



Walking the Talk

What government can learn from
the KJ Model

Prepared for: Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ)
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Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

‘After the Rains’ by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

Executive Summary

Independent reviews have confirmed what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long said: government is failing to deliver on the commitments of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Of 19 targets, only five are on track, and none of the four Priority Reforms have been meaningfully implemented.

The Productivity Commission and the Coalition of Peaks are unequivocal: governments have not shared power, have avoided genuine joint decision-making, have underinvested in the community-controlled sector, and have not reformed the way they work. The gap between rhetoric and action remains wide.

Systemic failings identified by the reviews include:

- Power remains centralised within government
- ‘Co-design’ is largely cosmetic, with little genuine community decision-making
- Programs are siloed, short-term and externally designed
- Evaluation is driven by funder requirements, not community priorities
- Partnerships are compliance-driven, not built on trust or mutual respect

In short: government talks reform, but continues with business as usual, indicating an inability to move away from its traditional methods. Government needs a new strategy to ‘walk the talk’ of the National Agreement and put it into practice.

A different way is possible – and necessary

Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), a Martu organisation in the Western Desert of WA, is a living, proven example of how to work differently. Over nearly two decades, Martu and non-Martu have together developed a model that delivers on priorities set by Martu themselves and achieves outcomes that are both culturally grounded and practically effective.

The KJ Model departs fundamentally from government’s conventional way of working, built instead on three interdependent principles:

- 1. Cultural foundations and methods:** Placing Martu culture at the centre of all work and decision-making
- 2. Community development ethos:** Supporting Martu community development, on their own terms, as the starting point, touchstone and guide to action
- 3. Partnership and relationships:** Martu and non-Martu working together as equals with complementary skills and knowledge

From business as usual to the KJ Model

The diagram below summarises the contrast between government's dominant approach and the KJ Model, showing how the combination of these principles addresses the core areas of failure.



Figure 1: The principles of the KJ Model address each of the criticisms of government's business as usual approach

This diagram highlights the key shifts required:

- **Design:** Co-create in an intercultural space, moving beyond tokenistic consultation to genuine power-sharing
- **Implementation:** Replace siloed, short-term approaches with integrated, place-based strategies grounded in culture
- **Evaluation:** Let communities define success; ensure accountability to them, not just funders
- **Partnerships:** Build long-term, trust-based relationships that empower shared decision-making
- **Governance:** Share power; blend cultural and Western structures so community voices lead

Evidence that it works

The KJ Model works for Martu and non-Martu. Evidence for the effectiveness of the KJ Model draws on years of commissioned reports and extensive consultations with Martu, and is summarised in two perspectives:

- **Martu perspective:** KJ is seen as making a meaningful difference on the issues that matter to Martu. They are highly engaged with the organisation and view it as a vital vehicle for shaping their future in contemporary Australia.

"I'm proud, happy – we can change the future for the better. Without this, we'd be drinking, in lock-up, fighting – KJ have changed a lot of people's lives. This gives us a chance to change our lives. We are now in charge." – *Martu person*

- **Non-Martu perspective:** Evaluators, government agencies, and other partners consistently regard the KJ Model as highly effective, with many agencies willing to adapt their own ways of working to engage with it.

"[Government agencies] need the opportunity to be flexible and to be able to try something different. We should be able to try push the edges a little bit, even if it is still within the same parameters...I feel more confident pushing back on Government because I've seen working with KJ and Martu works" – *Director, People Place and Community, Pilbara Development Commission (2024)*

Lessons for government

While developed in the Martu context, the KJ Model offers powerful lessons for governments seeking to implement the National Agreement's vision, with three caveats:

1. **A new model must share power.** A lack of genuine power-sharing was one of the central criticisms in the Productivity Commission and Coalition of Peaks reviews. Without power sharing, any transformation government undertakes is unlikely to be effective. The KJ Model provides a living example of genuine power sharing arrangements, between Martu and non-Martu people. The principles of the KJ Model cannot be adapted to new contexts without maintaining commitment to sharing power.
2. **Transformation requires holistic change.** The strength of the KJ Model lies in how cultural foundations, community development, and partnership work together as mutually reinforcing principles. Picking out one part, without the others, risks falling back into the fragmented, piecemeal logic of business as usual.
3. **Adaptation is essential.** The KJ Model evolved through Martu and non-Martu working together – it offers powerful lessons for others, but the model must be adapted to each local context. This is central to building genuine partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

This report presents the KJ Model as a real-world example of a new paradigm – one that directly addresses the core criticisms of governments' current methods. As the Coalition of Peaks Review notes:

“The recommendations are provided as a lever for internal reflection, examining current relationships and what they have been built on, and as an invitation to all Parties to challenge themselves to rise to the ambition of the Review and the National Agreement.” – *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap, Coalition of Peaks*

This report is not a prescription, but an invitation. It invites governments, funders and organisations to reflect on their own approaches and to consider how the proven, real-world alternative of the KJ Model can guide a shift to a new paradigm, one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are genuine partners in shaping their futures.

About this report

The report represents the culmination of years of evaluation, reflection and refinement of a model that makes the case for government to make a substantial change in how programs are delivered. The report has the following sections:

- **Section 1: The Failure of Business as Usual (page 7):** Summarises findings from the Productivity Commission and Coalition of the Peaks' reviews of governments' progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, highlighting the persistence of conventional approaches and the need for a paradigm shift
- **Section 2: The KJ Model (page 8):** Describes the history, evolution and current programs of Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), and outlines the three core principles of the KJ Model: cultural foundations and methods, community development ethos, and partnerships and relationships
- **Section 3: Does the KJ Model Work? (page 17)** Presents evidence of the effectiveness of the KJ Model from Martu and non-Martu perspectives, drawing on extensive consultations, commissioned evaluations and case studies
- **Section 4: The Paradigm Shift: (page 22)** Explores the contrast between government's conventional approach and the KJ Model, and identifies key lessons for government in areas such as design, implementation, evaluation, partnership and governance

- **Section 5: Conclusion (page 33):** Summarises the case for government to embrace a new paradigm, and outlines three key understandings that must guide any attempt to adopt or adapt the KJ Model

Readers seeking further detail, supporting evidence and source material are referred to the appendices.

Appendix 1 (page 34) provides a summary of the evidence for the success of the KJ Model, including references to commissioned reports and evaluation findings. **Appendix 2 (page 53)** further details the findings of the Productivity Commission and Coalition of Peaks reviews on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.



1. The Failure of Business as Usual

Government is failing to live up to its own commitment to transform how it works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to deliver meaningful change. While the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and other policies are sound, the track record shows that business as usual prevails in most cases. Government needs to fundamentally shift its approach in order to meet its aspirations, but the evidence suggests that government doesn't know how to do this.

Australian governments have committed to reform how they develop and deliver policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These commitments are articulated in policy documents such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) and WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy dates. Despite repeated commitments to reform, the dominant mode of government engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remains transactional, top-down, and disconnected from local priorities. Policies such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy articulate a vision for change, but in practice, conventional bureaucratic processes still prevail.

The National Agreement reflects an intention to move towards a fundamentally new way of working for governments, grounded in a commitment to genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. It commits Australian governments to four Priority Reforms:

1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making
2. Building the Community-Controlled Sector
3. Transforming Government Organisations
4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

Government is not meeting its aspirations. In February 2024, the Productivity Commission reported that only 5 of the 19 socio-economic targets were on track and that governments were failing to deliver on any of the Priority Reforms. The 2025 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Led Independent Review (the Independent Review) supported these findings, concluding that while the framework for change is fundamentally sound, government actions are not matching these promises. Both reviews concluded that governments have yet to commence the genuine transformative work that is required to meet the aspirations of Closing the Gap. **Business as usual approaches remain dominant. A new model is needed.**

See Appendix 2 for a summary of the National Agreement's Priority Reforms and the Reviews' findings on Government's progress

"It is too easy to find examples of government decisions that contradict commitments in the Agreement, that do not reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's priorities and perspectives and that exacerbate, rather than remedy, disadvantage and discrimination." – Productivity Commission Review of Closing the Gap

These shortcomings are magnified in remote communities, where siloed government structures, underinvestment, and the absence of a coherent long-term strategy perpetuate disengagement and disadvantage. Governments have consistently overlooked the potential of these communities to drive solutions on their own terms.

A different approach is not only possible – it already exists. This report outlines the model of KJ, an Aboriginal organisation whose work demonstrates how governments and communities can achieve genuine, shared decision-making, sustained cultural respect, and measurable outcomes. It offers a tested alternative to the entrenched patterns that continue to hold back Closing the Gap.

2. The KJ Model

Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, or KJ, takes a different approach to government. KJ is a Martu organisation. It has developed a way of working – the 'KJ Model' – based on Martu ways of doing and being. It provides a proven alternative to government's conventional approach identified in the reviews of the National Agreement. This section gives an overview of KJ's history, evolution and current programs and describes the KJ Model.

About Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ)

KJ was founded in 2005 to assist Martu to look after culture and heritage, and to ensure that the ongoing connection that Martu have with country remains strong. Incorporated as a not for profit in 2009 it has significantly broadened its scope to work with Martu to build strong, sustainable communities guided by three core objectives: support Martu to look after culture and country; build a sustainable economy in the Martu communities; and build pathways for young Martu to a healthy future.

The governing body is referred to as the KJ Board and consists of 12 Martu directors and three non-voting advisory directors. In addition, a group of senior cultural advisors (all elders) provide cultural safety and advice. The 12 Martu directors include two each from five Martu communities and two from the Martu diaspora.

KJ delivers work across four interconnected program areas. While each has a distinct focus, they overlap and reinforce one another, rather than operating as isolated areas, reflecting the holistic nature of Martu priorities and the organisation's integrated approach. It should be noted that this listing does not represent the administrative organisation of programs within the company.

Program area	Purpose	Programs
Cultural programs	Passing knowledge between generations strengthens community ties and Martu pride. Cultural programs share this heritage, enhancing appreciation and contributing to Australia's cultural diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to Country • Traditional Ecological & Cultural Knowledge camps • Waterhole Mapping • Oral History Collection • Family Trees • Language • Cultural Data Management
Country programs	Martu Country's vast size and rich biodiversity rank it among the top five wilderness areas worldwide. Country programs manage the conservation of the natural and cultural assets on Martu Country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire program • Threatened Species Management • Feral Animal Management • Junior Ranger Program • Looking After Tourists • Training

Social programs	<p>Martu face modern societal challenges and colonisation impacts. In response, they have developed social programs to work with external agencies while preserving their cultural heritage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Program• Cultural Education Prison Programs• Martu Diversionary Program• Young people on Country• Digital Empowerment Program• Transport Program
Families program	<p>The Families Program is a bicultural early childhood initiative for Martu families, aiming to nurture children to grow into confident Martu adults connected to their heritage and community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teach, learn and be Martu• Early years preparation for school• Leadership & Governance• Talking about Maternal & Child Health



KJ Long Term Strategy

KJ's long-term strategy provides a vision for how Martu will build the foundational steps towards a sustainable future for their people in modern Australia. Each step in the strategy builds on the last, creating a pathway of ongoing growth and development. KJ and Martu have built and entrenched the first three steps through their culture and country programs, and the MLP.

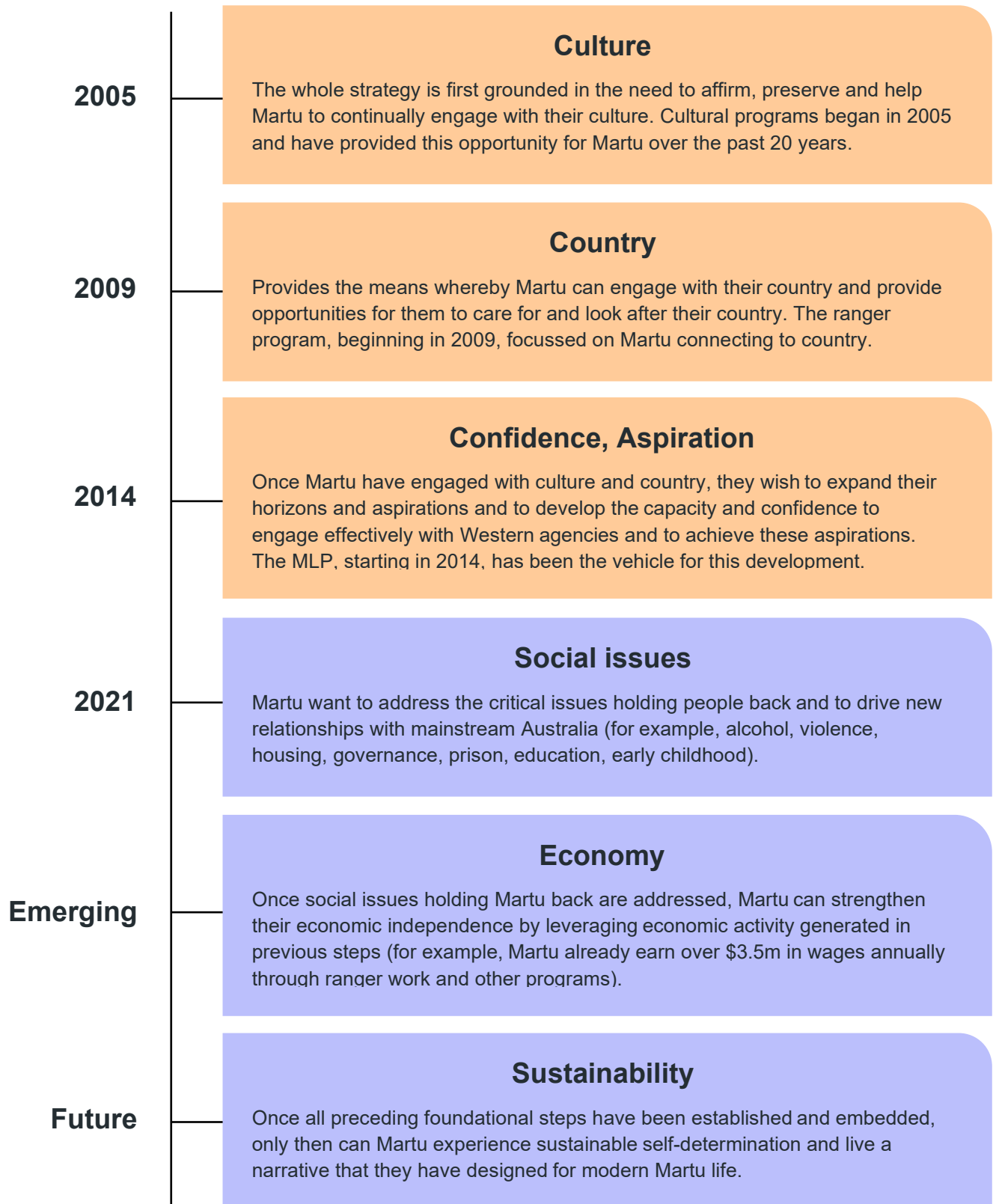


Figure 2: KJ Long Term Strategy

The KJ Model

Over time, KJ has developed a distinctive approach for Martu and non-Martu to work together to meet the aspirations of Martu – the “KJ Model”. The KJ Model can be articulated as encompassing **three principles**:

