, and empowerment of, them.

Balit Ngulu was also designed to provide culturally-safe, holistic support to clients

Once in contact with Victoria's youth justice system, the life outcomes of a young person tend to be poor, with limited or no change in their offending patterns.¹¹ At the time Balit Ngulu was established, there was limited expenditure from the state's youth justice budget on prevention and early intervention. In 2016-17, one per cent of that budget was allocated to two early intervention programs, the Community Based Koori Youth Justice Program and Youth Support Services.¹²

As well as providing legal advice, Balit Ngulu thus also sought to promote clients' long-term resilience and help prevent future contact with the justice system. Drawing on evidence that stronger culture, identity and kinship structures – as well as systemic reforms – are required to address the drivers of high incarceration rates and removals from family,¹³ Balit Ngulu introduced holistic, trauma-informed case support alongside legal services. This holistic approach reflected VALS' objectives to not only reduce the over-representation in the justice system but to help create conditions in which Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria are empowered and can thrive.

⁸ Australia, M Wilkie. *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997.

⁹ P Armytage, J Ogloff, *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017.

¹⁰ Victoria Legal Aid, *Annual Report 2016-17*, VLA, Melbourne, 2017.

¹¹ P Armytage, J Ogloff, *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017.

¹² P Armytage, J Ogloff, *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017.

¹³ PwC's Indigenous Consulting, *Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts*, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Australia, 2017.

2 Balit Ngulu's service design

VALS established and funded Balit Ngulu with \$277,000 from the proceeds of a building sale in 2013-14. VALS' staff had been iteratively creating a vision for, and designing, Balit Ngulu over the four years before it was set up, informed by their observation of the needs of children and young people and their families.

To meet the purpose identified, Balit Ngulu put in place a **service model** that combined the provision of high-quality legal services with culturally-safe, holistic case management to support children and young people before, during and after their legal proceedings.

The service model was designed to deliver legal practice excellence and to put into practice four well-established **principles for delivering high-quality services** for Indigenous peoples: embed self-determination; be culturally safe; take a holistic approach; and prioritise and value youth participation.

This section describes Balit Ngulu's service model and the principles underpinning its design.

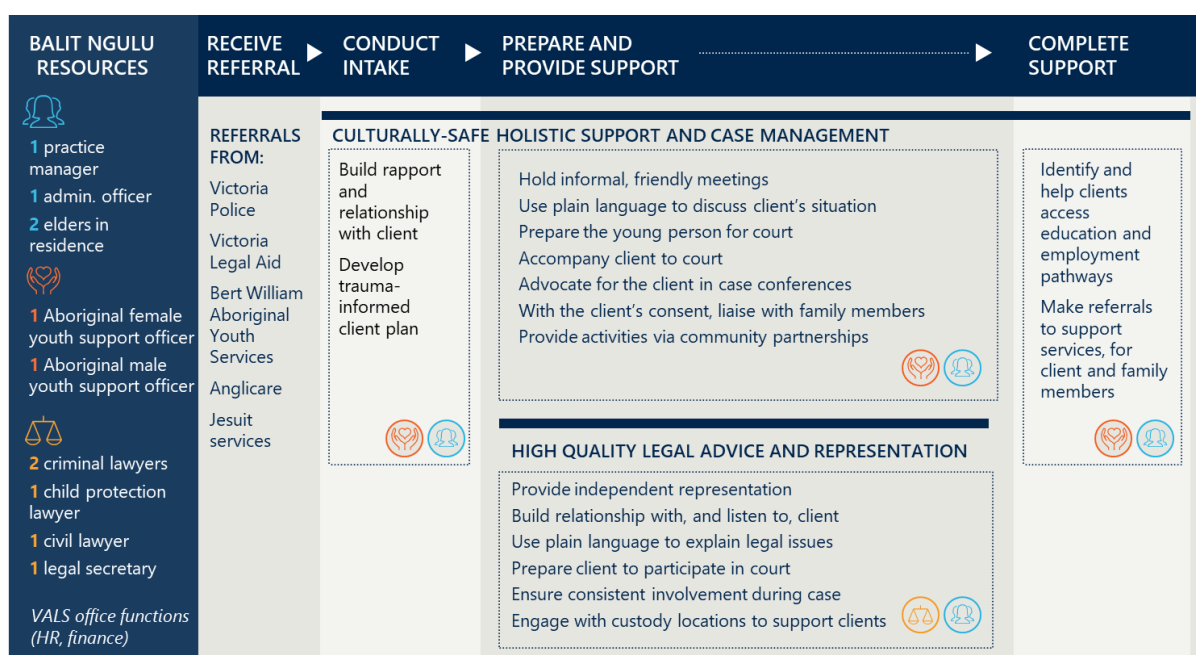
Balit Ngulu's model of service for clients was innovative and integrated

Balit Ngulu's founders wanted to assure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people "that they are not a lost cause and have a strong voice in their own affairs". As explained by the current VALS CEO, having an autonomous funding source meant VALS had flexibility to listen to community priorities and trial a service that responded to those priorities. The program's core function was to provide clients with necessary legal advice and representation, but it also wanted to divert young people from the justice system and/or facilitate kinship placements and support their empowerment and resilience.

Balit Ngulu's service model (Figure 7) included the provision of two streams of support for its clients:

1. **Culturally-safe, holistic support and case management** was provided to ensure children and young people felt seen, heard, connected and secure, and that they had positive pathways forward.
2. **High-quality legal advice, assistance and representation** was provided to ensure that children and young people were adequately and independently represented to facilitate just outcomes.

Figure 7 Balit Ngulu service model



In addition to working directly with clients, Balit Ngulu developed resources and conducted several community legal education forums to educate and mentor community members, including children and young people, on their legal rights and responsibilities.

The service model embodied four well-established service principles

The name of the service – ‘Strong Voice’ in the Wurundjeri language – embodied VALS’ intent and ethos. In addition to a core principle of delivering legal practice excellence in accordance with professional standards and ethical obligations, Balit Ngulu’s integrated service model was based in four well-established principles for delivering high-quality services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children and young people. These principles were:



This section describes each of the principles, and Nous’ assessment of the features of Balit Ngulu’s service model by which Balit Ngulu was designed to put those principles into practice.

Embed self-determination

Self-determination is the right of Indigenous peoples to make decisions about their lives and communities and to retain and develop their cultures.¹⁴ The right to self-determination is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, of which Australia is a signatory. Its fulfilment is internationally recognised as an effective mechanism to improve the outcomes of Indigenous peoples.¹⁵

Principles of self-determination can be applied to any situation where a decision must be made about matters affecting Indigenous peoples’ lives. Australian research has demonstrated that decisions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about service provision outperform decisions made by external parties. Major enquiries including *Bringing them Home* and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have consistently recommended that self-determination be embedded in the design and delivery of services for Indigenous peoples.¹⁶

Services grounded in principles of self-determination are those that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in their design and delivery. This engagement goes beyond ‘consultation’ and involves ownership and control; it looks like “our communities are leading discussions; ...our knowledge, expertise and understanding is being utilised”.¹⁷ For youth legal services, self-determination means that community must be actively involved in deciding what matters most for their children and what type of interventions will likely have the greatest positive impacts on their lives.¹⁸

¹⁴ PwC’s Indigenous Consulting, [Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers, Australia, 2017.

¹⁵ Australian Government, [Capacity development for Indigenous service delivery](#), Australian National Audit Office, 2012. Cornell, S & Taylor J, [Sovereignty, devolution, and the future of tribal-state relations](#), Harvard University, 2000. Denato, R & Segal, L, [Does Australia have the appropriate health reform agenda to close the gap in Indigenous health?](#), Australian Health Review, 2013.

¹⁶ The Productivity Commission enquiry into ‘Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage,’ which reviewed the outcomes of dozens of policies and services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country, found that community involvement was critical to success of almost all services studied. SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision), [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016](#), Productivity Commission, 2016; PwC’s Indigenous Consulting, [Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers, Australia, 2017; Oxfam, [In Good Hands: The people and communities behind Aboriginal-led solutions](#), Oxfam Australia, 2019.