- **Cultural foundations and methods:** Placing Martu culture at the centre of all work and decision-making
- **Community development ethos:** Supporting Martu community development, on their own terms, as the starting point, touchstone and guide to action
- **Partnership and relationships:** Martu and non-Martu working together as equals with complementary skills and knowledge

These principles are deeply interconnected and work together to create a whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

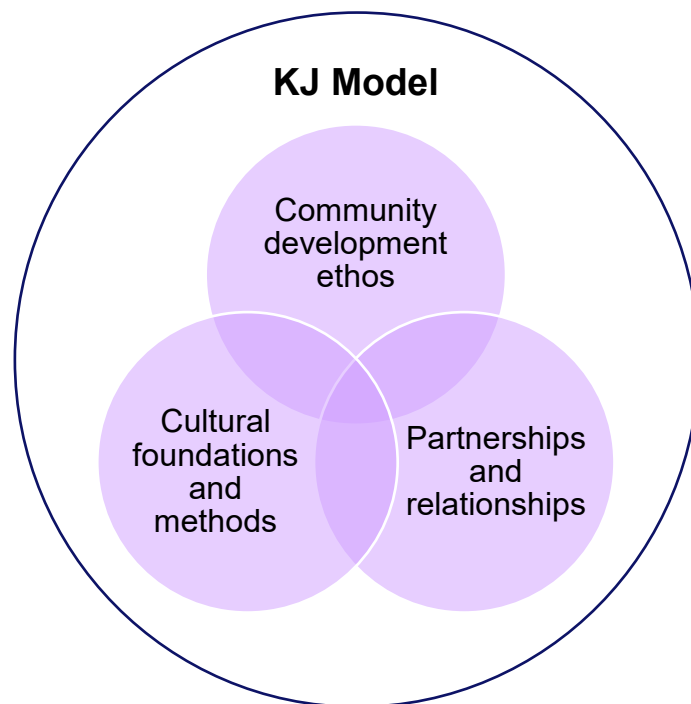


Figure 3: The KJ Model

“It’s a different and transformative way of working...it’s giving Martu an opportunity to be in control of their lives to lead their own destiny through their own culture. It is encouraging Government to think differently and trust that Aboriginal people understand their issues better than anyone else, what’s needed and how to support them to create a better future.” – Officer of Department of Justice (2024)

Principle 1: Cultural foundations and methods

KJ’s mantra is that it is a Martu organisation. That means far more than that the membership is Martu. **KJ sees Martu culture and society as the ground from which the organisation springs and the Martu perspective as properly dominant in shaping what it does and how it works.**

That creates a tension when much of the permanent workforce is non-Martu, requiring a whole style of cross-cultural work, cross-cultural learning and awareness and cultural humility. This tension can be either destructive or creative. To be creative, both Martu and non-Martu must humbly enter an unformed, middle space and create new forms and methods that reflect essential and mutually satisfactory elements of both worlds, learning from each other on the way.

KJ's approach rests on several truths about the Martu context:

- **Martu are Martu.** They neither have nor want a completely Western outlook, aspirations and expectations.
- **Nevertheless, they understand that they are not *pujiman*** (born into a traditional desert life). They live in a modern world in which they must engage with the Western world.
- **KJ's non-Martu staff are not Martu and never will be.** They are 'whitefellas' (a cultural appellation that is not about skin colour, but cultural orientation).

Most significantly, this means that KJ recognises the Martu strength, resilience, understanding, expectation, motivations, priorities and capability derive from their Martu identity, which is rooted in Martu culture. That 'culture' is not simply about artistic forms (singing, dancing, painting) but about the structures and mechanisms of their society, their lore (*jukurrpa*), their relationship to country, their belief systems and their values.

Recognition of the centrality of culture also means that decision-making on fundamental aspects of the organisation's work – scope, emphasis, method, strategy – should be culturally inflected and will not reflect conventional Western views about what 'should' or 'should not' be done.

The diagrams in **Error! Reference source not found.** illustrate this conviction of the centrality of culture to Martu futures. They identify the challenge for Martu living in the modern world, the consequences of Martu cultural identity being undervalued and the potential for Martu social and cultural development to accommodate that modern context.

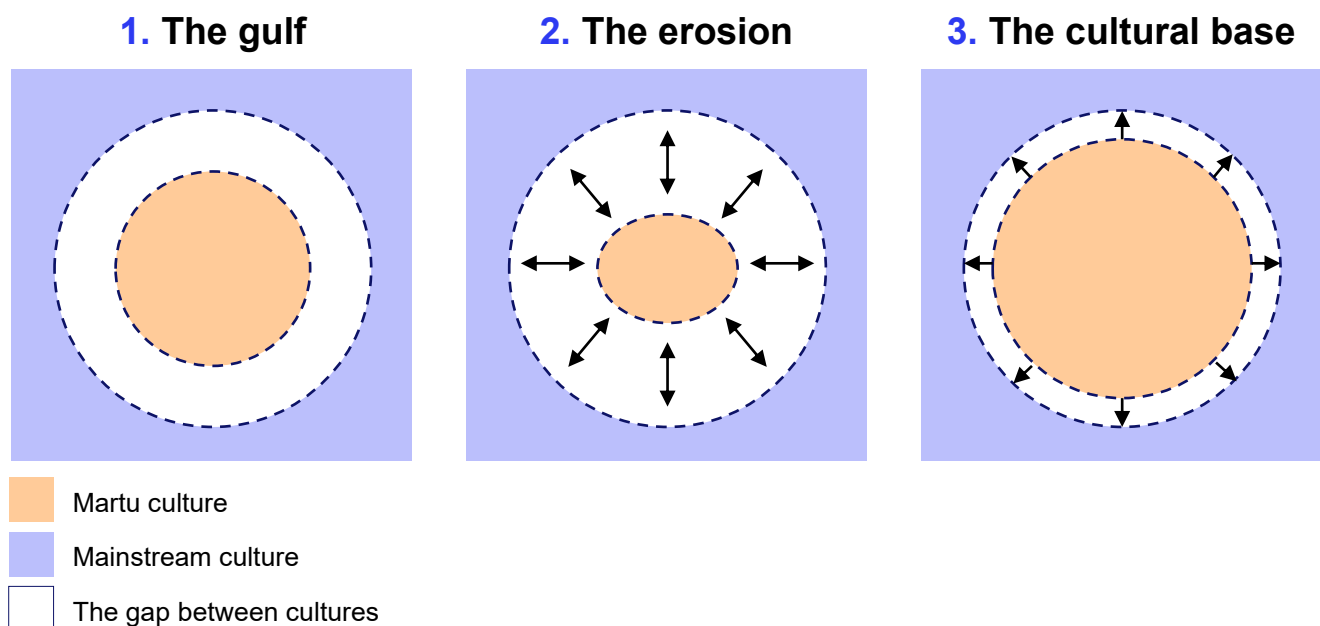


Figure 4: Martu relationship to Mainstream Culture

- 1. The gulf:** The first diagram illustrates the situation of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, where their society remains strong and is markedly different from Western society and where that creates a gulf between the two. In practice, the major response of Western society to this reality has been to seek to invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the institutions, forms and economy of the dominant society. In effect, at best this says, *'We have the right answer, we are willing to allow you to be included in our society, you simply need to come across'*. But Martu continue to choose to live primarily within their own culture and society.
- 2. The erosion:** The second diagram shows what happens when people continue to embrace their Indigenous identity and culture, rather than entering the dominant culture. Unless there are appropriate initiatives, opportunities and resources, they are not equipped with the knowledge and skills to make a space within the dominant society. So, their society is eroded by destructive forces springing from the

collision of cultures. Ultimately, this means that, rather than Martu moving to adopt a Western life, the gulf expands: more people inhabit that gulf and the distinctive Indigenous society shrinks in its knowledge, confidence and capacity to meet challenges.

3. **The cultural base:** The third diagram shows what can happen when activities, programs, developmental aspirations and methods flow out of the distinctive Indigenous culture, expanding the scope of their view of their capacity and place. This illustrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people meeting Western society on their own terms.

These diagrams reflect a set of fundamental convictions within KJ:

- That the Martu worldview, identity and strength flow from traditional cultural knowledge and forms
- That it is not only legitimate, but also wise, for Martu to continue to ground their societal strength and stability in their culture
- And that an organisation that seeks to work with Martu in the modern world must therefore seek ways to build outwards, from Martu culture, society, insights and perspective, to ground environmental, social and economic initiatives that will assist Martu to accommodate Western society.

Culture in practice

To be a Martu organisation, to be culturally grounded, does not mean that KJ absorbs and implements purely Martu social forms – in effect, being a *pujiman* organisation, reflecting a completely traditional society. That is both impossible and inappropriate in the modern context. Rather, KJ takes Martu cultural perspective, priorities, forms and methods seriously and attempts to work with them in ways that then resonate with Martu.

The ranger program is a good example. This program provides engagement with country, fulfilment of Martu cultural obligations, is conducted in accordance with Martu priorities and, as far as possible, methods, but also uses modern tools and harnesses the environmental aspirations of the Western world to do what Martu want to do anyway. There are other, similar examples in KJ's programs, in areas such as governance, early childhood education, the approach to alcohol abuse in Wama Wangka, the Martu strategy to reduce Martu incarceration and youth crime, in the MLP – in every program area. The third diagram above reflects the result of KJ's approach.

Principle 2: Community development ethos

KJ could have adopted many approaches to working with Martu, including a conventional “service delivery” model. Instead KJ determined that, given the Martu context – with their strengths, challenges, distinctiveness and difference from mainstream society – the most appropriate framework in which to proceed is one grounded in ‘community development’.

To KJ, it means that **the organisation's overall mission is to assist Martu to create the kind of society that they want, that they will find fulfilling**. This reflects the conviction expressed in the WA Government's *Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy*, which states as its purpose that *“the Western Australian Government will direct its efforts towards a future in which all Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation”*.

This formulation implies that Aboriginal people have the right to define their futures, their aspirations and their priorities, rather than it being assumed or imposed by Government or of any segment of Western mainstream society. It also aligns with the widely accepted definition of ‘community development’:

“Community development is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective action. Community development considers community members to be experts in their lives and communities, and values community knowledge and wisdom. Community development programs are led by community members at every stage – from deciding on issues to selecting and implementing actions, and evaluation. Community development has an explicit

focus on the redistribution of power to address the causes of inequality and disadvantage.” – *Australian Institute of Family Studies*¹

A community development ethos at KJ is defined by several key characteristics. It requires that the organisation:

- Values the people that KJ are working with (Martu), their knowledge, their skills and capabilities, their culture
- Starts where Martu people are at and proceeds from there, rather than expecting people to come to where the organisation stands
- Does not have a predetermined outcome or future picture in mind, but seeks to divine the community's priorities and aspirations, so that their picture is the reference point and objective
- Seeks to build community strength, confidence, pride and resilience in all its work. This means accepting that as a community builds in confidence and strength, its aspirations will develop, requiring flexibility and the capacity to change and develop
- Believes that the process of development is at least as important as any outcome (as the community's goals will continually move or become refined); the process of development is one of continuing growth of confidence, direction, capability and conviction
- Understands that structures and methods that resonate with the community are most likely to be engaging and effective
- Understands that the non-Martu staff don't know better than Martu and therefore need to be constantly learning, requiring a reflective, learning mindset
- Places Martu people themselves as the primary agents in development and change, rather than non-Martu actors such as KJ staff being the agents and Martu being 'recipients' or 'clients'.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the community development ethos is a departure from a conventional planning model in which concrete, government-set objectives are a prerequisite to development of method and to taking action: 1) Articulate program objectives within government-set parameters; 2) Develop a plan to achieve objectives; 3) Develop milestones and measures; 4) Implement the plan; and 5) Evaluate against the milestones and measures.

This method only works in an environment in which effects are predictable, which is not the case in the Martu environment and, arguably, in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environments. Rather than giving preset objectives a preeminent, guiding role, the community development approach makes the community's development (on its own terms) the starting point, touchstone and guide to action. As discussed later, this creates tensions when external organisations (funders or partners) have conventional expectations.

Principle 3: Partnerships & relationships

Partnership and relationships provide critical underpinnings to the way that KJ works. Distinct yet intertwined, they reflect Martu social values and shape every aspect of the organisation's approach.

For Martu, partnership is a natural way of working, whose social structures do not reflect Western hierarchical structures. While there are strata reflecting seniority in Martu society, the kinship system precludes any person taking on a universally recognised 'leadership' role, with each person's relationship to each other person defined by their kinship relations. Cooperation and consensus have high social value in Martu society. KJ's values reflect this approach.² One of its eight core values is defined as "*Kujungka: Partnership* – Martu and non-Martu working together as equals, with complementary skills and knowledge"

¹ Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), *What is community development?*, AIFS, July 2023, accessed 24 May 2025

² Social Ventures Australia (SVA), *Think Martu. Think Differently. Act Differently. Evaluation of KJ against Martu outcomes*, SVA, June 2021, accessed 7 June 2025. See Appendix 1 for a summary of these values

This recognises that both Martu and non-Martu bring knowledge and understanding of their society to the partnership and that this can be a strength when, in so many aspects of their lives, Martu are required to negotiate their relationship to the Western world.