¹⁷ Quotation from the CEO of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, in Moore, G, [From and Aboriginal Mission to the UN: shifting perceptions on self-determination](#), The Guardian, 2016

¹⁸ Richards K, Rosevear L, & Gilbert R, [Promising interventions for reducing Indigenous juvenile offending](#), Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse, 2011.

Established, funded, led and managed by Aboriginal people, Balit Ngulu was a self-determined program. Its service model also aimed to promote self-determination in the justice and child protection systems. First, Balit Ngulu sought to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in matters relating to their own lives. In keeping with a cultural value that young people can make decisions on their own behalf, the service model included preparing clients not only to attend, but to participate actively in, court and legal processes.

Second, the service sought to contribute to stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and decision-making in the court. When representing a child or young person in Koorie court, Balit Ngulu was part of a loop of Aboriginal representation: elders, organisations, families and the young person sat together at the same table, shared their voices and focused on outcomes that would promote the young person's restoration as well as their accountability. In discussions of child protection matters, Balit Ngulu sought to advocate for keeping children with their kin when possible.

Be culturally safe

A well-established literature on service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples indicates that connectedness to community, culture and cultural strengthening leads to better outcomes for Indigenous people, including for children and young people.¹⁹ Culturally safe services are services which see and value the full identity, relatedness and worth of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. They also put that recognition into practice and, by doing so, create a safe setting for people to access the support they need to thrive.

There are four common strategies to develop and deliver culturally-safe services.²⁰ Table 1 sets out these strategies, along with the ways in which Balit Ngulu incorporated them in its service model.

"Understanding children's lives is the first step to supporting them to be happy and healthy. When supports for Aboriginal children use non-Aboriginal frameworks to understand children's needs and strengths, they are unsuccessful. Aboriginal children are best supported by Aboriginal definitions of identity and wellbeing."

– Ngaga-dji (2018)

Table 1 | Strategies to develop and deliver culturally safe services

Strategies for culturally competent services	Features of Balit Ngulu's service model
Embed cultural knowledge in the structure of the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve community in identifying the services needed and how they can be delivered. For example, VALS consulted with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus through the wider Aboriginal Justice Agreement and collaborated with Koorie Youth Council given their relation to Aboriginal youth. • Employ staff, especially youth support officers, who are members of Koorie communities with connections and cultural knowledge as well as professional expertise. • Establish a governance Board of elders and other community members who have community recognition and relevant professional experience.

¹⁹ PwC's Indigenous Consulting, [Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers, Australia, 2017. Australian Government, [Closing the gap: law and justice - prevention and early intervention programs for Indigenous youth](#), Resource sheet no. 34, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Youth Justice in Australia 2017-18](#), AIHW, Canberra, 2019. Colquhoun, S & Dockery, AM [The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples](#). Centre for Labour Market Research and School of Economics and Finance, Curtin University, 2012; Koorie Youth Council, [Ngaga-Dji \(Hear Me\): Young voices in creating change for justice](#), 2018.

²⁰ Price-Robertson, Rhys & McDonald, Myfanwy, [Working with Indigenous children, families, and communities: Lessons from practice](#), Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, 2011.

Employ specific practices and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage a male youth support officer and a female youth support officer so they can conduct men's business and women's business with clients. • Embed a relationship-based service culture. This included clear expectations about the responsibility of the lawyers and youth support officers to gain and maintain clients' trust and deliver consistent service. For example, one lawyer would see each case through to provide continuity, quality and tailoring of advice and representation for each client. • Actively prepare the young person to attend and participate in court and to be seen by the court as a whole person. For example, the support officer worked with the young person, their family or carer, and with their community connections to identify and document the young person's kinship network/mob. They prepared a 'cultural identity and care folder' for each client which also included information on the client's interests, achievements and community involvement to tell a story about the young person's 'whole self'. The folder was shared with the young person and with the magistrate/judge, elders and representatives from community organisations. • With the client's consent, liaise with family members/carers and provide support and advice when requested. In this way the service communicated to clients, their families and the court its understanding of the client as a young person who is in relationship with their family and community.
Selection, training, and actions of individual staff members	<p>In a culturally safe service, staff members use their cultural and community knowledge, and their understanding of western systems (such as law, governance, health and education) to fully understand clients' needs and situations.²¹ Balit Ngulu strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members, each of whom had professional expertise and/or experience working with Koorie young people, and who understood and fostered culturally-relevant ways of working. • Invite 'elders-in-residence' with justice sector experience to provide cultural support to the youth support workers and train Balit Ngulu lawyers to work with community. • Establish a Balit Ngulu service style and ethic. Balit Ngulu lawyers were expected to get to know their client as a whole person, beyond their legal circumstances. They were expected to ask, and listen to, the client talk about their needs, experiences and preferences, and in turn, explain their legal issues, responsibilities and options plainly. Similarly, youth support workers were expected to build a relationship with their clients to show care and respect, and make conversations informal and open-minded, so they could work effectively with clients before, during and after legal proceedings and help them look to the future.
Define what success looks like using measures and definitions grounded in the culture of the community being served.	<p>Success measures included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support officer and lawyer know about how life is going for a child or young person, apart from their legal proceeding/outcome. • Young people are prepared for, and not too stressed or feeling sick about, the court process, what might happen, and what their voice is in it. • Members of the court are prepared to hear the young person's voice in court. • The support officer works with the child or young person to identify their long-term pathway and assist them to work towards it.

Take a holistic approach

The provision of legal services to a person who has come into contact with the justice system, in isolation from the myriad factors that affect their life, has been shown to have a reduced likelihood of achieving sustained or meaningful outcomes for them.²² A holistic approach to legal service provision is one in which the provider assesses the full scope of a person's needs and the inter-related causes for their contact with the legal system, and collaborates with other agencies to address those needs and causes. This approach assumes that the range of challenges should be addressed because they are likely to:

²¹ Oxfam, [In Good Hands: The people and communities behind Aboriginal-led solutions](#), Oxfam Australia, 2019

²² Curran, Liz, [Making Connections: The Benefits of Working Holistically to Resolve People's Legal Problems](#), Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law, 2005

- be the root cause of a person's need to engage with the legal system
- prevent them from receiving the support they are entitled to, and
- forestall any attempts through the legal system to improve outcomes.

For example, contact with the legal system can be driven, in part, by a lack of access to adequate or appropriate housing, food, education or employment, as well as mental health issues. A holistic service approach is therefore more likely to contribute to improvements in overall wellbeing and outcomes and reduce the likelihood of a person coming into contact with criminal justice in future.²³

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the causes of involvement with the justice or child protection systems also include the occurrence and consequences of dispossession, violence, racism and inter-generational trauma. NATSILS argues that holistic legal service provision is therefore especially important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who:

need to access justice in ways that are different to other Australians. Our people have disproportionate rates of, for example, incarceration/child removal/experiences of family violence/experiences of racism, live in more remote locations with more disadvantage and complex needs and therefore need greater access to lawyers... We need culturally safe services, and holistic services that address underlying needs and trauma which are a consequence of colonisation and subsequent policies.²⁴

A holistic approach is also important for children and young people, for whom building better health and wellbeing and acquiring key life skills – such as literacy, managing finances and obtaining a driver's licence – is important for setting them up to be capable, independent and resilient.²⁵ Elements of Balit Ngulu's holistic approach included:

- The expectation (as noted above) that lawyers and youth support workers would build a relationship with the young person, understand what was happening in their lives more broadly, identify the drivers behind their contact with the justice or child protection system, and explain legal matters clearly to the young person so that they were aware of their responsibilities and rights under the law.
- The development of trauma-informed case plans that identified the young person's ambitions, dreams and needs, including in relation to education, training and employment. As appropriate around legal proceedings, the support officer assisted the client to identify and take key steps on a future-focused pathway (e.g. re-start school, move schools, enrol in TAFE) and made referrals to relevant support services (e.g. Koorie education support officers; women's family violence service).
- Efforts to help strengthen, where possible, the young person's connection to culture and family and/or providing case management support for the family as well as to the young person. For example, if there was a crisis, the support officer would look at the situation for family members and make referrals to other services as needed, such as the Bunjilwarra (Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service), Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Victoria Aboriginal Community Services Association.

Prioritise and value youth participation

Enabling youth participation involves consulting young people about important decisions that affect their lives. For healthy growth and the development of skills and self-esteem, every child and young person needs to feel that their sense of self and their identity is "valued in some way by the people and environments that surround them."²⁶ Asking young people for their views, preferences and ideas is a way of demonstrating that their perspectives matter.

²³ Curran, Liz, [Making Connections: The Benefits of Working Holistically to Resolve People's Legal Problems](#), Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law, 2005

²⁴ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Submission to the Review of the Indigenous Legal Assistance Programme, NATSILS, 2018.

²⁵ Koorie Youth Council (KYC), [Ngaga-Dji \(Hear Me\): Young voices in creating change for justice](#), KYC, 2018.

²⁶ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), [This is Forever Business – a framework for maintaining and restoring cultural safety in Aboriginal Victoria](#), VACCA, 2010.

Engaging young people in this way has been shown to be beneficial not only for individual young people but for the effectiveness of a service itself and for communities.²⁷ This is especially important for Koorie communities which have a young demographic. With almost 60 per cent of Victorian Aboriginal people being under the age of 25 (compared to 32 per cent for non-Aboriginal people),²⁸ this is both an important group of people to engage and involve now, and to build their skills to live safe and healthy lives and lead their communities in future. The Koorie Youth Council argues that “to solve systemic problems like those affecting Aboriginal communities, we need solutions from the people who live through them. By using youth participation, we actively listen and include children’s voices in decision-making processes. This helps provide relevant and effective solutions that change children’s and communities’ lives for the better.”²⁹

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- “It was the first time I told my story where people heard me. They asked me what I needed and what my family needed. I felt a spark of trust light up again.”
 - “The hate in my head is getting quiet as culture and connection get loud and strong.”
 - Koorie young people interviewed for ‘Ngaga-dji’ (2018)

For legal services, prioritising and valuing youth participation means taking into account the perspectives of the young person when deciding how to design services and proceed with their legal matters. Balit Ngulu prioritised and valued youth participation by:

- Holding meetings in places and ways that were comfortable for young people. For example, support officers met clients in informal settings when possible (such as a local food restaurant, park or at home) and established a relaxed and friendly tone that created a safe space in which to discuss legal issues, the young person’s accountability and their options.
- Preparing the young person to participate in their court process (as noted earlier); this included ensuring they knew what to expect about the experience, being able to explain their connection to family and mob and tell their own story, and being able to engage with confidence and demonstrate accountability to elders and judicial members.
- Requesting the young person’s permission to share information between support workers and lawyers, and to talk to family members/carers about their case.
- Facilitating practical ways to participate in life, such as helping them open a bank account.
- Developing and drawing on community partnerships to provide additional activities for clients to join, such as a boys basketball competition.

²⁷ B Head, [Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation](#), Children and Youth Services Review 33, 2011.

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [2024.0 Census of Population and Housing: Australia Revealed 2016](#), ABS, 2017.

²⁹ Koorie Youth Council (KYC), [Ngaga-Dji \(Hear Me\): Young voices in creating change for justice](#), KYC, 2018

3 Balit Ngulu's reach and outcomes

Balit Ngulu was based in Broadmeadows and its **service reach** extended across North-West Metropolitan Melbourne and the Goulburn Valley region. Between July 2017 to September 2018, the program worked with 71 clients and supported them with 101 matters. Criminal matters formed half of the service's case load, with child protection at nearly 40% and the remainder civil law matters.

The feedback Nous received on Balit Ngulu's **service quality and outcomes** was overwhelmingly positive:

- Young people who participated in the program felt supported by experienced staff who demonstrated they cared about them and whom they could trust. This support helped them manage stress, participate in court, feel stronger in their family and community, and start re-establishing their lives.
- Former Balit Ngulu staff and other justice sector actors believed Balit Ngulu could deliver these benefits because it had a 'one service' approach, led by Aboriginal people, in which skilled and dedicated staff acted 'with' clients rather than 'for' them and used strengths-based case management to help clients take responsibility. Challenges included the ability to recruit and retain experienced staff, and funding constraints.

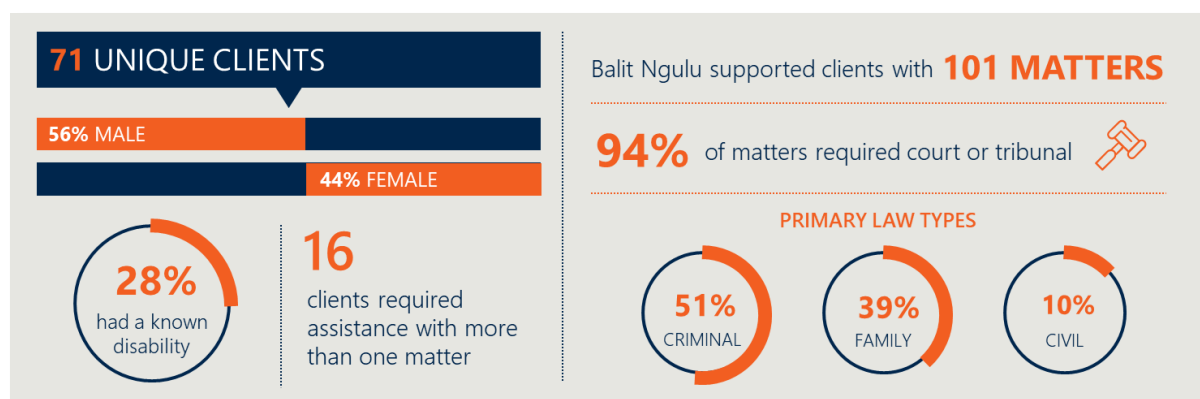
In presenting this feedback, Nous notes that we interviewed a small number of people (13) and the interviews were conducted 18 months after the program ended. The information they shared tells an important story about Balit Ngulu's achievements. It also illustrates what elements make a legal service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people valuable. Our findings should be read while keeping in mind, however, that our data may not be representative of all cases or views. There may be aspects of the program's strengths and challenges that Nous is unaware of due to the relatively small sample size and/or due to the time elapsed between the end of the program and the evaluation.

This section describes Balit Ngulu's service reach in one year of operation. It also reports the feedback given to Nous about the service's value for Koorie children and young people, from the perspective of some Balit Ngulu clients, staff and other actors in Victoria's justice system who interacted with the service.

Service reach: Balit Ngulu represented 71 clients during its pilot year

The Balit Ngulu program office was in Broadmeadows and the program operated across North-West Metropolitan Melbourne and the Goulburn Valley Region, where there are strong Koorie communities. In one year, Balit Ngulu represented 71 clients on 101 matters (Figure 8 shows service data).

Figure 8 | Balit Ngulu client and service data



To ensure the program reached as many children and young people as possible with the resources available, Balit Ngulu staff promoted the program to their counterparts at Victoria Legal Aid's regional

offices, Victoria Legal Aid Child Protection and Youth Crime Forums, youth detention facilities and at Aboriginal community organisations.