Partnership does not imply that Martu are not ultimately in charge. In KJ's governance, Martu retain ultimate authority. With Martu directors, cultural advisors and 3 non-voting Advisory Directors provides a metaphor for the dynamic of 'Martu-led partnership'. Non-Martu recognise that the overall endeavour is not for mutual benefit, it is explicitly for Martu benefit, with non-Martu providing skills essential to securing that benefit. So, ultimately, it is Martu who set priorities, who determine the suitability of methods, who have formal control over the direction of the organisation.

Strong partnerships are built on personal relationships. That is a fundamental cultural requirement of the Martu world. In a Western professional service delivery organisation, relationships are often professional, defined by the accepted role of the service delivery agent and the need of that service by the 'client'. In many contexts, that maintains an understood 'arms-length' distance between the provider and the client. This model is foreign to Martu and therefore can be problematic.

In the Martu world the personal relationship comes first and shapes the extent and form of any joint undertaking. Within the Martu kinship system, it is actually impossible to know how one should behave in the presence of another until the correct kinship relationship has been established, at which time each party understands precisely the nature of the relationship, appropriate behaviours, obligations and expectations. Kinship relationships provide the foundation for Martu society.

KJ is not built on adoption of that kinship system, although some non-Martu have a place within it. However, genuine relationships are the foundation of its partnership model. Martu want to know, understand and trust a person before they are open to them and able to work in a flexible and comfortable way. Such relationships deepen understanding, respect, trust and loyalty. They demand a particular style of interaction: attentive, willing, helpful and humble. It is through these deep connections that KJ's partnership principle becomes a living practice.



Case study: The Families Program – A Martu-Led Approach to Community Wellbeing

KJ took over an early childhood program from a mainstream provider in 2019 and transformed it from a conventional early childhood initiative into an integrated and holistic program. While the program retains a focus on early childhood development the recasting of the program was guided by and grounded in Martu vision, priorities and values. This makes the Families program an interesting case study for what the KJ Model looks like in practice.

In transforming the early childhood program, KJ's **community development ethos** manifested in the following ways:

- Martu mothers used the KJ Model to identify shared priorities and take collective action on a range of issues affecting them, and lead decisions on how actions were implemented and evaluated.
- The program evolved to have a broader vision than service delivery by supporting long-term, community-led change further enabling Martu to advocate for culturally safe, respectful services (such as child and maternal health services) and shape solutions on their own terms as there is an acknowledgement that the issues identified by women are deeply interconnected.
- The program has a focus on “increasing opportunities through which Martu can work together to create society that works for them.”³

The Families Program was built on strong **cultural foundations** in several ways, including:

- In response to community concerns about early learning, Martu combined Western and cultural approaches, designing play-based learning activities based in Martu language and values, and running on-Country camps with Elders and Rangers to strengthen identity, connection, and engagement.
- The program was integrated closely with KJ's other programs, supporting cultural activities and education.
- Women actively shaped child development initiatives by contributing a wide range of practical ideas grounded in lived experience, helping to inform and drive culturally relevant strategies.

The Families Program has also strengthened **partnerships and relationships**, including through:

- Leadership within the Families Program was guided by Martu kinship structures and relationships, with Martu taking the lead in shaping decisions and actions with KJ's support.
- Martu mothers in the Families Program worked with service providers to shift conversations away from simplistic analysis of the reasons for lack of engagement with those service providers and toward co-designed, culturally informed approaches.
- A Martu-led health consumer group is being established through the program to improve access to culturally safe, responsive health care.

The Families Program exemplifies how community development grounded in culture, leadership, and respect can transform early childhood programs into holistic, intergenerational initiatives. By listening to Martu voices (particularly women) the program has created new spaces for healing, leadership, and advocacy. It shows what's possible when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered to lead, rather than simply receive, services. The result is a model not only of cultural relevance, but of hope.

³ Dr Ann Ingamells, *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*, May 2025

3. Does the KJ Model work?

The KJ Model works for both Martu and non-Martu. Martu believe that KJ is making a difference on the issues that matter to them and they deeply value KJ as their organisation and their means to shape a future for Martu in contemporary Australia. Non-Martu evaluate KJ as a highly effective, leading organisation and KJ can point to multiple examples where government agencies have been willing to work in this new way with Martu.

This section summarises evidence on the effectiveness of the KJ Model from both Martu and non-Martu perspectives, and shows that government agencies have been willing to work in a model that departs significantly from their conventional way of working.

What it means for the KJ Model to 'work' is very different from these two perspectives:

- From the **Martu perspective**, the KJ Model 'works' if it is helping Martu to achieve the outcomes that Martu want and delivering what Martu value.
- From the **non-Martu perspective**, the KJ Model 'works' if its funded programs are found to be effective and if it enables non-Martu institutions and stakeholders to be more effective in engaging with Martu.

KJ has been highly successful on both fronts. KJ can point to an abundance of evidence of its success against these measures, from extensive consultations and evaluation activities with Martu, and independent reports, studies and evaluations conducted by non-Martu specialists and evaluators.

This is a brief section summarising key findings on KJ's effectiveness – so the report can focus on how the KJ Model provides lessons for how government can make the paradigm shift that it needs to. Detailed analysis of the evidence base on the KJ Model and a list of the source material can be found in Appendix 1.

See Appendix 1 for a detailed analysis of the evidence base on the effectiveness of the KJ Model including a list of the source material used to draw these conclusions.



The Martu perspective

Martu values and perspectives sit at the heart of how KJ evaluates its work, reflecting the organisation's cultural grounding and community development ethos. This includes commissioning independent evaluations and reports that have sought Martu perspectives and KJ conducting additional extensive consultations with Martu across communities in the Western Deserts.

Analysis of the findings from these evaluation activities point to three themes:

1. **Martu deeply value KJ.** Martu believe that KJ is making a significant difference on the outcomes that matter to them, and deeply value KJ's programs and activities as expressions of Martu culture and aspirations. The consultations also found that Martu identify with KJ as a Martu strategy to realise a future for themselves in contemporary Australia.

"It's good because it belongs to all of us Martu, it belongs to all of the people. It is our organisation. It does what we want and need to do. It listens to Martu and grows with us. We try new programs and keep growing. KJ listens to Martu. It comes from Martu." – *Martu person*

2. **Martu are highly engaged in KJ's programs and activities.** The value of an organisation or program can be reflected in the level of engagement from the people it is intended to benefit. KJ consistently achieves high participation across its programs, with Martu showing ongoing enthusiasm not only for involvement in activities but also for contributing to KJ's evaluation processes.
3. **Martu are using KJ as a vehicle to shape their future in contemporary Australia.** The ranger program and Martu Leadership Program are two of KJ's flagship initiatives that have been most influential in providing a vehicle for Martu to shape their futures.

"I'm proud, happy – we can change the future for the better. Without this, we'd be drinking, in lock-up, fighting – KJ have changed a lot of people's lives. This gives us a chance to change our lives. We are now in charge." – *Martu person*

These findings demonstrate that from the Martu perspective, the KJ Model is effective because it is contributing to the outcomes that matter to Martu, Martu are deeply supportive and engaged with the organisation, and Martu view the KJ approach as the vehicle to a better future.

The non-Martu perspective

KJ has also evaluated its programs from the non-Martu perspective, commissioning independent evaluations and reports to assess program performance in achieving the objectives that matter to funders, government and other non-Martu institutions. KJ partners – including the WA Department of Justice and BHP – have also commissioned evaluations of KJ programs.

As part of this study, KJ commissioned independent reports on each of KJ's four programs from external specialists. KJ has also commissioned SVA Consulting to conduct multiple program evaluations and cost-benefit analyses since 2011, providing additional evidence of KJ's overall impact and effectiveness.

These reports point to four conclusions:

1. **KJ's programs are consistently found to be highly effective.** KJ commissioned independent reports from people who have the specialised domain experience, expertise and familiarity with Martu to be able to comment authoritatively on the quality and value of each of KJ's four programs. Each of the reports found that KJ's programs are successful in achieving social value for Martu communities.

"Martu are empowered: they have the confidence, knowledge and social connections to work with each other and whitefellas to shape a new future for Martu in modern Australia" – *Evaluation of the Martu Leadership Program using the SROI methodology (2017), Social Ventures Australia*

“For two decades KJ has been building these multilayered programs, documenting and archiving cultural and historical knowledge and providing a rich tapestry of programs to actively keep culture and language alive through practice. Nevertheless, the true value of the programs may not be fully realised until generations into the future.” – *External report: Value of KJ’s Cultural Programs*

2. **KJ’s programs share distinct characteristics that drive their effectiveness.** The success of KJ’s programs stem from deeply embodying the principles of the KJ Model. Common success factors identified in independent reports include an integrated, community development approach, a commitment to putting Martu at the centre, and genuine intercultural partnerships.
3. The value of the KJ approach to partnership is clear for the non-Martu institutions that interact with Martu communities on a daily basis. Reflections from staff at WA Government Departments, WA Police, the Pilbara Development Commission, and the Aboriginal Legal Service demonstrate the ways in which KJ facilitates genuine partnership between Martu and non-Martu people.

“I’m seeing here a pathway for hope and a pathway for a future, which we’ve got to walk hand in hand with...If we can adapt the elements of traditional Martu law, combine that with the elements of the criminal justice system, and find a meeting point in which they can both work alongside each other, that is an idea that both Martu and Government agencies should pursue...The first part is to sit down and listen, to acknowledge that things can improve and then collectively work in unison.” – *Chris Dawson, then Commissioner of WA Police (2018)*

4. **Individuals and agencies have shown willingness and success in working with Martu in this new paradigm.** Non-Martu stakeholders in the Pilbara have shown a willingness to engage with Martu in a new way, facilitated by KJ. They have developed confidence in this new paradigm and now recognise its value.

“[Government agencies] need the opportunity to be flexible and to be able to try something different. We should be able to try push the edges a little bit, even if it is still within the same parameters...I feel more confident pushing back on Government because I’ve seen working with KJ and Martu works” – *Director, People Place and Community, Pilbara Development Commission (2024)*

“KJ is highly regarded in Government as a trusted partner working in the best interests of Martu and helping to develop the next generation of Martu leaders.” – *Craig Ward, Executive Director, Remote Aboriginal Communities – Emergency Mobilisation Unit, WA Dept of Premier & Cabinet*

These findings demonstrate that from the non-Martu perspective, the KJ Model is effective because external evaluators consistently assess KJ’s programs and approach as effective and high performing, and government agencies have shown an openness to working with Martu in this new paradigm.

Case study: Yiwarra Kuju – A Culturally Led Justice Reform Pilot

KJ was funded by the Department of Justice, through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Royalties for Regions fund, to deliver Yiwarra Kuju – the Martu Diversionary Program. This program is significant because it reflects a real and visible appetite within government to meaningfully collaborate with, and be led by, Aboriginal people in efforts to improve outcomes and address long-standing challenges – in this case, high rates of incarceration. It is grounded in KJ's core values, including the primacy of Martu culture, the development of Martu leadership and the strengthening of Martu capabilities to interact with non-Martu systems.

What is Yiwarra Kuju?

Yiwarra Kuju is a program created and led by Martu people to help reduce the number of Martu going to prison or returning to prison. What makes it special is that it is based on Martu culture and ways of doing things, not on mainstream Western prison programs. Yiwarra Kuju is primarily made up of the following four components:

- **Prison Program:** The program aim is to provide a foundation for reducing reoffending among Martu individuals by providing culturally tailored support, while Martu are in prison. This involves workshops on criminal justice process and cultural education to build aspiration. Martu lead the cultural education workshops and many of the workshops on changing patterns of offending. Below is a quote from Martu delivering the program:
"We can provide them with hope. After a couple of workshops, they already start to get hope. We give them confidence Martu to Martu. They are more confident. They get excited." – Martu delivering Prison Program
- **Wangka Minyirnpa:** Involves discussions by a Martu panel with these offenders, to help them to create a workable plan to avoid offending. The panel then makes recommendations to courts and the Prisoner Review Board. It places Martu at the centre of working with offenders, to try to change or avoid toxic life patterns.
- **Transport:** KJ provides transport for Martu who have left prison to get back to remote communities, and away from Newman where there is a much high risk of coming into contact with alcohol and drugs and reoffending.
- **Transition:** The program provides Martu with employment and hands-on job training aligned with local employment opportunities such as roles in land management, community services, and administration while also helping them build confidence, cultural identity and aspiration. The program also continues to provide cultural education and cultural experiences, such as trips on country, to build stronger cultural identity.

Government doing things differently

The WA Government is beginning to shift how it works with Aboriginal people, recognising that past approaches have not delivered the outcomes communities need. This shift is reflected in the following observation from a Department of Justice officer:

"Aboriginal people are at the front and centre leading the conversation and meetings, as well as the organisation of it, delivery of it, and the follow up after as well. There's a throughcare process and they are heavily involved in the decision making around it" – Officer at Department of Justice (2024)

Both State and Federal Governments now want to support Aboriginal-led solutions instead of making all the

decisions themselves. These aspirations are outlined in key policy documents, including the WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These policy commitments reflect a response to the failures of conventional government practices in effectively supporting Aboriginal people.

Yiwarra Kuju exemplifies how Aboriginal leadership, combined with flexible government support can result in innovative justice solutions grounded in cultural legitimacy and community ownership.

“Martu are delivering services in relation to the criminal justice system. Yet, they are not simply working for government to deliver government designed services. Yiwarra Kuju is their aim. Each service, each program is a thoughtful response to what Martu can see is needed if their vision is to be a reality. They are not professionals trained in human service delivery; they are not recruited as individuals to contribute to a government agency. They are Martu building the Martu world.” – Dr Ann Ingamells, Thematic Analysis Report



4. The paradigm shift

The shift away from business as usual is inherently complex. It is a challenging process that requires deep reflection and a willingness to change. While there is no simple roadmap, the KJ Model offers guidance and a proven alternative.

This section presents the core criticisms of government's conventional approach and contrasts this with the KJ Model as an alternative with powerful lessons for government.

Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders agree: moving beyond business as usual requires a true paradigm shift. This is not a minor adjustment to programs — it is a structural, cultural and relational transformation in how governments work with communities.