Service outcomes: Balit Ngulu made a genuine difference for Koorie young people

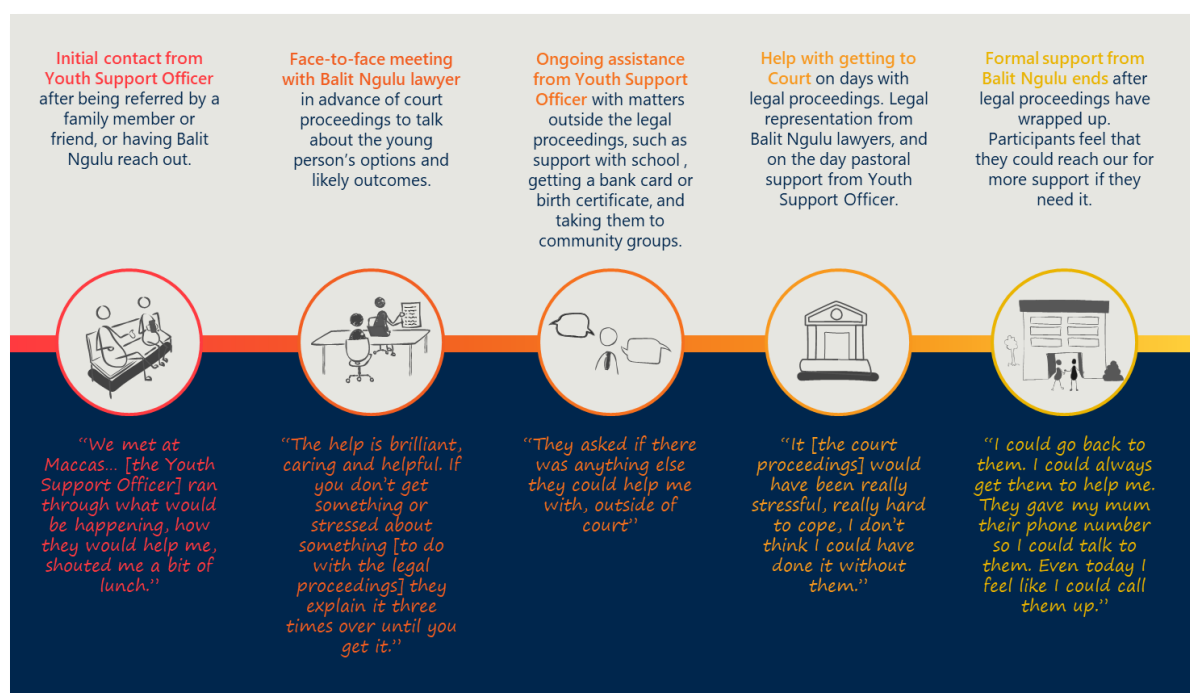
The Balit Ngulu clients, staff and other actors in Victoria's justice system to whom Nous spoke were unanimous in their view that Balit Ngulu provided a unique and valuable service to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, one that made a genuine difference to their ability to participate in court, to be well-represented and to take steps towards good pathways in life. We present, in turn, insights from clients and from former staff and justice sector stakeholders who interacted with the service about what made Balit Ngulu a valuable service, as well as their suggestions for improvement in a future service.

In presenting this feedback, Nous notes that we interviewed a small number of people (13) and the interviews were conducted 18 months after the program ended. The information they shared tells an important story about Balit Ngulu's achievements and illustrates what elements make a legal service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people valuable. The data may not, however, be representative of all cases or views. There may also be aspects of the program's strengths and challenges that Nous is unaware of due to the relatively limited sample size.

Balit Ngulu client stories

Nous spoke to four Balit Ngulu clients who shared their stories about their experience with Balit Ngulu and what they liked, or did not like, about the legal and case support they received. Although the participants required assistance with different types of matter, each of our evaluation participants described a similar journey through Balit Ngulu (illustrated in Figure 9).

Figure 9 | Balit Ngulu through the eyes of participants



The evaluation participants identified four features they found most valuable about Balit Ngulu. (To protect participants' identities, we have used the gender-neutral pronoun 'they' to report their feedback.)

Being supported by experienced staff they could trust

The evaluation participants said that it was extremely important to them that they had felt comfortable with, and trusted, Balit Ngulu youth support officers and lawyers. These young people had previously accessed other services and had contacts with lawyers, and they took note of Balit Ngulu staff members' attitudes towards them. The participants said they couldn't have trusted someone at Balit Ngulu who didn't seem experienced or comfortable working with young people who looked, spoke and acted like they did.

"I felt that I could really talk to them about the things that were troubling me. They just seemed like you could really trust them, and they could actually help. There are some [others] that aren't really that trustworthy."

– Balit Ngulu client

For these young people, it was important to have staff who were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, but not crucial. Working with a staff member from community helped create a sense of connection and familiarity. As one young person said: "they knew what I was going through, they actually understood what was going on and how I felt". Participants said that what mattered the most was that the people who supported them "don't judge Aboriginal people like other people do" and that staff really cared about them, their situation and how they felt. They liked that the Balit Ngulu staff listened to them and "didn't just pass off" what they said, and that staff members kept conversations confidential (where confidentiality was appropriate).

The trust participants felt in the youth support workers, and the care that they felt from them, was reflected in one comment that "even today I feel like I could call them up." One suggestion for improvement was for Balit Ngulu to make their contact with the young people more predictable; a participant said they didn't know when or how often they would be contacted, and it seemed ad hoc.

Being supported to participate in court and manage stress associated with it

The evaluation participants all said that dealing with legal processes and going to court was stressful. Balit Ngulu's support helped them to be accountable and participate actively in legal proceedings, and to gain optimism and agency to re-build their lives. With Balit Ngulu's support they understood better:

- What their circumstances were, and the implications: "help me figure out what I'm getting charged for and why"
- What was expected of them: "be there, be polite and respectful"
- How to participate: "she said maybe I should write a letter and I did, it was pretty good. Gave it to the judge and I went to court and she said it was amazing what I wrote."
- How to keep perspective on the pressure and continue with other aspects of life such as school and work: "[they helped with] my mindset, how I'm feeling and things I can do when I'm not feeling the best"; "they said, the court stuff was only happening that day and it would all be done the next day."

"I've got a kind of fear of Police because I've had some bad experiences with them. Going to the court was a bit depressing, but with [Balit Ngulu] I started enjoying going and it really helped me."

– Balit Ngulu client

"[Court] would have been really stressful, it would have been really hard to cope. I don't think I could have done it without them."

– Balit Ngulu client

Balit Ngulu's support was especially important for evaluation participants who had previously felt poorly advised, supported or involved by lawyers they had worked with, and for whom court processes occurred over a long period of time. One participant reported repeatedly poor prior experiences: "she kept saying oh you're going to get locked up anyway" and "he wouldn't give me a word to say, he just made the decisions practically."

It was unclear from these participants what distinct roles Balit Ngulu lawyers and youth support officers had played in helping them deal with court; with time elapsed since their engagement with the service, it was difficult for them to remember who had done

what. However, the feedback illustrates just how stressful and frustrating a legal process can be for a young person, and the type and attitude of support they value from people who work with them.

Having their family recognised and supported too

Several of the evaluation participants said they appreciated the family-orientated and culturally-appropriate ways in which Balit Ngulu staff conducted themselves. For example, one young person said it was important it was to them that Balit Ngulu staff asked them if they had a mum, dad, nan, pop or other family member whom they would like to be involved in some way. This participant noted that other legal services didn't generally ask about their family situation with the same respect, politeness or patience. For example, one participant said that a lawyer from another service demanded that their parent be present.

"Having a parent around was very helpful because if I felt I didn't want to go through with [court], I could have a break and talk to mum about it."

– Balit Ngulu client

"[The lawyer] was more of a friend than a lawyer. She helped our whole family actually... at the time I was having some outbursts and she helped with that."

– Balit Ngulu client

The participants reported that their family members had been invited to attend the initial meeting with Balit Ngulu, and the youth support officer kept clients' parents or key family members involved during their case, with the client's consent. The participants said they appreciated Balit Ngulu's commitment to involving their family, with their consent, because it brought together everyone who could support them. It meant the young people knew they had multiple people to lean on when managing court and dealing with life. It also reflected the important role that some of the young people's parents and family members already played in encouraging them to

participate in Balit Ngulu and the court proceedings. For example, one young person said, "my mum said [Balit Ngulu] helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids like me, it's a good experience and would help me."

Being connected to community and other services

Balit Ngulu staff were well-connected to other organisations, services and support programs, and the evaluation participants said the youth support officers encouraged them to participate. The young people appreciated the opportunity both to connect with other people and to manage practical aspects of life.

One young person shared their experience of attending a cultural group. The youth support officer picked them up and joined the session so that they felt comfortable and could make connections. This participant said they would not have tried the group without support because they didn't know about it and would have felt "too shame and embarrassed" to go alone. They found the activities "relaxing and calming".

"I wouldn't change anything honestly. They ask what people need in life; if I had a job, offered to help me get a job, even though I already had one. [It] was good that they asked, because others might not have one and need that support."

– Balit Ngulu client

The participants' stories also pointed to several lessons about how to offer the best activities:

- *Set clear expectations about what clients can ask for or expect.* One young person appreciated receiving practical help like accessing Centrelink and applying for a bank card, but they hadn't expected this support. They had asked for help to obtain a driver's license, but the youth support officer did not follow through and this confused the young person.
- *Ensure services are accessible.* A young person enjoyed being connected to a cultural group but it would meet a long way from where they lived and so they couldn't keep attending after the program ended.
- *Ensure the services are useful to the participants.* While participants appreciated enjoyable activities that connected them to culture (e.g. craft), one said they would have liked more practical support.

- *Connect young people with each other.* One participant said they would have liked to be introduced to other Koorie young people, so they had “someone who actually knows, who has gone through something similar. Kind of connect. Share all of the things that helped you.”

Perspectives from former Balit Ngulu staff and associates

Nous also spoke to three people who had been Balit Ngulu or VALS staff, and five people working in the justice system who had worked with, or had visibility of, Balit Ngulu. All interviewees strongly supported Balit Ngulu’s dual-focus service model, identifying similar client benefits as had the young people we interviewed. While identifying the ability to recruit and retain experienced staff, and funding constraints, as challenges, the program’s former staff and associates identified six organisational strategies which they believed contributed to the generation of these benefits.

A “one service” approach so clients could “tell their story once”

One associate commented that “community hate repeating their story” and that often people feel compelled to tell their story to every service provider. By bringing together legal and wellbeing assistance in one service, Balit Ngulu only required its clients to start the process of engagement once and it could coordinate a holistic response, driven by the client’s consent and willingness to engage. Additionally, former Balit Ngulu staff members said that having stronger connections with a client’s lawyer meant that the youth support officer better understood the client’s legal circumstances and conditions. In turn they felt better equipped to advise and support the client: “if you don’t know you can’t work out their patterns.”

Leadership by Aboriginal people to help clients feel safe, connected and accountable

Former staff members believed that having the service led, and key positions staffed by, Aboriginal people was an important signal to clients of self-determination and cultural safety. It also facilitated practical assistance. Former staff members said that being connected to community and national networks was very important: Koorie staff used their knowledge of Victorian Aboriginal communities and families, and contacts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in other states, to help connect clients to their kin and mob, a step seen as essential to strengthen their sense of self and belonging. Additionally, staff members believed that some difficult-to-engage clients were likely to respect and respond to someone from community: “when I said to him ‘I think you know [the youth support officer], next time he will come with you to court and we’re going to have a big chat about what’s going on’...the boy engaged with me better and looked forward to [the youth support officer’s] visit”.

Provision of independent legal advice in the interests of the child or young person

As discussed, Balit Ngulu was established separately from VALS’ organisational structures to overcome a conflict of interest that arose if VALS also represented the child or young person’s family member. Stakeholders believed this separation not only gave comfort to clients but served as a reminder, in the justice system, that it is fundamentally important that young people receive excellent legal representation. Some stakeholders noted that the organisational identity of staff could have been communicated more explicitly so that their independence from VALS was clear, as some staff had worked in both services.

Preparing clients for legal proceedings and being ‘with them’ rather than acting ‘for them’

Justice system stakeholders we interviewed commented on how stressful it is for a young person to attend court: “some of them are physically sick... I worry about what they expect”. In many cases, Balit Ngulu represented clients in the Children’s Koori Court in North-West Melbourne and Goulbourn Valley. The court is “an alternative way of administering sentences so that court processes are more culturally accessible as well as acceptable and comprehensible to the Indigenous (Koori) community”.

The court’s emphasis on an informal atmosphere and reducing perceptions of intimidation and cultural alienation was consistent with Balit Ngulu’s own efforts to provide culturally safe services. This alignment meant Balit Ngulu could work closely with court staff and other community services committed to:

... ensuring greater participation of the Aboriginal community in the sentencing process... through the role to be played in that process by the Aboriginal elder or respected person and others so as to assist in achieving more culturally appropriate sentences for young Aboriginal people.³⁰

Interviewees who had worked in association with Balit Ngulu noted that, even with the cultural safety and extra supports in the Children's Koorie Court, it can be frightening and embarrassing for a young person to attend court and have elders and strangers talk about the most private parts of their life. These interviewees believed Balit Ngulu played a crucial role in ensuring young people had someone with them through the process, rather than having someone who acted for them.

Being 'with' the client, 'in their corner', did not mean agreeing with the client or absolving them of their responsibility. Rather, it meant accompanying them and ensuring they had support beyond what statutory court staff (for example, Koori Court officers) can provide. Accompaniment included:

- *Preparing clients for court* by: explaining the process and the people who would be involved; finding out and documenting, in a personalised client folder, the client's family tree, map of their Country, history and a summary of cultural services Balit Ngulu could link them to; and physically going with them to court – Balit Ngulu youth support officers often collected and took clients to court.
- *Supporting the client's voice in court* by helping clients prepare to explain to the elders and the judge who their family and kin were – the opening question from elders in the Koorie Children's Court – and how they wanted to conduct their lives. One justice sector stakeholder said that "If [a young person] come to court and doesn't feel comfortable they say nothing, that is not an effective court process. Balit Ngulu is a chance [for young people] to change direction by making them feel heard, seen, giving them agency and voice; for a long time they've been on a road where they felt lost."
- *Advocating effectively for clients*, with the commitment to consistent legal representation being very important and seen as an acknowledgement that children and young people have needs that are distinct from adults' needs. Balit Ngulu lawyers were reported to have demonstrated to the judges and elders that they had built rapport with the young person, genuinely knew their history and could share how the young person might be getting help or working to do better. Sharing this knowledge gave court staff a better understanding of the client's particular circumstances and allowed them to make better-informed decisions.

"[The court process] is most effective when a child has a voice in the process, where they feel comfortable speaking and having a say in their future. This is fundamental to their right in having a fair hearing."

– Justice stakeholder

A Balit Ngulu staff member gave an example of the benefit of this approach: in the case of a child placed in foster care with a family they did not know, and who had poor mental health and school engagement, the Balit Ngulu lawyer's advocacy saw a decision to place the child with an aunt. "The child began to thrive, not just survive." Conversely, a justice stakeholder highlighted the risks of inadequate representation: a client from a previous case had attended court with different legal representation each time, with lawyers giving generic introductions that didn't accurately reflect the client's life or assist the client or court to understand their needs and options.

"I like to think of [the personalised folder] as a map for [the client's] journey ahead."

– Balit Ngulu staff

Former Balit Ngulu staff were proud of the introduction of the personalised client planning folders. They believed the preparation of the folders, by the youth support officer working with the client, gave each client a sense of pride and purpose which helped make the court experience less scary. Justice sector stakeholders also praised the folders as an important innovation that helped hearings run effectively: they believed that the cultures helped elders and court

³⁰ Judicial College of Victoria, Children's Court Bench Book, Judicial College of Victoria, Melbourne, 2017.

staff know who the clients were and how to work with them; they also helped clients felt engaged and empowered in court, in a culturally appropriate way.