“This requires more than just ‘business as usual’ ways of working for governments... It will require deep systemic change, attitudinal shifts and a framework to guide how to both make a start and implement changes.” – *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap, Coalition of Peaks*

“The Commission’s overarching finding is that there has been no systematic approach to determining what strategies need to be implemented to disrupt business-as-usual of governments. **What is needed is a paradigm shift.** Fundamental change is required, with actions based on a clear logic about how they will achieve that change.” – *Productivity Commission Review of Closing the Gap*

The KJ Model offers a **proven, alternative approach** that has worked for Martu and can offer lessons for other contexts. While not “off the shelf”, its principles stand in stark contrast to the current dominant model.

This section uses the five domains in Figure 5 to compare the current government approach with the KJ Model. In summary, government’s business as usual approach can be characterised as follows:

- **Design** of policies and programs is led by government, not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations communities
- **Implementation** and program delivery is narrowly focused on short-term program objectives that treat social and community needs in isolation
- **Evaluation** is primarily accountable to funding, and fails to include or value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and values
- **Partnerships** are approached as a compliance requirement with limited scope, rather than relationships that facilitate shared understanding and collaboration
- **Governance** is centralised within government, with decision making top down and no genuine power sharing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities

In contrast the KJ Model is characterised by the following:

- **Design** of policies and programs is led by communities, inherently place-based, and highly responsive to the vision, aspirations and values of communities
- **Implementation** recognises that programs need to be highly integrated to be effective and mutually reinforcing, and to make sense from a Martu point of view
- **Evaluation** is primarily a mechanism to support accountability to community, and continuous learning and improvement

- **Partnerships** are actively nurtured to build trust and shared purpose, so Martu and non-Martu can work together to meet the goals of Martu
- **Governance** is intercultural, bringing together Western and Martu authority structures to support Martu empowerment

While community-led organisations can draw inspiration from these principles, the greatest barrier lies with government itself. Current funding rules, accountability measures and program structures make it difficult to work in this way. Governments must take the lead in changing their methods, resourcing, and expectations to enable genuine, place-based, community-driven approaches.

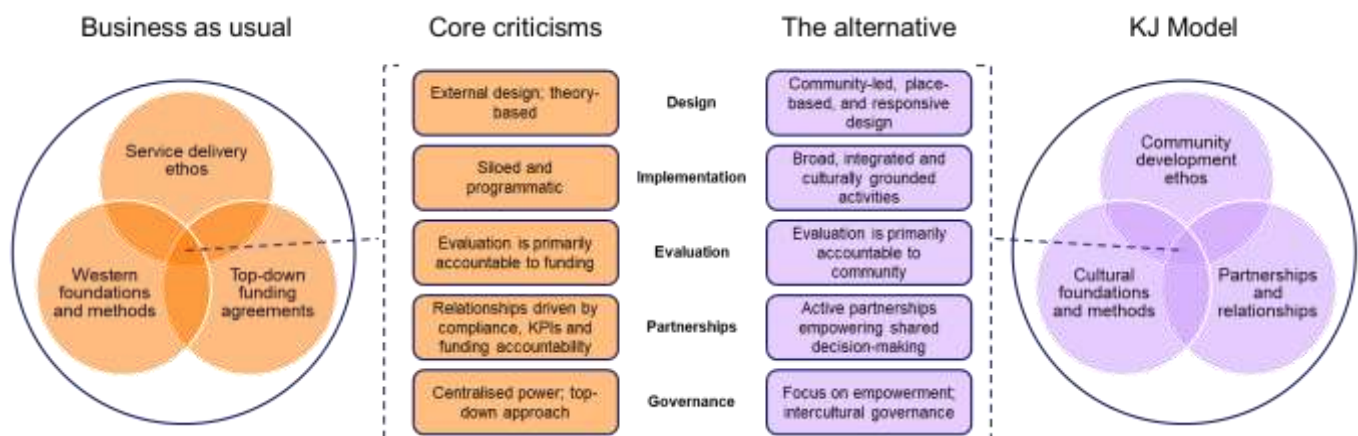


Figure 5: The principles of the KJ Model address each of the criticisms of government's business as usual approach

The KJ Model is not the only effective approach. Many organisations across Australia already demonstrate the value of alternatives despite operating under the constraints of business as usual. But the KJ Model is one clear, proven example for governments prepared to work differently.

Design

Business as usual

The dominant approach to program and policy design for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continues to involve minimal genuine consultation with the very communities it aims to serve. The Productivity Commission review states that policymakers, consultants or academics lead the design process without meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In practice, this results in programs developed for particular peoples, places and contexts being imposed on entirely different communities – communities that were never effectively engaged in the design process.

This detached approach to design reinforces the assumed superiority of Western approaches and continues the damaging and traumatic legacy of health, justice and family interventions rooted deeply in colonial paternalism. It is underpinned by a homogenising mindset — the idea that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share the same needs, priorities and contexts — which ignores the diversity, strengths and capacity for self-determination of individual communities.

Unsurprisingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including Martu, often do not respond well to programs designed in this manner, yet it is government's standard approach.

As the Productivity Commission has shown, there is a clear disconnect between government rhetoric and practice. While 'co-design' is frequently referenced in government circles, it remains largely cosmetic, with little

evidence of genuine power-sharing.⁴ Governments have shown a reluctance to relinquish the power necessary for true co-design and community-led approaches, underpinned by a persistent belief that Western solutions are the most well-evidenced and effective approaches.

This reflects a deeper structural issue that the National Agreement must confront: while there is consensus on the desired path forward for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, implementation continues to falter. As the Coalition of Peaks Independent Review observed:

“Implementation continues to falter due to the unresolved tension between two fundamentally different worldviews” – *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap, Coalition of Peaks*

There remains an implicit expectation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must adapt to existing dominant structures and systems, rather than governments being willing to reimagine their own. Without a fundamental shift in the systems that design and implement programs, externally driven, theory-based design will remain the norm and the resulting programs will fail to recognise community strengths or respond to local needs – and ultimately, will be largely ineffective.

The alternative

Program and policy design must take place in the space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews, where new solutions and partnerships are developed with balanced input from both sides. KJ call this the ‘intercultural space’ between Martu and whitefellas (Figure 6). Each side must gain knowledge about how the other works and thinks, to see the possibility and potential of engaging with the other and to be prepared to forego familiar ways of working and preconceptions about ‘the right way of working’. In this way, program design becomes a consultative and creative process, rather than the adoption of derivative Western models. This poses challenges but is fundamental to ensuring that KJ’s programs are distinctively Martu.

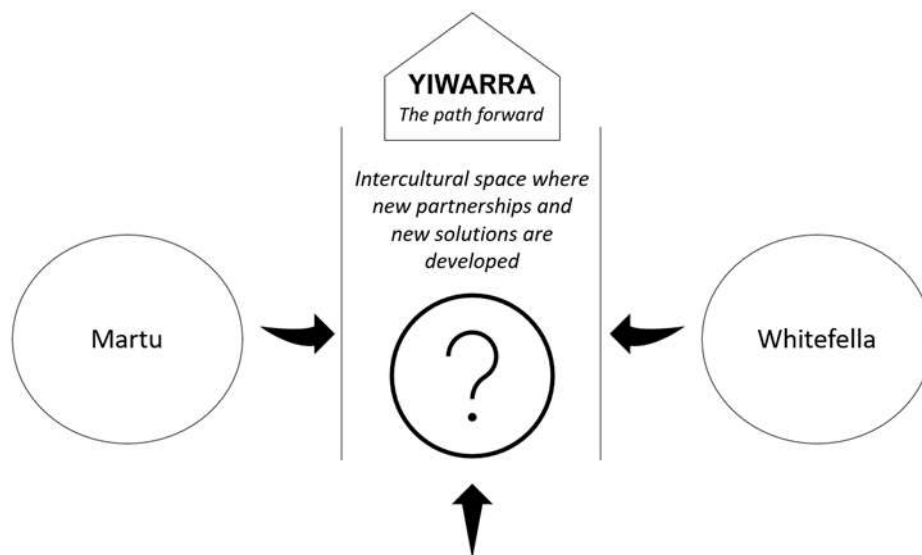


Figure 6: The intercultural space

This approach recognises that the worldview, priorities, motivations and concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often very different to those shaping Western systems. In the Martu context, this is particularly true: Martu come from and live almost completely within a Martu society, deeply grounded in Martu culture. The past has demonstrated that simply inviting Martu people to participate in Western society will not work, because the relative mindsets are so different.

⁴ Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap*, Coalition of Peaks, June 2025, accessed 8 July 2025

While this reality may vary across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the principle of the 'Intercultural Space' still applies to the design of programs. Each society must recognise the reality of the other and the practical consequences of that fact. Each must learn about the other's perspective, expectations and forms and must work together to find new forms that satisfactorily resonate with or meet the expectations of each society. If the program content resonates with and makes sense to Martu, it will work. If it feels foreign or detached, it will not.

The prerequisite for working in this 'Intercultural Space' is that the non-Martu participants have been educated in the forms and structures of Martu society, Martu priorities and the whole Martu approach to the domain that is being discussed. It is essential that those engaging in this space have a foundational understanding and respect for the Martu worldview; without this, genuine co-design is not possible.

Design must also be adaptive, based on the assumption that an effective practice model will emerge through growing experience and reflection. This stands in contrast to the conventional, top-down approach, which entails a sequential process of planning and implementation guided by a detailed, fixed plan. In contexts marked by ongoing learning, complexity and cultural differences, it is essential to enable and watch the gradual emergence of a practice model that resonates with and works for the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community involved.

The broad scope of KJ's programs is similarly responsive, limited only by Martu priorities rather than by any organisational sense of identity. The design process is not constrained by a program-defined sense of 'core business' but rather a community-focused identity, emphasising development. The organisation's vision is therefore expressed in broad terms that reflect long term aspirations, because the vision must remain capable of accommodating Martu people's changing priorities. There is an organisational willingness to expand or change. As Martu aspirations develop and change, it is seen as essential that the organisation is willing to take on requests to expand and change the design of programs to help the community meet those aspirations.

Implementation

Business as usual

Government program delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remains built on siloed, programmatic foundations that are ill-equipped to address the interconnected and structural nature of inequality. The Productivity Commission has been clear in its critique of governments' track record on Closing the Gap, identifying its siloed nature as a core barrier to progress. This is not an issue that can be resolved through isolated policy reforms or program reviews. It demands a fundamental shift in the way that government thinks about effective responses.

In practice, the limitations of this model are evident in both the lack of coordination across governments on issues requiring joint responses, and the prescriptive funding arrangements that constrain community organisations. Government departments operate in isolated portfolios that are incompatible with the interconnected challenges in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially remote ones. Programs and services are typically delivered through narrow, topic-specific streams – such as health, education, or housing – each with separate goals and reporting lines.

This fragmented approach is mirrored in the community organisations that are funded through the same isolated portfolios. Funding is often tied to the specific, pre-determined objectives of the government department, preventing organisations from taking a holistic or adaptive approach to the interconnected and structural drivers of inequality in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As a result, services are often restricted to achieving short-term, fragmented outcomes rather than driving community development and long-term, systemic change.

The alternative

The KJ Model is the opposite: the breadth of its program portfolio, in which, rather than operating in isolation, programs are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The KJ Model provides an effective approach that can respond effectively to the complex web of social challenges facing Martu.

While the breadth may appear to defy conventional wisdom that organisations should ‘stick to their core business’, there are significant benefits that flow from a willingness to incorporate a broad array of activities and focuses within a unified strategy. Importantly, this can be done either within one organisation or across multiple organisations – it does not require replication of KJ’s breadth of responsibility within one agency.

1. **Shared resources.** Programs can support each other, sharing resources, activities and opportunities, where that is appropriate. Joint activities leverage the capability of people across programs and the resources of each program. For example, KJ’s Prison Program, in which groups of Martu regularly attend Roebourne Regional Prison and conduct cultural education workshops for the large cohort of Martu prisoners, uses resources produced by KJ’s Cultural Programs. These are different programs in different divisions, but they work closely together and support each other to create an innovative and very popular initiative.
2. **Integrated Delivery.** Activities address multiple needs simultaneously. For example, a Kalyuku Ninti (return to country) trip can include rangers, who can perform their resource management work while also supporting the cultural objectives of the trip, young people who are part of the Youth Diversionary Program, former prisoners who are part of Yiwarru Kuju (the adult Diversionary Program) and participants in the Wama Wangka (alcohol and substance abuse) program. This integration also facilitates multi-generational engagement, reflecting the cultural norm that many Martu activities naturally involve people of every age, rather than being stratified by age. Program integration is not only efficient, but it reflects a Martu outlook on life, where social issues are interlinked. As one Martu man stated:

“Martu don’t have programs, they just have Martu.” – Clifton Girgirba (Martu man)

This in part reflects the holistic outlook generated by the KJ Model: the focus in all activities is greater than the objectives of a single program, always with an eye to higher objectives. One example is the consciousness of a developmental aspect to every activity: every meeting, event, activity or interaction is seen as an opportunity for community development, building unity, confidence, capability and aspiration for the future.

3. **Cultural Coherence.** Most importantly from KJ’s perspective, this integration enables cultural knowledge, norms, priorities and methods to flow through every program and activity. For example, engagement with country forms a significant part of almost every program, not because it is convenient or easy, but because that reflects Martu values and life.

The result of this integrated, broad and ultimately, culturally grounded approach to program delivery is very high engagement and buy-in from Martu, laying the foundations for Martu-led community development and long-term change.

Evaluation

Business as usual

Evaluation is an essential mechanism for holding government and non-government organisations to account and understanding where and how to improve. An approach to evaluation aligned with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement would be one that held government accountable to Indigenous people as equal partners in shared decision making, engaged with Indigenous people, and gave primacy to Indigenous perspectives in evaluating programs and policy. The reviews found that in practice the evaluation of programs, policies and progress on Closing the Gap falls short of these aspirations:

- **There are not enough high-quality evaluations.** Policies and programs impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not being evaluated sufficiently, and results are not published. This means

government can't be held accountable to its own commitments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, and government and others cannot learn how to adapt and improve.

- **Evaluation does not value and centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.** Evaluation often reflects a non-Indigenous understanding of progress, with limited and tokenistic engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The overwhelming number of indicators can be disconnected from what matters to communities. While cultural outcomes are increasingly included, they often focus narrowly on language and overlook the diversity of cultural priorities across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **Evaluation focuses on socioeconomic targets in isolation from each other and their place.** Closing the Gap focuses narrowly on socioeconomic targets, rather than evaluating progress towards the Priority Reforms. This leads to an approach of looking at issues in isolation and focusing on the deficits of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in making progress. The over-reliance on aggregated data obscures local realities and limits the usefulness of evaluation findings for communities and place-based initiatives.

“When stocktakes, agreements, reviews and evaluations are not published, it makes it much harder for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, as well as the broader Australian community, to understand whether governments are moving beyond a business as usual approach, and to hold them accountable for meeting their commitments.” – *Productivity Commission Review of Closing the Gap*

The alternative

KJ treats evaluation as primarily accountable to Martu. KJ takes evaluation seriously, not simply as a means of measuring and demonstrating effectiveness, but as a means of identifying Martu priorities, dissatisfactions and desires. This approach therefore emphasises Martu evaluation: evaluating KJ based on the outcomes and values that matter to Martu, and using methods that are accessible to Martu. This also means detailed feedback to Martu on the findings of evaluation activities, and consequent changes and responses to Martu input. KJ's evaluation activities have included:

- Reflective practice: structured feedback sessions following major activities such as trips or camps, but also after meetings, in which Martu not only indicate what was positive or negative about the activity, but how the experience felt
- Consultative feedback and planning meetings: sessions in which the progress of an activity or program is discussed with Martu over one or two days, and decisions made on where the program is succeeding or failing, what refinements should be made, what new initiatives would address issues and where activities should be expanded.
- Martu outcomes evaluations: assessments of KJ's performance across 12 key indicators that were developed by Martu, which reflect their definition of their aspirations. These are major consultations that have taken place in 2020 and 2024/5 (results are summarised in the section '[Appendix 1: The success of the KJ Model – a summary of the evidence](#)').
- Focused evaluative consultations: includes activities such as the Martu Values and Priorities study in 2024/5, which sought Martu views across the full range of KJ's activities, and included ranking of the importance of activities, identification of what was good and what could be improved, and an opportunity for broad, detailed discussion of all of KJ's work (see the list of source material in Appendix 1 for further details).

The high value placed on Martu evaluation not only supports program design and refinement processes but embeds the sense that the focus of KJ is Martu priorities, Martu desires and Martu aspirations. It reflects the Productivity Commission's conclusions as to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs should properly be evaluated. It ensures that programs have the greatest chance of engagement and success. And it also reflects

Martu desires, with people placing great value on these processes of feedback, consultation and evaluation – it means that non-Martu are listening.

Evaluation is used to support learning and adaptation. KJ's approach emphasises the importance and value of evaluation in supporting program design, learning and ongoing adaption – not just to understand, measure and report on performance. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together in genuine partnership to understand and respond to the complex social, cultural and economic challenges of contemporary Australia requires a lot of creativity, learning and adaptation, and evaluation needs to support this. KJ have therefore adopted many of the processes of developmental evaluation into its evaluation approach.

Evaluation against non-Indigenous criteria must be meaningful and helpful. Evaluating against criteria that matter to non-Indigenous institutions – to government and funders – is important too. Funding contracts inevitably require financial acquittals, program reporting and evaluation processes. While any required evaluation processes are ideally negotiated, they usually involve reporting on the level of achievement against some outcomes sought by the funder. This evaluative method, usually quantitative, is inevitable and, if properly framed, useful. Ideally, that means that the outcomes to be measured reflect Martu priorities, rather than externally-set objectives.

KJ is committed to integrating both Martu and non-Martu approaches to evaluation. Rather than seeing them as opposing frameworks, KJ works to ensure that each can support and strengthen the other. This approach reinforces KJ's emphasis on reflective practice and adaptation, ensuring that quality evaluation serves both funding accountability and program improvement.

Partnerships

Business as usual

Government has, on the whole, failed to build meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. Partnerships involve sharing power and decision making, mutual understanding and working collaboratively to achieve goals. The Review of Closing the Gap concludes strongly that government faces persistent barriers in making progress here and call for significant change.

“Persistent barriers to progressing the Agreement's Priority Reforms are **the lack of power sharing** needed for joint decision-making, and the failure of governments to acknowledge and act on the reality that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for their communities. **Unless governments address the power imbalance in their systems, policies and ways of working**, the Agreement risks becoming another broken promise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.” – *Productivity Commission Review of Closing the Gap*

The Productivity Commission Review found positive examples of partnering have been limited to a small number of place-based agreements and policy partnerships. Partnerships are often structured around project delivery timelines or compliance requirements. Partnerships are often documented as activities or deliverables within funding agreements, with an emphasis on demonstrating that engagement has occurred, rather than building long-term collaboration or shared leadership.

Genuine partnership, in a cross-cultural context, is not achieved simply through inclusion of Aboriginal people in Western processes or structures. It requires the accommodation and meeting of two worldviews. It is the melding of these worldviews that will allow government to live up to the aspirations of the Closing the Gap Agreement.

The alternative

For KJ, partnership is not a side activity — it is central to the KJ Model, operating on two level. There are two dimensions: the external partnerships between KJ and other organisations, and the 'internal' partnership between non-Martu and Martu within KJ.

External partnership: KJ seeks to work in partnership with government agencies, corporate partners and other non-profit organisations. Ideally, each partnership works within the intercultural space and therefore is not simply an agreement between organisations, but a dynamic form of work that actively includes and involves Martu. External partnerships looks like:

- Strong personal relationships. Partnerships are built through time spent together, often over years, grounded in trust and shared purpose. This involves deep listening, humility, and a willingness to engage beyond transactional or project-based goals.
- A shared intercultural space. Both Martu and non-Martu partners bring knowledge, values and ways of working. Partnership means meeting in this space – each party contributing to something neither could create alone. It relies on mutual learning, open dialogue and power-sharing.
- Clarity of purpose. The focus of the partnership must remain on Martu benefit. While mutual respect is essential, non-Indigenous partners are asked to recognise that these partnerships serve Martu priorities first and foremost. This orientation is fundamental to maintaining trust and accountability.

KJ's cultural programs work in partnerships with major national and State cultural institutions. Its land programs have a very close relationship with the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation & Attractions as well as numerous private or non-government specialists in fields such as fire management, ethno-ecology, preservation of species and safety. Its social programs work in close partnerships with agencies such as the WA Departments of Justice, of Corrective Services and of Communities, with WA Police, with lawyers from Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) and Legal Aid, with the WA Mental Health Commission and with numerous non-government, specialised agencies. KJ has long had a deep and diverse partnership with BHP, including taking senior management on cultural immersion trips and providing cultural presentations at all levels of the company.

These partnerships enable Martu-led innovation. By combining Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, and by investing in long-term, trust-based relationships, KJ's partners are able to support work that is grounded, practical and transformative for both sides.

Internal partnership: The internal partnership within KJ – between Martu and non-Martu – is as foundational as any external collaboration. It is built on trust, respect and a shared commitment to Martu priorities. It asks non-Martu staff to go beyond conventional professional boundaries and invest personally in relationships and community life.

This kind of partnership requires time and openness. It may involve joining Martu on-country, where non-Martu staff are outside their comfort zone and must learn through participation. It may mean living in community, listening, helping, being present, and being prepared to learn as much as to lead. This model requires:

- Recognition of each other's knowledge, values and limits
- A continuous process of negotiation and adaptation
- Embracing hybrid approaches that meet Martu aspirations while working within external requirements
- Shared authority – with non-Martu staff only holding authority when recognised and supported by Martu

It also means that roles are shaped thoughtfully. For example, Martu may request that a non-Martu person undertake a difficult or contentious role to preserve community harmony.

“Good for Martu people to do the coordinator jobs – also peoples saying it's best for whitefellas to do it. If people want to learn they should be able to. Could be problem with Martu running because of family. Powerful partnership.” – *Martu person*

Above all, this is not a static arrangement. It is a developmental process – grounded in action, reflection and learning. The goal is not just to deliver programs, but to build Martu leadership, expand capacity and grow the organisation in a way that reflects Martu values. Through ongoing dialogue – in everyday life and in formal spaces like on-country workshops – the partnership continues to evolve.

Governance

Business as usual

An unequal approach to governance lies at the heart of government's failure to meet the expectations of the Priority Reforms. Critiques of the government's conventional approach can all be traced back to the absence of genuinely shared decision-making, stemming from a Westminster system that is founded on hierarchal structures and centralised authority. Compounding this is the enduring colonial lens in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are seen, not as sovereign partners to negotiate with, but as subjects to be managed.

"It is a fundamentally unequal starting point - one that expects compliance rather than negotiation and collaboration – and runs counter to the very premise of shared decision-making." – *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap, Coalition of Peaks*

It is crucial to understand that effective joint governance in this context requires far more than simply including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'representatives' in Western governance processes, using Western governance methods. It requires the recognition of an alternative worldview and its methods and structures of decision-making. Current mechanisms for shared decision-making are limited to consultation with communities on pre-determined approaches and perhaps, formal roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in governance structures, but without the power to steer or shape those structures. In this paradigm, the balance of power remains firmly within government. True shared decision-making means accepting that systems and structures may be reshaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and with that, a preparedness to relinquish power.

"A focus on shared decision-making that does not include self-determination as the ultimate objective, perpetuates the power imbalance between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people." – *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review of Closing the Gap, Coalition of Peaks*

Shifting the imbalance is not just a matter of changing policy or process, but structural transformation and a paradigm shift in the way that governments approach governance.

The alternative

KJs' governance arrangements bring together Western & Martu authority structures. KJ modifies conventional corporate structures & methods. The KJ Board structure reflects a familiar cultural separation of elders, who provide cultural safety, advice and ultimate authority on cultural issues, and middle-aged 'workers' who have responsibility to do the work required of directors. This is complemented by 3 Advisory Directors, who have a non-voting role with a responsibility to advise on legal, financial and compliance issues. Financial reports are presented in accessible, graphical forms, so that participants who lack familiarity with formal numeracy or Western presentations of quantitative materials are readily able to understand and take responsibility for monitoring company performance and for key decisions.

This marriage of conventional corporate structures and Martu authority is also reflected in the management methods. Whether in work planning, conduct of work, evaluation or any conventional undertaking, the form of that undertaking cannot be assumed. It cannot be the conventional, top-down form that Western people are familiar with and find comfort in. It cannot involve non-Martu disciplining or exercising authority over Martu; those functions are resolved within the authority structures of the Martu kinship system. Work methods are adapted or designed for the cross-cultural context; there is an assumption that if they don't make sense to or resonate with Martu, they simply won't work.

Ultimately, Martu lead decisions on what gets done, resulting in the generation of new solutions that are completely novel and deliver huge value for Martu people and external stakeholders

In dealing with external agencies, there is a strong focus on Martu empowerment. This starts with the development of a Martu understanding of and skills in Western systems. The emphasis on skill-based partnership between Martu and non-Martu extends to relationships with government agencies. These partnerships include a focus on education of agency staff in Martu culture and expectations, extending to multi-day cultural immersion trips on country. The focus on partnership with external stakeholders seeks their participation, creates opportunities for engagement in both Western and Martu environments and seeks a strong role for Martu in joint governance processes.

Adapting the KJ Model to different contexts

The KJ Model offers a proven alternative to the pathway taken by government. But this not an 'off the shelf' solution that can be replicated without careful consideration. Instead, it provides a set of guiding principles that have proven effective in a specific remote environment and must be thoughtfully adapted to different contexts.

Successfully implementing the KJ Model has required KJ to navigate and manage several challenges. Government agencies and organisations looking to adapt the principles of the KJ Model to new contexts will need to understand these challenges. While some of these are specific to the Martu context, others are likely to be relevant in a variety of settings:

- **Staffing:** It is essential to find the right people to work with Martu: staff who are humble, committed to ongoing cross-cultural learning, and able to work effectively in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty. Working in the intercultural space requires genuine creativity to develop approaches that meet the needs of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities while also satisfying the requirements of Western agencies whose funding or support is essential.
- **Management:** Managing in a cross-cultural environment is complex. It requires integration of activities across inter-supportive programs, management of staff operating in a cross-cultural environment, and management of intercultural governance processes. Managers must commit to ongoing Martu consultation, evaluation and feedback, and negotiate new forms and methods with government funders. Managers must ultimately be the champions and exemplars of the culturally grounded methods of KJ.
- **Advocacy:** It is continually necessary to argue for government acceptance of approaches, methods and outcomes that are implied by an alternative model. The cultural foundation of KJ is commonly at odds with Western expectations and the demands of Western funders or government agencies. This creates a need for effective, informed and creative advocacy to bring those agencies into the intercultural space, to appreciate the Martu perspective and to recognise the genius of Martu forms and methods within their society.
- **Breadth of scope and vision:** The breadth of KJ's programs or activities, developed in response to Martu demand, creates challenges and risks. It means that the organisation is permanently in some state of stress, attempting to meet all of the various objectives of different lines of work, with the risk of spreading either human or other resources too thinly.
- **Funding:** There is a constant tension with external funding agencies as KJ will not seek funding that is tied to strict external guidelines on program outcomes, KPIs or measures. In practice, this frequently means that there is a need to negotiate those aspects when negotiating funding, to ensure that KJ can continue to have a primary focus on Martu priorities. While frequently the externally sought outcomes align with Martu aspirations, the manner in which these are expressed or achieved may require negotiation.
- **High expectations from Martu:** If KJ is successful as a responsive and effective organisation, Martu can place responsibility on the organisation even when that expectation is unrealistic or unreasonable. So, for example, where Martu are frustrated with a state of affairs that can only be addressed by government, the most that KJ can do is work with Martu to advocate for that change in creative and, ideally, effective ways. If government does not act, at least obliquely, KJ is held responsible for that failure.

- **Different views of partnership and the non-Martu role:** A major challenge to KJ's partnership model comes from differing assumptions about what true Indigenous-led practice looks like. Some external (and occasionally internal) voices expect full Martu (or at least Indigenous) control of all governance and management roles, assuming that: Martu have the skills to perform all functions; Martu want all leadership positions; There are no roles that Martu would prefer non-Martu to take; and all Indigenous groups understand and relate to each other. The KJ approach has drawn and will continue to draw criticisms from people holding this view, but such concerns tend to ease once they have been fully exposed to the views of Martu and the reality of the partnership.