A strengths-based case management approach to help clients take responsibility

The youth support officers' role was seen by associated stakeholders as being to "walk through doors that had been shut [in the young people's] faces". By helping clients reengage with family, school, sport and community, the support officers showed clients what youth participation looks like, without the young person necessarily being explicitly aware of that.

Balit Ngulu staff said they deliberately expressed confidence in clients' ability to take responsibility for their actions and circumstances now, and to achieve a future they wanted. For example:

"We yarned with them about what they wanted, where did they see themselves going... [We said] 'we'll help you engage in what you want to do, support your education, what else can we do to help you stop reoffending.' You can tell they're thinking about it, taking in what you're saying; they know their rights from wrongs... [So we said to clients] 'we're pretty much saying you can be whatever you want to be but if you continue down this path, you'll have obstacles in your way. We want you to stop now... not having a criminal record. If you want to be a builder, you start now'... So we were reinforcing that strength."

Staff members would have liked to back their work with other activities, such as mentoring by elders or other community members who had had similar challenges and had turned their lives around. They said resources had constrained Balit Ngulu's ability to set up and fund activities which could keep clients engaged and act as a mechanism for ongoing support if required.

Employment of skilled and dedicated staff

All interviewees emphasised, and attributed a large portion of Balit Ngulu's success, to the capability and actions of its staff:

- Positive feedback about Balit Ngulu's lawyers highlighted their specialist expertise representing children and young people and their commitment to seeing their clients through proceedings.
- Positive feedback about the youth support officers highlighted their connection to community, their availability to liaise with court staff and community organisations, and the close contact they maintained with their clients.

"The commitment of lawyers in that program is unrivalled... No other organisation maintains that consistency of approach. Even with limited resources they never came unprepared. They did a great service for their clients."

– Justice stakeholder

An example was given of a teenaged boy who, after committing his first offence, received a diversion order. He was at risk of losing this opportunity to avoid court after failing to meet court-directed conditions. He wasn't answering phone calls and the next step was a warrant from the court. Balit Ngulu stepped in and "got the client to court and back on track." They helped him enrol in TAFE, counselling and a social group.³¹

Justice stakeholders said they saw this facilitation role as a particular strength of Balit Ngulu staff. Court staff knew that if they were worried about a young person failing to complete court-directed conditions, or were unsure if they were going to show up for court the next day, they could send a message to Balit Ngulu support officers "at any time of the day or night and the next day they would know where the young person is and the young person would show up to court." Several interviewees reflected they had only experienced similar commitment and capability from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations who were deeply connected with community.

³¹ This example was described to Nous. It was also published in Leah Tolley, August 2018, 'Vulnerable children need advocates', *Law Institute Journal*, p15.

"You really do need experienced, tough lawyers. It was really hard to find staff... there was a lack of people with the right legal experience, personality and personal skills."

– *Balit Ngulu staff*

Interviewees identified Balit Ngulu's professional expertise, cultural knowledge and experience working with young Koorie clients as important. Additionally, staff needed to be resilient, have good communication skills and not be fazed by levels of abuse and aggression they might witness.

Several interviewees commented that there had been challenges recruiting and retaining staff, both those who had the personal skills to work with challenging clients, and those with specialist experience with young people in relevant areas of law. Interviewees commented it is not uncommon to have difficulty engaging lawyers with sufficient expertise and experience, especially in a regional area. Constrained funding was also seen to be a challenge for securing, training, supporting and retaining suitable staff.

4 Lessons and opportunities

Balit Ngulu closed in September 2018. There continues to be a real need and strong demand for legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria. The Victorian Government is taking intensified action to address service gaps and reduce young Indigenous people's contact with Victoria's justice system and child protection. Its renewed commitment to advance outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including young people, is grounded in the recognition of self-determination as a guiding principle.

Balit Ngulu's dual-focus service model offers, consistent with relevant literature, a framework to shape the design and delivery of legal services that can effectively give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people "strong voices" and help achieve the Victorian Government's justice sector objectives. Ideally, all organisations delivering legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people – public, private and community-based – would deliver services that reflect the principles and practices Balit Ngulu illuminated. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, in particular, have an important role in delivering such services in a justice system that prioritises self-determination.

The importance of achieving financial sustainability for youth legal services cannot be stressed strongly enough, if the goal is to contribute to a substantial and systematic improvement in the outcomes Victoria's justice system delivers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. A key constraint on Balit Ngulu was the lack of a sustainable funding model. For any future service, early and sustained consideration should be given to securing multi-year funding, and collaborative planning with others in the sector should be undertaken.

Koorie children and young people continue to require legal services

In September 2018, after unsuccessful attempts to secure an ongoing funding source, Balit Ngulu closed its doors. The pilot program was recognised and commended by the Law Council of Australia,³² the Law Institute of Victoria,³³ The Koorie Youth Council³⁴ and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.³⁵

There continues to be a real need and strong demand for legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria. While the average daily number of Aboriginal young people in detention in Victoria remains small, the rate of Aboriginal young people in detention on an average day has increased from 12 per 10,000 in 2014 to 22 per 10,000 in 2018. Compared to 2014 figures, in 2018 Aboriginal young people were less likely to be cautioned by police (from 62.4 to 55 per cent) and were more likely to be held in remand (from 27.3 to 55 per cent).³⁶

Many of the experiences and benefits described to Nous by former Balit Ngulu participants are consistent with the findings of *Ngaga-dji* – which translates to 'hear me' in the language of the Wurundjeri people – a report which documents, in their own words, the experiences of 42 children and young people who were in, or had previously, been in youth justice supervision when engaged in 2017. Several justice sector stakeholders Nous interviewed said that since Balit Ngulu finished they have been less confident that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are receiving court preparation, follow-up and holistic support to the degree they did through Balit Ngulu, with implications for their ability to be well-represented, to participate in court, and for their long-term outcomes.

³² Law Council of Australia, [Alternative Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), La Council of Australia Limited, Canberra, 2018.

³³ Law Institute of Victoria (Family Law Section), [LIV calls on government to fund Balit Ngulu](#), Law Institute of Victoria, Melbourne, 2018.

³⁴ Koorie Youth Council (KYC), [Ngaga-Dji \(Hear Me\): Young voices in creating change for justice](#), KYC, 2018.

³⁵ C Agius, Victorian [Aboriginal Legal Service shuts down youth service](#), Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018.

³⁶ State Government of Victoria, [Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2019](#), Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2019.

The Victorian Government recognises self-determination and is focused on outcomes

The contemporary policy environment holds promising signs that Victoria is taking intensified action to address service gaps and reduce young Indigenous people's contact with Victoria's justice system and child protection. In 2017, the Victorian Government accepted, or accepted in principle the 126 recommendations of the 2016 Youth Justice Review, which included a call to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It announced \$50 million over four years.³⁷

More recently, the Government has acknowledged that culturally-appropriate prevention, early intervention, diversion and support services are critical to address Aboriginal over-representation in criminal justice and help break cycles of offending. It has also promoted the role of community-based and community-led services in connecting Aboriginal Victorians to culture and promoting positive outcomes.³⁸ Work underway in accordance with this acknowledgement includes:

- *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4* which supports major initiatives intended to ensure Aboriginal people can access an equitable justice system³⁹
- A Koori Youth Justice Taskforce led by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- An Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, developed with Aboriginal people, including young people⁴⁰
- The Maggolee Mang Program to help young people connect to culture and community in custody.⁴¹

The context for these major efforts in the justice sector to advance the outcomes, self-determination and connectedness of young people is the overall renewal of the Victorian Government's approach for working with Aboriginal Victorians, organisations and the wider community. Building on prior legislation,⁴² self-determination has been made the guiding principle for that renewed approach to driving action and improving outcomes for, and with, Aboriginal Victorians. The commitment to enabling self-determination is set out in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 (VAAF), supported by the Self-Determination Reform Framework for the public service.