Ultimately, the KJ approach embodies the conviction that 'non-Martu don't know better', a principle seen as more important than requiring Martu to take on responsibilities they may not want. This conversation also plays out internally. Some Martu adopt a more conventional political position, arguing that "all of the managers and all of the ranger coordinators should be Martu." These discussions are ongoing, but consensus typically returns to the view that there are some roles and functions that Martu want non-Martu to perform. This remains an area of continuous and healthy negotiation.

5. Conclusion

Governments across Australia have agreed to a sound framework for improving how they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. If implemented as intended, the reforms in the Agreement would fundamentally change how governments engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, leading to better outcomes for communities.

Yet, despite this commitment, the Productivity Commission has found that governments have not implemented the reforms in any meaningful way. Progress on the Priority Reforms has been limited, fragmented, and lacking a coherent, unified strategy for change.

The KJ Model is a real-world, proven example of how things can be done differently. Independent evaluations and studies commissioned by KJ and its partners – including the WA Department of Justice and BHP – show that both Martu and non-Martu see its immense value and benefit from its approach (See Appendix 1 for further detail). The KJ Model directly addresses many of the core criticisms raised in the Productivity Commission's Review of Closing the Gap – not by theoretical design, but because it evolved in response to the lived failures of the conventional system in Martu communities.

The KJ Model contradicts the conventional approach of government because it has witnessed and understood the failure of that approach in Martu communities, failure that will continue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities if governments do not fundamentally change.

While this report does not offer a prescriptive solution, it demonstrates that an alternative approach is possible. It invites the reader to consider the KJ Model's alternative approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the context of three key understandings:

1. **A new model must share power.** A lack of genuine power-sharing was one of the central criticisms in the Productivity Commission and Coalition of Peaks reviews. Without power sharing, any transformation government undertakes is unlikely to be effective. The KJ Model provides a living example of genuine power sharing arrangements, between Martu and non-Martu people. The principles of the KJ Model cannot be adapted to new contexts without maintaining commitment to sharing power.
2. **Transformation requires holistic change.** The strength of the KJ Model lies in how cultural foundations, community development, and partnership work together as mutually reinforcing principles. Picking out one part, without the others, risks falling back into the fragmented, piecemeal logic of business as usual.
3. **Adaptation is essential.** The KJ Model evolved through Martu and non-Martu working together – it offers powerful lessons for others, but the model must be adapted to each local context. This is central to building genuine partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Ultimately, the KJ Model represents a new paradigm – one that shifts the balance of power towards the communities that government aims to serve. Implementing such a shift will be challenging, requiring structural and cultural change at all levels of government. But for governments that have signalled their willingness to change through the National Agreement, the KJ Model offers both a compelling example and a practical guide for how to start.

Appendix 1: The success of the KJ Model – a summary of the evidence

This appendix provides supporting evidence for the report section ‘Does the KJ Model work?’. This evidence is presented for both the Martu and non-Martu perspective.

- From the **Martu perspective**, KJ ‘works’ if it is helping Martu to achieve the outcomes that Martu want and delivering what Martu value. The primary data sources for assessing the KJ Model’s performance from this perspective are two 2025 reports: the Martu Values and Priorities Report and the Martu Outcomes Report. Both reports were informed by consultations designed to centre Martu voices and account for a Martu conception of KJ activities. **See page 35 for findings from the Martu perspective.**
- From the **non-Martu perspective**, KJ ‘works’ if its funded programs are found to be effective and if it enables non-Martu institutions and stakeholders to be more effective in engaging with Martu. The primary data sources for this perspective are commissioned reports, evaluations and studies completed by non-Martu researchers, evaluators and specialists external to KJ, on KJ’s programs and activities, and quantitative metrics collected by KJ. **See page 43 for findings from the non-Martu perspective.**

Source material

This report is the culmination of a series of consultations and commissioned reports that assess the effectiveness of different aspects of the KJ Model. This section will draw out the key findings from these sources to assess whether KJ activities are delivering outcomes for Martu.

The Martu perspective

This sub-section largely draws on two reports: Focus groups were conducted with Martu community members in Newman, Jigalong, Punmu, and Kunawarritji. Across the four locations, 98 Martu participated in discussions, though attendance fluctuated throughout the sessions as people came and went.

To assess the Martu perspective on outcomes, consultations revisited the 12 Martu-defined outcomes and provided an opportunity for Martu to once again evaluate KJ’s performance against what matters most to them. To explore Martu values and priorities, discussions were organised around ten ‘activity groups’ that reflect how Martu experience and understand KJ’s work, such as Trips on Country, Cultural Knowledge or Workshops and Camps. These groupings differ from KJ’s internal program structure (e.g. Cultural Programs, Land Programs, Social Programs, Families Program), which reflects organisational, funding, and staffing needs but does not align with how Martu conceptualise KJ activities.

Source list:

- **Martu Outcomes Reports, Social Ventures Australia (2021/25):** Arising from a study conducted by SVA in which Martu identified 11 critical outcomes (later expanded to 12) they wished to see in their communities and lives. In both 2021 and 2025, Martu voted on the extent to which KJ was contributing to these outcomes, enabling a comparison of results over time.
- **Values and Priorities Report, Social Ventures Australia (2025):** Identifies themes from a series of focus groups conducted by KJ with Martu, with analysis undertaken by SVA. Captures the value that Martu attribute to KJ’s activities, their perceptions of that value, their priorities, and their wishes for future improvements.
- **Evaluation of the Martu Leadership Program using the SROI methodology, Social Ventures Australia (2017):** Evaluated the Martu Leadership Program (MLP) to understand, measure and value the changes it generated. Used the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology to conduct the evaluation.

- **MLP and Social Programs Study Report, Social Ventures Australia (2024):** A review of the MLP model over the past decade to understand the value created by its approach and any learnings for how government and corporate stakeholders may better work with Aboriginal communities.

The non-Martu perspective

This sub-section draws on the following data sources.

As part of this comprehensive study, KJ commissioned four independent reports from people who have specialised domain experience, expertise and familiarity with Martu to be able to comment authoritatively on the quality and value of each of KJ's four programs.

In addition, commissioned evaluations conducted by SVA Consulting over several years provide a detailed evidence base. These evaluations include both program-level assessments and broader cost-benefit analyses, offering a comprehensive view of KJ's overall impact and effectiveness.

Source list:

- **External Program Reports on the Land Programs, Cultural Programs, Families Program and Social Programs:** Four reports authored by external specialists in each program area, assessing the value of the programs and some offering recommendations for improvement.
- **KJ SROI: Social, economic and cultural impact of On-Country programs, Social Ventures Australia (2011):** Evaluated the social, cultural and economic benefits of KJ's On-Country programs over FY 2010 and 2011, using the SROI methodology.
- **KJ SROI: Social, economic and cultural impact of On-Country programs, Social Ventures Australia (2014):** Updated the 2011 SROI to assess the value of outcomes created during the FY2010–2014 period.
- **Evaluation of the Martu Leadership Program using the SROI methodology, Social Ventures Australia (2017):** See description in [The Martu perspective](#).
- **MLP and Social Programs Study Report, Social Ventures Australia (2024):** See description in [The Martu perspective](#).

The Martu perspective

Martu values and perspectives sit at the heart of how KJ evaluates its work, reflecting the organisation's cultural grounding and community development ethos. The primacy of the Martu perspective also aligns closely with the intention of the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy to "put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre" of program and policy evaluation.⁵

KJ has conducted evaluation with Martu for many years, including most recently focus groups across Martu communities to understand KJ's contribution to Martu-defined outcomes, and whether and how KJ is delivering value for Martu people. The evidence from these evaluation activities is summarised under several conclusions:

1. Martu deeply value KJ
2. Martu are highly engaged in KJ's programs and activities
3. Martu are using KJ as a vehicle to shape their future in contemporary Australia

Martu deeply value KJ

⁵ Productivity Commission, [Indigenous Evaluation Strategy](#), October 2020, accessed 19 June 2025

Consultations with Martu across the Western Deserts consistently find very strong support for what KJ does: Martu believe that KJ is achieving the outcomes that matter to them, and value KJ's programs and activities. Findings on both points are presented below.

KJ is delivering on Martu outcomes

In 2021, Martu identified 12 outcomes that reflect what they value most and provide a framework to assess the impact of KJ through a Martu lens, rather than through mainstream indicators.⁶ The outcomes include five traditional outcomes and seven modern outcomes.



Figure 7: Martu Outcomes

As part of this Martu evaluation process, the effectiveness of KJ's activities was assessed against these outcomes, both in 2021 and again in 2025. Martu were asked to reflect on whether KJ is 'not helping enough',

⁶ Social Ventures Australia (SVA), *Think Martu. Think Differently. Act Differently. Evaluation of KJ against Martu outcomes*, SVA, June 2021, accessed 7 June 2025

'helping a bit but more is needed', or 'helping a lot' for each outcome. The 2021 results were highly encouraging, with strong community support across most areas and only two outcomes receiving significantly lower ratings.

More recently, in 2025, as part of its commitment to staying accountable to Martu and continually shape its work around community aspirations, KJ held a new round of consultations with Martu communities to revisit and reevaluate KJ's performance against the 12 Martu-defined outcomes.

The results once again delivered a strong endorsement of the KJ model. Martu confirmed that KJ is contributing meaningfully to the outcomes they value: three outcomes received a perfect (100%) positive response, and ten of the twelve had at least 90% of respondents say KJ is "helping a lot". The two outcomes that had previously received lower ratings in 2021, 'making community strong with a high standard of living' and "getting people out of town, out of 'lock-up' and back to community", continued to lag behind others. However, both showed significant improvement, with positive responses increasing by 38% and 34% respectively.

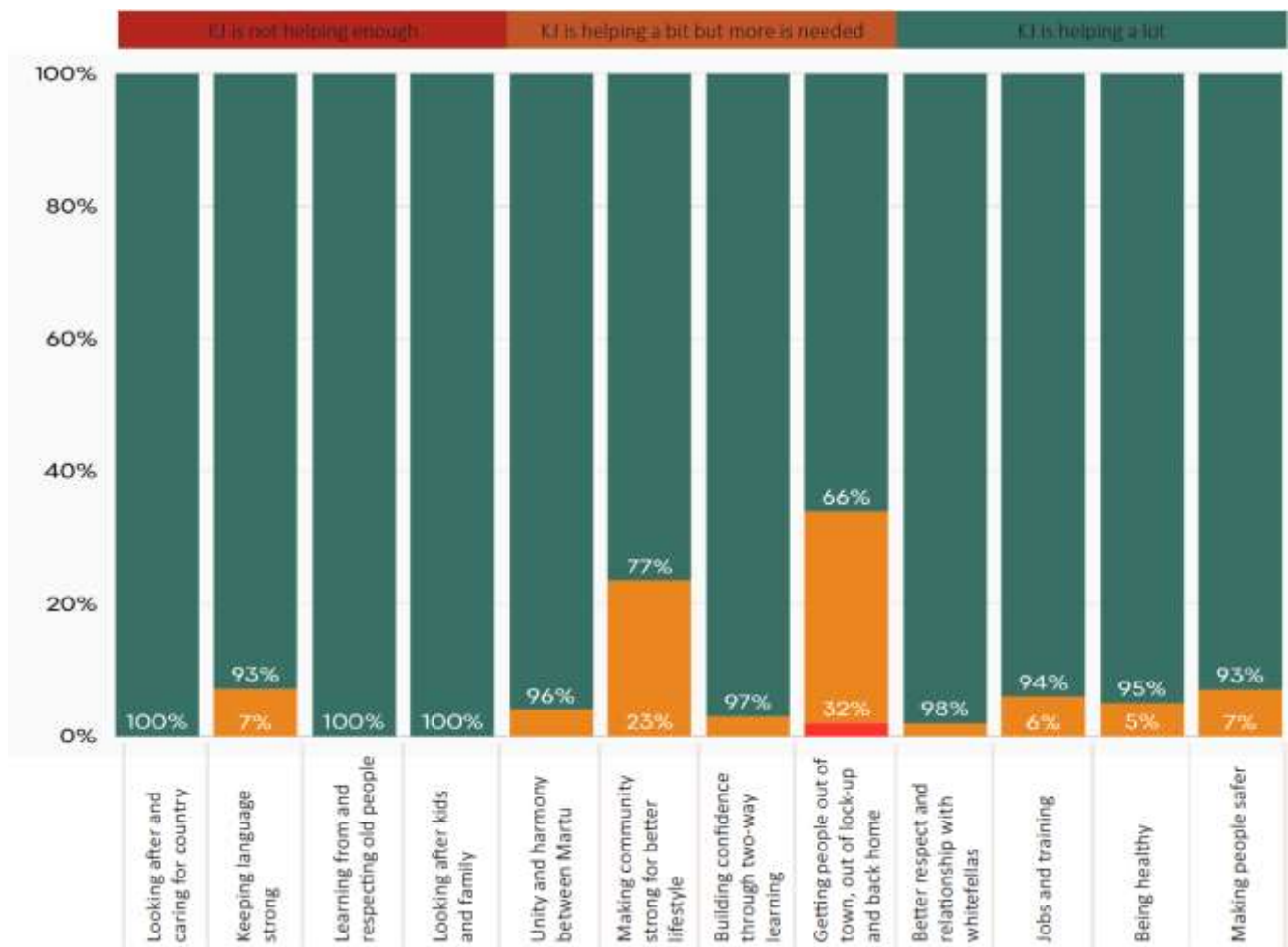


Figure 8: Martu Outcomes Report 2025

These findings reinforce the value of the KJ model in addressing what matters to Martu as well as the limits of what an organisation can do alone. Continued collaboration with government will be essential to address structural issues in the areas of justice, housing and service access in remote communities.

Martu value KJ's programs and activities

The Martu Values and Priorities Report presents strong qualitative evidence of the value Martu place on KJ's work. Four key themes emerged from the focus groups that were conducted, reflecting the voices and views of participants:

1. **Martu want more of the activities that KJ delivers.** Across all activity groupings, the strongest finding was that Martu people want more of the activities and programs that KJ delivers. This is a significant and powerful outcome of the consultations, as it is not a call for something new, different, or improved. Instead, it is a clear request for the expansion of what already works. This strongly demonstrates the immense value Martu place on KJ's activities and stands as one of the clearest forms of evidence for that conclusion.

"More of that Ranger camp training." – *Martu person*

"Overall, we just want to do more of these [workshops and camps]" – *Martu person*

"More trips off country – more exchanges & government trips" – *Martu person*

2. **KJ is a Martu organisation** Martu consistently expressed, in different ways, their strong sense that KJ is a Martu organisation – one that belongs to them and reflects their aspirations. This deep sense of ownership is instrumental in KJ's ability to deliver outcomes aligned with Martu hopes for their community and therefore, this perspective is strong evidence for the significant value that Martu place on KJ activities. This shows up in multiple ways:

- Martu see KJ as the pathway to fixing all problems. Even when these problems are not within the organisation's remit, Martu have a deep belief that KJ can help. Martu see KJ as the place to turn when facing challenges, a vehicle for solving problems and creating opportunities, and a source of hope for their mob.
- A relationship of partnership. Martu are clear in their belief that while KJ is a Martu organisation, its strength also comes from the contribution of non-Martu. Martu value the different skillsets and expertise of non-Martu staff that is required to navigate non-Martu systems. For Martu, a strong KJ is one where these two worlds and understandings work together, in partnership.
- Reluctance to criticise. KJ staff facilitating the focus groups observed that participants were often reluctant to criticise KJ or suggest it was underperforming in any area, even with significant prompting. This reflects a deep sense of ownership over the organisation and the change it is trying to create.

"It's good because it belongs to all of us Martu, it belongs to all of the people. It is our organisation. It does what we want and need to do. It listens to Martu and grows with us. We try new programs and keep growing. KJ listens to Martu. It comes from Martu. We grow up our young people and teach them how to learn about companies so we know how to understand the mainstream world. The young ones are growing to be strong in both worlds." – *Martu person*

"I'm proud, happy – we can change the future for the better. Without this, we'd be drinking, in lock-up, fighting – KJ have changed a lot of people's lives. This gives us a chance to change our lives. We are now in charge." – *Martu person*

"But when you put them together, that's when you get a really powerful partnership. This is a good partnership with whitefellas who do it in the way we're doing it." – *Martu person*

3. **Martu deeply value the cultural foundations of KJ activities.** Almost all KJ activities have a cultural element that guides them. KJ makes a concerted effort to integrate learning on country into many of its programs and weaves in Martu storytelling throughout many activities. From KJ facilitated trips on country to the Families Program, Martu value the integration of their culture into the programs that KJ facilitate. There are very few KJ activities that do not involve some form of time on country, practising traditional

ways, looking after sacred sites, speaking language, or listening to stories from their old people – all critical ways that Martu continue to live culture today. All KJ activities that provide opportunities to practise, strengthen and share culture are highly valued by Martu, and are clearly prioritised over their experiences in programs and activities that are born out of Western foundations, such as classroom-based education. Culture is the context and foundation of KJ's work with Martu, and it is this organisational identity that allows Martu to feel secure in their engagement with KJ.

| What you have here (KJ) is cultural security in action.” – *Martu person*

4. **Martu deeply value the opportunity to learn and share knowledge.** Martu place a high value on learning, a theme that emerged strongly through the community focus groups. KJ supports this by providing a culturally grounded learning environment for Martu. On-country, KJ facilitates opportunities for Martu to strengthen knowledge about country, hunting, bush medicine, kinship, and sacred sites. This style of learning mirrors how knowledge was passed down in pujiman times and is a KJ approach that is deeply valued by Martu.

| “That's our ancestry, the ancestors, they come from there. And for me and my family, it's very important to keep that going, keep coming to Country and looking after Country.” – *Martu person*

KJ also supports learning in Western domains, offering training in practical skills on country and facilitating off-country experiences such as leadership trips, ranger exchanges, and workshops. These help Martu build the skills and confidence needed to navigate the non-Martu world – including engagement with government and funders – in ways that protect Martu interests.

| “Before it was like blind was leading the blind and deaf was leading the deaf. For me I'm still hungry, I want to learn more and more. I want to feed my own people. A little taste is not enough for me. The more we learn the more we can take it to others. It's not just about us it's about the community too, we feedback to them” – *Martu person*

| “For me, Martu leadership, talking to people, I'd never done it before, it gave me confidence to talk up to people out of community, long time ago I never used to talk to people, I was shy in front of biggest crowd, but everything started for me from Mens Leadership Program, it gave me everything, gave me confidence, how to talk, I chose that one, palya (good).” – *Martu person*

Importantly, KJ also ensures that this learning off country is a two-way process. Martu take great pride in teaching others about their culture and the work that is being done with KJ's support. This includes sharing their ranger practices with other traditional owner groups and sharing the Martu experience with non-Martu. KJ facilitate these trips through ranger exchanges with other ranger groups and trips off-country through the Martu Leadership Program. Martu understand the importance of making their experiences visible – not just to build respect and understanding, but to help secure the long-term sustainability of KJ and the activities that matter to them.

| “KJ and Martu, we've been doing this for a lot of years now too. So some of the new mobs that haven't been doing it for as long, we can teach them some things.” – *Martu person*

| “I want to go to Canberra for first time, I want to see the parliament house and the city, tell them my story, I want to talk about the desert and the story of what we've been doing there. Tell them how we are living and how I was raised in the desert.” – *Martu person*

Martu are highly engaged in KJ's programs and activities

The value of an organisation or program can be reflected in the level of engagement from the people it is intended to benefit. Sustained and growing participation is a strong indicator that the target group sees value in the work being delivered.

As shown in the graph below, engagement with KJ, which refers to being employed by KJ in some capacity through participation in a KJ program or activity, has steadily increased from 2009/10 to 2023/24. The current number of Martu engaged by KJ is significant when compared to the estimated Martu population living in the East Pilbara, the region in which KJ operates. Of the approximately 1,000 Martu living in the region (including adults and children), an estimated 600 to 700 are adults. Having between approximately 75-85% of all Martu people in the East Pilbara engaged with KJ represents a high rate of participation.

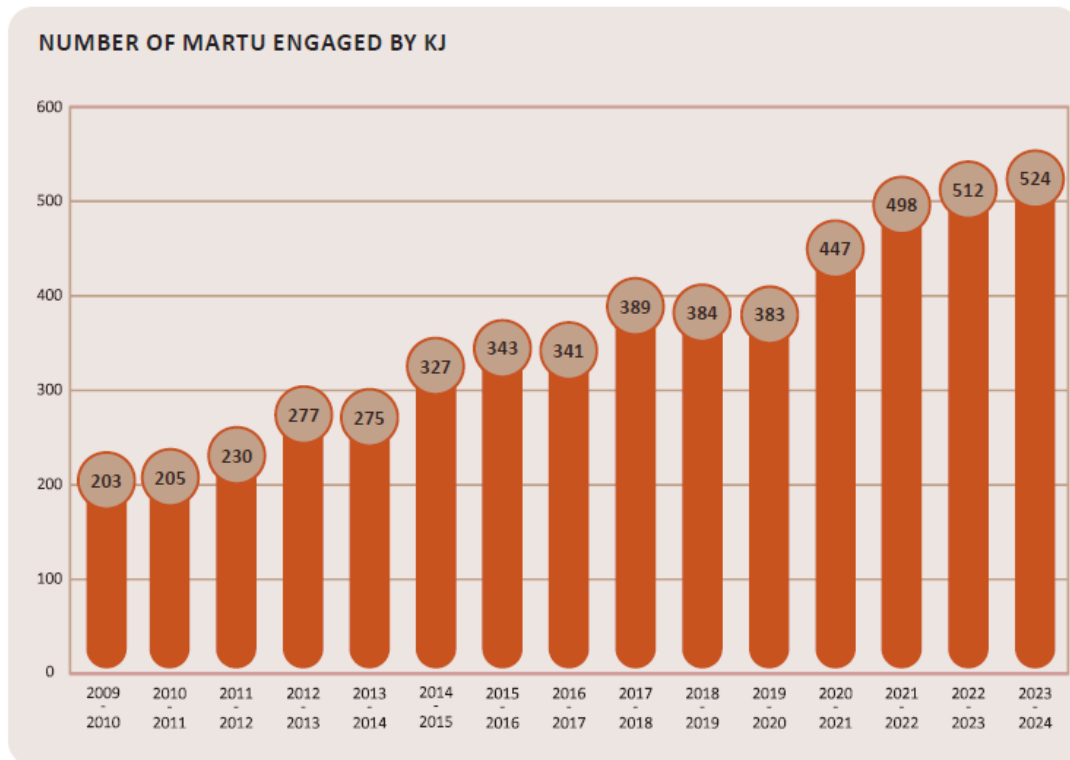


Figure 9: Martu engagement numbers

Another indicator of the Martu investment in KJ's activities is extent to which Martu are engaged in the evaluation exercises that KJ facilitate. One example of this is the high level of engagement Martu had with the Values and Priorities Report. Martu valued this opportunity to evaluate KJ. Engagement in the evaluation was consistently high across the four locations (Newman, Jigalong, Punmu and Kunawarritji), even though it was a lengthy, full-day consultation process and often in very hot conditions. Despite this, most participants stayed for the entire session and remained actively engaged throughout. This reflects how important the feedback process is to Martu, and their strong interest in having a say in how KJ is working for them.

Martu are using KJ as a vehicle to shape their future in contemporary Australia

The stated intention of Australian government policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities is 'empowerment' and 'shared decision-making'. The WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021-2029 states the aspiration that "*all Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation*", while Priority Reform 1 the National Agreement on Closing the Gap envisions that "*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress.*"

In reality, government often falls far short of these aspirations: the Productivity Commission found that Australian governments have overall failed to provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to shape their own future, and fundamentally to share power (see [Appendix 2](#) for more detail).

KJ provides an alternative: Martu see KJ as a means to shape their own future. The ranger program and Martu Leadership Program are two of KJ's flagship initiatives that have been most influential in providing a vehicle for Martu to shape their futures.

Beginning in 2009 in Jigalong with only six rangers, the ranger program has grown to employ over 300 Martu across Jigalong, Punmu Parnngurr and Kunawarritji communities⁷. KJ's ranger teams work to protect and manage the natural and cultural assets across Martu country. Elders work together with young men and women to put 'right way' *waru* (fire) into country, clean and locate waterholes, manage weeds and feral animals and look after special sites. Not only is the ranger program the largest employer of Martu, but it is a strong enabler of cultural development, particularly for young Martu, and fulfilment of cultural obligations for all Martu involved.

"More of the good things of being a ranger is when we go out to our country and then return back to the community and tell the people back home that we are looking after their country." – *Martu ranger (2015)*

The Martu Leadership Program (MLP) has played a pivotal role in enabling Martu to shape their own future in contemporary Australia. The MLP emerged out of a desire to engage with the non-Martu world more confidently, capably and effectively. The MLP has since played a pivotal role in building the necessary foundations and partnerships to work effectively with non-Martu stakeholders – government, corporations, research institutions – to design new solutions that address serious issues impacting Martu communities.

These changes are evident in statements from Martu people, and observations of external reports and evaluations of KJ programs.

"If you want to learn about government or law come to leadership. We all learn new things every day, we can learn together. It'll help you be strong for your community. It will make you feel proud of who you are inside. Not to be shy - talk up. Learn to knock on doors. Lots of things you can learn from KJ programs. Whatever you want to do or work on, KJ can direct you" – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

"The [MLP] is making us stronger, so we can have a voice for Martu, and for the elders. So, we can build our confidence, build our communities, build it for our kids. So, they can follow in our footsteps" – *MLP member (2016)*

"I was in prison twice. Came back for leadership. Want to try and change this law. Because this law, we don't know it, we want to change it through leadership. We got 100 Martu prisoners and it's got to stop. The law rulebook is not right for Martu." – *MLP member (2017)*

Through the MLP, Martu have become more confident, resilient and capable in their ability to engage with and influence mainstream systems. Martu understand more about mainstream culture, law, companies, finance and how government works; Martu feel stronger in themselves and their community; Martu in the MLP are united and see non-Martu as potential partners; traditional Martu authority structures are reinvigorated; and Martu aspirations to shape a new future are awakened. This change within MLP participants is an important foundation to other outcomes that follow. Martu describe the changes that they experience through the MLP as five foundational outcomes:

- *Ninti* (mainstream knowledge): Martu understand more about mainstream culture, law, companies, finance and how government works
- *Palya* (confidence and resilience): Martu feel stronger in themselves and their community
- *Kujungkarrini* (partnership): Martu are united, and have the ability and assertiveness to partner with non-Martu who can empower and learn from Martu

⁷ Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), *Country Programs*, KJ, accessed 12 June 2025

- *Kanyirninpa* (social strength): Traditional authority structures are reinvigorated – the old hold and trust the young, and the young respect and support the old
- *Yiwarra* (strategies and aspiration): Martu aspirations to shape a new future are awakened, and Martu form strategies to make this happen



Figure 10: MLP Outcomes

Wider Martu community is also more confident and capable in their ability to engage with the mainstream world. The outcomes experienced by MLP participants have served as a catalyst to empower the wider Martu community. Through the MLP, the Martu community has an awakened desire to learn more about how the mainstream world works, has created a platform to discuss and address issues important to them, and has created a new platform to effectively engage with mainstream stakeholders. Again, this change experienced by the Martu community is an important foundation to other outcomes that follow.

Authentic intercultural partnerships have formed between Martu and non-Martu. These partnerships are important and precede the mainstream concept of 'co-design'. They are critical to bridging the gap between two cultures that are often at odds with each other. Martu and non-Martu have gained knowledge about how the other works and thinks and can see the possibility and potential of engaging with the other. Both sides are prepared to forgo familiar practices and embrace more innovative ways to work towards a common goal.