Government action to enable self-determination acknowledges that Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities – a view long-shared by Aboriginal people, who also consider that the process of furthering self-determination, including in justice, must be led by Aboriginal people.⁴³

Balit Ngulu demonstrated what matters in youth legal services that improve outcomes

The provision of high-quality legal services to children and young people is critical to meet Victoria's obligations under the *Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4* and to drive the achievement of the VAAF's objectives in its 'Justice and Safety' and 'Children, Family and Home' focus areas.⁴⁴ Balit Ngulu's work preceded the announcement of these objectives. Its high-order purpose – to reduce over-representation

³⁷ P Armytage, J Ogloff, *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2017.

³⁸ Victoria Legal Aid, *Annual Report 2016-17*, VLA, Melbourne, 2017; State Government of Victoria, *Building A Modern Youth Justice System*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2017.

³⁹ State Government of Victoria, *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2019*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2019.

⁴⁰ A partnership between the Victorian Government and Aboriginal Community, *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4*, Victorian Government, Victoria, 2018.

⁴¹ State Government of Victoria, *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2019*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2019.

⁴² State Government of Victoria, *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2019*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2019.

⁴³ For example, Section 12 of the Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 recognises the principle of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination in decisions that concern Aboriginal children and families.

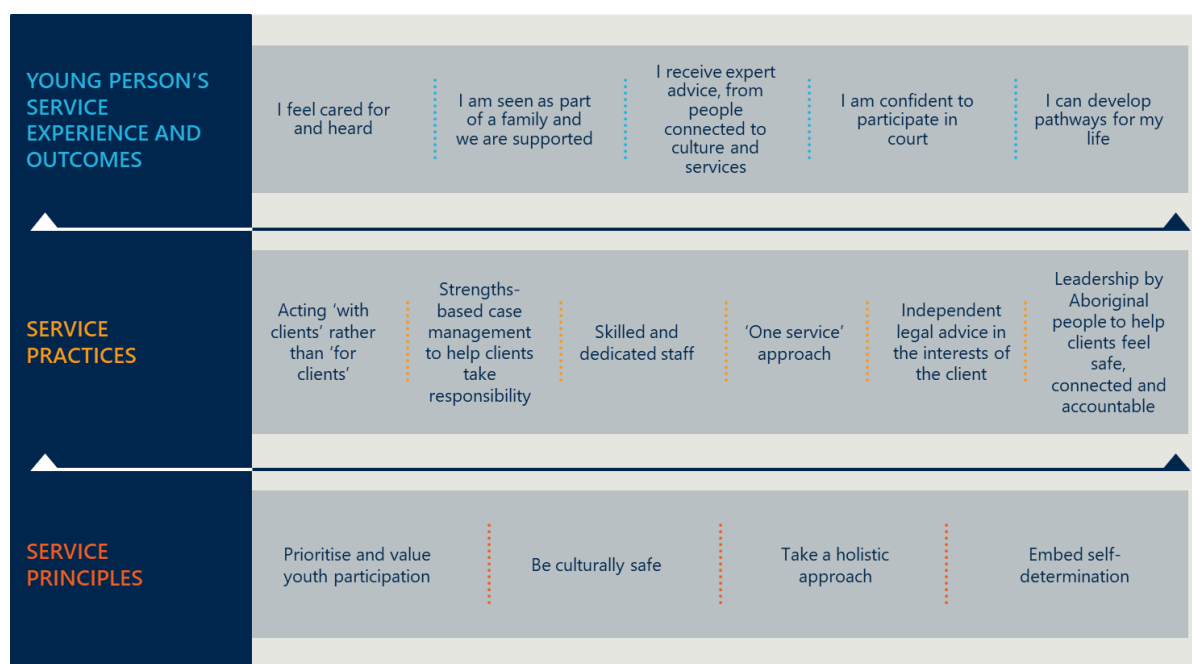
⁴⁴ The Aboriginal Justice Caucus states that Aboriginal self-determination is a matter for Aboriginal people. A partnership between the Victorian Government and Aboriginal Community, *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4*, Victorian Government, Victoria, 2018.

⁴⁵ Through the 'Justice and Safety' the Government aims to eliminate Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system while ensuring Aboriginal Victorians are safe and connected and have access to safe and effective justice services. Through 'Children, Family and Home' it aims to ensure Aboriginal children are raised by Aboriginal families. State Government of Victoria, *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, 2019.

in the justice system and help create conditions in which Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria are empowered and can thrive – is consistent with Victoria’s renewed agenda.

In this report Nous has described Balit Ngulu’s dual-focus model for independent, specialist and holistic legal services, and how that service model was implemented, with what effect. We have drawn from the feedback received on Balit Ngulu, as well as from the literature referenced in this report, to propose a framework (Figure 10) that can shape the design and delivery of legal services so that they can effectively give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people “strong voices”.

Figure 10 | Framework for legal services that give Indigenous children and young people ‘strong voices’



Legal services for young people require Aboriginal leadership and sustained resourcing

Ideally, all organisations involved in the delivery of legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Victoria – public, private and community-based – would deliver services that reflected the principles and practices expressed in the framework. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOS) are an important part of a justice system which puts self-determination at the centre of its priorities, policies and services for the Koorie community. They are led by Aboriginal people and facilitate genuine input and control over the services delivered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In youth justice and child protection, ACCOs have an important role to play in responding quickly to community needs, connecting young people to family and culture, making justice proceedings culturally safe and helping children and young people keep sight of their longer-term future.

Organisations involved in the delivery of legal services that reflect the principles, practices and outcomes in the framework requires adequate resources. Skilled and experienced staff, and funding, are required to deliver legal and case management services to children and young people, undertake community outreach and coordinate with others in the sector. Effective service delivery is underpinned by corporate functions such as staff recruitment, training and management, data collection, financial management and reporting. Unfortunately, while VALS’ funding created a unique opportunity to pilot an innovative service approach, insufficient preparation and sector engagement meant Balit Ngulu was unable to secure long-term funding and the service closed after a year.

For any future service, early and sustained consideration should be given to securing multi-year funding, and collaborative planning with others in the sector should be undertaken, so that the service has a clear

role and resourcing and partnerships it can draw on to drive service success. Noting there are funding constraints in the justice sector, including for public and community legal aid, sources might include the Victorian Government, Commonwealth Government and grants from sources such as Victoria Legal Aid⁴⁵ and the Integrated Services Fund administered by the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

The importance of achieving financial sustainability for youth legal services cannot be stressed strongly enough, if the goal is to contribute to a substantial and systematic improvement in the outcomes Victoria's justice system delivers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

⁴⁵ VLA is currently conducting a [Community Legal Services Program Reform Project](#) to create a more streamlined, transparent and accountable funding framework for how it administers funding to Victorian community legal centres (CLCs).

Appendix A Program logic

By understanding how a program is intended or expected to work, evaluators can ask systematically what happened compared to what we expected to happen, and why. A **theory of change** is a hypothesis about the central mechanisms by which a certain change will come about for individuals and organisations involved in the project. A **theory of action** identifies what inputs and activities will be used to effect the desired change for each stakeholder group. Figure 11 sets out a **program logic model** which expresses Nous' understanding of Balit Ngulu's theory of change and action.

Figure 11 | Balit Ngulu program logic



Appendix B Evaluation approach

In mid-2019, VALS, in collaboration with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), engaged Nous Group (Nous) to conduct an evaluation of Balit Ngulu. VALS commissioned the evaluation because it wanted to understand and document the benefits that Balit Ngulu may have had for its clients – from clients’ perspectives – and identify, through facilitated reflection and assessment, what matters for the delivery of effective, culturally-safe legal services and holistic support for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. VALS also intended that government and non-government services draw on the findings to inform funding decisions and the design of future legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The report presents the findings and recommendations of the summative evaluation of Balit Ngulu that VALS commissioned from Nous and that was conducted in late 2019-early 2020. Summative evaluations seek to identify and attribute the impact of a program on its participants and the community. Two overall research questions guided the enquiry:

- What contribution did the Balit Ngulu legal service make to improving outcomes for Aboriginal young people in contact with the justice and child protection systems in Victoria?
- What are the lessons for future policies and programs aimed at improving the provision of legal services to Aboriginal young people?

More detailed evaluation questions, which we used to develop interview guides and structure the report, are provided at Nous had originally planned to more comprehensively review Balit Ngulu’s reach, quality and outcomes. Due to the limitations in the data, as described, our enquiry focused on the evaluation questions shown at Table 3.

Evaluation process

The evaluation was completed in three stages:

1. Preparation – Nous met VALS to agree on the project scope, approach and governance. From this meeting Nous prepared an ethics application for JHREC, developed an evaluation plan and collected additional data from VALS regarding Balit Ngulu’s program design and theory of change.
2. Consultation – Nous conducted 13 interviews with program participants and other key stakeholders. See Table 2 for a full list of consultations.
3. Analysis and Reporting – Nous synthesised the data provided by Nous and collected during the consultations to develop a journey map, participant archetypes and the draft report. Nous tested the evaluation findings with VALS and submitted a final version in December.

Ethical considerations

In September 2019 Nous submitted an ethics application to the Justice Human Research Ethics Committee (JHREC). Nous received full approval for the evaluation, including approval to interview former Balit Ngulu participants, staff and other actors in the justice sector who had worked with, or had visibility of, Balit Ngulu. We conducted the research in accordance with ethical standards and in the spirit of NHMRC’s guidelines for ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. These guidelines seek first and foremost to ensure that research is safe, respectful, responsible, high quality and of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. For each interview we received the interviewee’s consent and had distress protocols in place.

Data collection and analysis

We collected primary data through interviews with program participants and other key stakeholders. Nous developed an interview guide for each stakeholder group. In line with the research questions and evaluation questions, these interviews explored the provision, outcomes and overall impact of Balit Ngulu, as well as possible areas for improvement for future services. Table 2 lists the stakeholders consulted.

Table 2 | List of stakeholders consulted

Stakeholder group	Number of stakeholders consulted	Stakeholder
Balit Ngulu clients	4	<i>Not disclosed publicly</i>
Balit Ngulu/VALS staff	3	Nerita Waight, CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services
		Emily Lovett, ex-Client Service Officer, Balit Ngulu
		Leah Tolley, ex-Practice Manager, Balit Ngulu
Justice sector actors	5	Ashley Morris, Manager Koori Services and Programs, Children's Court of Victoria
		Judge Amanda Chambers, President, Children's Court of Victoria
		Magistrate Jennifer Bowles, Supervising Magistrate, Children's Koori Courts
		Nicole Rich, Executive Director Family, Youth and Children's Law, Victoria Legal Aid
		Dan Nicholson, Executive Director Criminal Law, Victoria Legal Aid
Other stakeholders	1	Indi Clarke, Executive Officer, Koorie Youth Council

In the report, we have indicated the weight of a particular view or perspective as follows:

- 'one stakeholder' – one stakeholder shared this view
- 'several/some' – two-three stakeholders shared this view
- 'many' – more than three stakeholders shared this view
- 'most/the majority' – almost all stakeholders shared the view
- 'all' – all stakeholders interviewed.

In addition to interviews with key stakeholders, Nous analysed documents and de-identified secondary data provided by VALS, including client and service data and the numbers and rates of program activities. This program information helped Nous gain a complete picture of the rationale for Balit Ngulu, its design and the reach of the service to young people.

Additionally, we conducted a literature review to put Balit Ngulu in a wider context. We reviewed statistical data on the contact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with Victoria's justice and child protection systems. We also sought to understand common principles and evidence for the design and delivery of effective services for Indigenous peoples.

Nous used thematic analysis as the primary technique to extract key insights and messages from all the data available. We used our evaluation questions to review notes from the interviews and identify the issues raised as well as common themes arising across interviews within and between stakeholder groups. We triangulated what we heard from interviewees against the program documents and secondary data provided by VALS.

Data limitations

The analysis in this report should be read while keeping the following limitations in mind:

- The evaluation was conducted more than 12 months after the program finished. This means:
 - It was difficult to secure as many interview participants as originally anticipated. Nous received ethics approval to interview up to 10 former clients of Balit Ngulu; 4 consented to participate. Additionally, not all former staff members or other actors in the justice system who had worked with Balit Ngulu could be reached.
 - Program participants and other key stakeholders reported that they could not fully remember their experiences relating to the program.
- Balit Ngulu collected limited quantitative data about program participants.
 - It did not collect baseline data, i.e. on the situation and outcomes of program participants before Balit Ngulu started delivering services to them, so there is no quantitative or consistently described basis for judging improvement in a client's outcomes.
 - It collected data on clients' age, location and case type and this data was given to Nous. This data provides a view of program reach (i.e. how many clients and what services they received).
 - It did not collect data on clients' legal outcomes or pathways recommended by Balit Ngulu.
 - Balit Ngulu/VALS was unable to collect follow-up data about clients' experiences after they left Balit Ngulu, due to the discontinuation of the service.

These limitations mean that Nous cannot give a comprehensive or definitive view of the program quality and client outcomes achieved by Balit Ngulu. We may not have heard the full diversity of perspectives on the program's strengths and weaknesses, and important aspects of the program may not have been reported, or were only partially described, to us. We have not been able to validate the perspectives as strongly as we would have liked. Nor can we exclude the possibility that other services or things happening in young people's lives also affected the experiences and outcomes that participants reported.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Nous believes that the evaluation report is relevant and useful as an illustrative evaluation, both for telling Balit Ngulu's story and for informing the design of future services. The people we interviewed were generous in sharing their experiences and opinions. Their stories and views help bring to life – backed up by existing evidence in the literature – not only what mattered to them in Balit Ngulu, but what matters to ensure Koorie young people have access to high-quality, holistic legal services in future.

Nous had originally planned to more comprehensively review Balit Ngulu's reach, quality and outcomes. Due to the limitations in the data, as described, our enquiry focused on the evaluation questions shown overleaf.

Table 3 | Key lines of enquiry

KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY	EVALUATION QUESTIONS	PROJECT QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE					
			Literature review	Primary data from VALS	Interview with VALS CEO	Interviews with former	Interviews with program	Interviews with former
Purpose	What need did Balit Ngulu seek to fulfil?	What was the youth justice and child protection landscape in Victoria prior to Balit Ngulu?	✓		✓			
		What gaps in the youth justice and child protection system did Balit Ngulu seek to address?			✓			
		What outcomes did Balit Ngulu seek for Aboriginal children and their communities in Victoria?			✓			
Scope	What did Balit Ngulu do?	What steps did the program take to support Aboriginal children?				✓		
		How many Aboriginal children did the program reach?		✓		✓		
Quality	How well did Balit Ngulu deliver its service?	What did participants and other stakeholders think of program quality? – did participants receive useful and high-quality advice?						✓
		What could we do differently or better next time, in a similar program?			✓	✓	✓	✓
Outcome	What benefits did the program have for Aboriginal children, their communities and the community at large?	What contribution would Aboriginal children say the program has made to their opportunities or experiences?						✓
		How do these benefits compare to what was expected in the program design?			✓	✓	✓	
		Were there any downsides or risks that were not adequately addressed?			✓	✓	✓	✓
		What role did the program play within the broader youth justice and child protection system?			✓		✓	✓
		What were the benefits (expected and unexpected) of having this specialist service for other youth justice and child protection providers working with young Aboriginal Victorians?				✓	✓	✓
		What happened in the youth justice and child protection system when the program ended?			✓			
		What lessons does this present for what matters to effectively support Indigenous young people, but also young people more broadly, who are involved in juvenile justice and child protection?			✓	✓		
		Based on this experience, what is required of any future program so that it plays the most useful role possible in the youth justice and child protection system, for Indigenous young people and young people more broadly?			✓	✓	✓	✓