All of this has enabled Martu and non-Martu to work together to develop entirely new programs, or shape existing programs, to tackle the issues that Martu care about. There are many examples of these within KJ, but three include:

- **Yiwarra Kuju.** Yiwarra Kuju is a Martu diversionary program. Its objective is to reduce the exceedingly high rates of incarceration and recidivism among Martu people. Yiwarra Kuju is designed to play a coordination role, bringing together elements of other pre-existing programs to create a holistic and community-driven approach to diverting Martu from prison.
- **Wama Wangka.** The objective of Wama Wangka is to harness cultural education and identity as a counter to alcohol and substance abuse, violence, depression, suicide and other self-harming or destructive behaviours. Wama Wangka does not attempt to achieve objectives through discussing and educating Martu about the physical and social dangers of alcohol and other drugs alone (an approach more typical to non-Martu), but rather embraces a quintessentially Martu approach of strengthening and reconnecting Martu with country and cultural identity. Wama Wangka is primarily delivered through cultural education workshops, on-country trips, and workshops on the issues of alcohol and substance abuse.
- **Transport (Getting Back Home).** The objective of the Getting Back Home program is to provide transportation for Martu to get out of Newman where they are exposed to alcohol, drugs and destructive

influences, and back home to the safety of remote communities.⁸ The program uses Martu drivers and a fleet of vehicles to transport Martu people and families to a safer environment.

The non-Martu perspective

The non-Martu perspective of what “works” is very different to the Martu perspective. It emphasises independent and specialist assessment, the priorities and values of government and funders, and the need for formal and procedural (rather than relational) accountability. It is a perspective that matters because it is the culturally dominant perspective, and it is the perspective of the institutions that make policy, commission services and programs, and distribute funding from both public and private sources.

Across the board, non-Martu experts and institutions consistently state that the KJ model is effective and delivers outcomes for Martu. This is explored below through the perspectives of two groups:

1. KJ’s programs are consistently found to be highly effective
2. KJ’s programs share distinct characteristics that drive their effectiveness
3. The value of the KJ approach to partnership is clear for the non-Martu institutions that interact with Martu communities on a daily basis
4. Individuals and agencies have shown willingness and success in working with Martu in this new paradigm

KJ’s programs are consistently found to be highly effective

As part of this comprehensive study, KJ commissioned four independent reports from people who have specialised domain experience, expertise and familiarity with Martu to be able to comment authoritatively on the quality and value of each of KJ’s four programs.

In addition, commissioned evaluations conducted by SVA Consulting over several years provide a detailed evidence base. These evaluations include both program-level assessments and broader cost-benefit analyses, offering a comprehensive view of KJ’s overall impact and effectiveness.

Country Programs

KJ’s Country Programs are made up of more than 300 Martu who are employed as rangers and engaged in a wide range of on-country activities and land management work. The Martu rangers are a central feature of KJ’s identity, and their impact has been demonstrated over many years.

“KJ’s land programs are the cornerstone of the organisation. Culture and country are inseparable for Martu, and so a connection to, and active engagement with country are key motivators for Martu in a programmatic sense.” – *External report: Value of KJ’s Land Programs*

The effectiveness of KJ’s Country Programs has been well documented. KJ commissioned SVA to conduct two SROI analyses of the Ranger Program, in 2011 and 2014. The analyses provided compelling evidence on the significant social, cultural and economic value that the Ranger Program created for Martu people, in language that made sense from a non-Martu perspective. The 2014 SROI found that the total value of the outcomes of KJ’s Country Programs was \$55m over 4 years, compared to an investment of \$20m. Two-thirds of value accrued to Martu (\$39m, or 68%) while the WA and Australian Government collectively accrued almost a quarter of the value created (\$13m, or 23%). The WA Government benefited significantly from a reduction in the number of Martu in jail (estimated \$3.7m) – through community orders or reduced sentences – and a reduction in alcohol related crime (estimated \$4.2m). The remainder of the value generated accrued to other stakeholders (\$5m or 9%).

⁸ A study comparing the financial and social cost of crime in Newman and remote Martu communities identified a significantly lower rate of offending in communities than when Martu are in town. Social Ventures Australia, *Why invest in remote communities: A comparison of the financial and social cost of crime in Newman and remote Martu communities*, SVA, April 2024, accessed 2 July 2025

The SROI analysis focussed attention of the broader sector in the wider social and economic benefits of Indigenous land management programs. This evaluation approach was then taken up by the Commonwealth with a focus on both the Indigenous ranger and Indigenous Protected Area programs.

An external report on KJ's Land Programs by independent consultant, Gareth Catt, who specialises in fire and land management, also confirmed the significant impact of the program. The report's assessment of the Country Programs included the following findings on how the programs have contributed to improved environmental outcomes:

- Fire program: Through the cultural knowledge held by Martu and the vehicles and equipment provided by KJ, Martu rangers have implemented small scale ground burning and aerial incendiary burning to develop a patchwork of managed land. This work has increased vegetation diversity and reduced the impact and extent of unplanned fires in these areas.

“The Jigalong team was central in building one of the most successful fire programs that has been documented since the beginning of the ranger movement in arid Australia.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Land Programs*

- Threatened species management: Martu people's understanding of rare or poorly known species in the desert has enriched the knowledge of Western ecologists working in the Pilbara. For example, once the old people in Parnngurr understood which animal the Jigalong team was working on, Martu knowledge quickly expanded the known range of rock wallabies. Similarly, playing back the call of the night parrot to elders led to new areas being explored and, ultimately, to the discovery of previously unknown populations.

KJ's Country Programs and particularly the Ranger Program have contributed heavily to the Australian desert management sector, demonstrating the support for the program's approach outside of the Martu world. Through forming a relationship with BHP, KJ started the 10 Deserts Project by securing funding for a concept plan from the BHP Foundation. KJ also played an instrumental role in consolidating the Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA) – an Indigenous controlled, member-based organisation that plays a vital role in building connection and resilience for desert ranger programs – into the national umbrella organisation that it is today. KJ's approach to programs on Country has been an important guiding influence in the growth of desert management as key part of the Indigenous Land and Sea Management sector in Australia.

Social Programs

KJ's Social Programs include the Martu Leadership Program (MLP) and the suite of initiatives that have grown from it, including the Prison Program, Wangka Minyipirpa, Wama Wangka, Yiwarra Kuju, Jijiku Yiwarra and Transport Program (Getting Back Home). Together, these programs respond to a range of complex and interconnected challenges commonly faced by Martu, particularly in relation to the justice system.

The MLP is the foundation of KJ's Social Programs and has been essential in creating a new way of working between Martu and non-Martu, building and supporting the capacity of Martu leaders to influence the Western systems that affect their communities. SVA's 2017 evaluation of the MLP found that participants in the program experience five foundational outcomes (See [Martu are using KJ as a vehicle to shape their future in contemporary Australia](#) for further detail), which flow on to Martu communities through their leaders.

While the social value of these outcomes could not be estimated with high confidence at that early stage and was therefore excluded from the SROI analysis, the overall change created through the MLP was summarised as:

“Martu are empowered: they have the confidence, knowledge and social connections to work with each other and whitefellas to shape a new future for Martu in modern Australia” – *Evaluation of the Martu Leadership Program using the SROI methodology (2017), Social Ventures Australia*

Since then, the strength of the MLP has been demonstrated in its development of the following innovative Social Programs:

- **Yiwarra Kuju:** A Martu diversionary program to reduce incarceration, strongly supported by Martu and non-Martu stakeholders for its innovative approach and emerging evidence of effectiveness.⁹
- **Wangka Minyirrpa:** A cultural advisory panel for magistrates and the Prisoner Review Board, providing structured integration of Martu knowledge into justice processes and achieving high community participation.⁹
- **Prison Program:** Delivered at Roebourne Regional Prison, it educates prisoners on justice processes, assists with release planning and keeps Martu connected to community and culture, improving reintegration outcomes.⁹
- **Wama Wangka:** A cultural education program addressing substance abuse, violence, and other self-harming or destructive behaviours. Activities and outcomes achieved by the program are aligned with and delivering on the Indigenous Model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing adopted by the Mental Health Commission.¹⁰
- **Jijiku Yiwarra:** A youth-focused Martu diversionary program running parallel to Yiwarra Kuju, with strong engagement and data indicating a likely contribution to reduced offending.⁹
- **Transport Program (Getting Back Home):** Transports Martu from prison and towns back to remote, alcohol-free communities, reducing reoffending risk.⁹

Cultural Programs

KJ's Cultural Programs focus not only on the preservation of knowledge, but also on its transmission and sharing, particularly across generations. Preservation and maintenance alone will not guarantee the sustaining of language and culture practices into the future. The focus of the Culture Programs is on applied knowledge. This applied knowledge is embedded across a range of initiatives, including Kalyuku Ninti (return to Country trips), the Language Program, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, the Martu Archive, Martu Genealogies and waterhole mapping, among others.

“For two decades KJ has been building these multilayered programs, documenting and archiving cultural and historical knowledge and providing a rich tapestry of programs to actively keep culture and language alive through practice. Nevertheless, the true value of the programs may not be fully realised until generations into the future.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Cultural Programs*

The benefits of KJ's Cultural Programs are discussed by Dr Inge Kral, a linguistic anthropologist and Honorary Fellow at the Australian National University, who highlights that the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge is not only intrinsically valuable, but also essential to maintaining a distinct Martu identity, discussing the broader socio-economic, health and wellbeing benefits that flow from these programs.

The health and wellbeing benefits of KJ's Cultural Programs are tied to the extent to which the program's enable and facilitate connection with country, language and cultural learning. Participation in these cultural activities is associated with protective factors that can positively influence overall health and wellbeing¹¹.

“Without language, you lose cultural knowledge. Without cultural knowledge, you lose identity. Without strong identity, your wellbeing is at high risk.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Cultural Programs*

For example, the Wama Wangka program, funded by the WA Mental Health Commission, is a culturally-led, Martu response to alcohol and drug abuse, depression, suicide and self-harm. The program centres cultural learning and engagement with significant cultural sites across Martu Country. By strengthening Martu identity and connection with their culture, it aims to reduce vulnerability to alcohol abuse and other self-harming practices. Standard Western responses to alcohol and other drug abuse do not work in this context.

⁹ Social Ventures Australia, *Yiwarra Kuju Pilot Interim Evaluation*, SVA, November 2024

¹⁰ Social Ventures Australia, *Kujungkarrini: How to Achieve Aboriginal Policy Objectives – A study of the Martu Leadership Program as an example of putting policy objectives into practice*, SVA, July 2024, accessed 28 May 2025

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Determinants of health for Indigenous Australians*, AIHW, July 2024, accessed 28 May 2025

Families Program

The Families Program balances a weekly playgroup focused on early childhood education and care with a strong Martu-led cultural agenda. Both elements are embedded within a broader program that addresses the immediate and long-term issues affecting Martu family life. The Families Program itself works closely with other KJ programs as part of the wider Martu and KJ community development strategy.

The social value of the Families Program has been assessed by Dr Ann Ingamells, a senior academic and researcher at Griffith University, specialising in community development. She highlights that its value lies in the effective blend of a Western model of early learning with Martu cultural education, and in the active involvement of carers and families in the flow of activities.

“Gradually, Martu and non-Martu adults work together with ease, leadership is shared, mothers begin asking why certain activities are important, non-Martu begin to understand that Martu children have greater competencies in some areas than their Western counterparts and that in other areas they need a little more coaching.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

As the playgroup has matured, early years teachers have noted that children transitioning from the Families Program are more confident, eager to learn, and better prepared for the rhythm of the school day.

The cultural element of the Program is enabled through the integration of other KJ programs such as the Ranger and Cultural Programs, where children accompany the rangers and other Martu adults on day trips. Reflecting on these trips, a non-Indigenous family worker shared:

“The children are different people in the desert, they are interested, they want to learn, they listen and they are endlessly creative” – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

The cultural learning environments that are created through the Families Program are profoundly healing for children and carers. It is still called playgroup, but it is also a space where deeper change, connection and community development can take place.

KJ's programs share distinct characteristics that drive their effectiveness

Independent evaluations and reports have consistently found that KJ's programs are highly effective. This success stems from each program being created within and deeply embodying the principles of the KJ Model. Common themes identified in independent reports on KJ's programs include:

- An integrated, community development approach
- Commitment to putting Martu at the centre
- Genuine intercultural partnerships

It is no coincidence that these themes closely reflect the three principles of the KJ Model: community development ethos, cultural foundations and, partnerships and relationships. While these principles are expressed differently across programs, each plays a foundational role in their overall impact and effectiveness, and are features of the four programs that were recognised by experts and evaluators.

Integrated, community development approach

Evaluations and studies of KJ programs consistently highlight the integrated, community development focus that underpins every initiative. All programs are directed and led by Martu people, both culturally and in day-to-day implementation, which enables Martu to design their own solutions to the challenges they face. This means investing in long-term futures and outcomes, rather than chasing short-term results with siloed responses to single issues.

The community development approach is recognised as a deliberate response to the complex and interwoven challenges experienced by Martu communities:

“There are so many interwoven issues and ongoing systemic dysfunctions, that any small hard-won change is consumed into, and reproduces, the status quo. Martu know what supports children to be healthy, but if the house is crowded with people, there is no washing machine or fridge and the shop does not sell healthy food, and a visit to the clinic makes you feel shame, and the teacher sees your children through a deficit lens, then making and sustaining small changes can often be dispiriting.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

KJ's four core programs – the Cultural Knowledge Program, the Land Programs, the Social Programs and the Families Program – draw on each other to deliver a holistic response to these challenges. Each program is enriched by and enriches every other program to create an integrated, rather than siloed strategy for change.

For example, the Families Program, which focuses on the care and education of Martu children, meaningfully integrates elements from other KJ programs to equip families with the tools and resources to achieve greater control over their futures. While the emphasis of the Families Program continues to be centred around a weekly playgroup encompassing early childhood education and care, the program is also embedded in a broader, Martu-driven cultural agenda. Cultural knowledge and priorities are integrated into a wider program that addresses the broader realities of Martu life. The Families Program itself works closely with the Women's Leadership Program, and draws on the KJ Cultural Program, the Ranger Program, the Wama Wangka Program, the Justice Program (Yiwarra Kuju) and the Martu economic strategy. (See the Families Program case study on page 16 for further detail.)

In this way, the chances of the early childhood focus achieving its goals are greatly increased through its being part of the wider Martu/KJ community development strategy. – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

An external evaluation of the Cultural Knowledge Program also reflects this sentiment and acknowledges that the size and complexity of the issues which KJ seeks to address through a community development strategy means that some results may take time to be fully realised.

The KJ Cultural Knowledge Program sees itself as part of a larger social strategy being pursued by Martu and KJ, grounding and informing most aspects of an overall community development strategy, rather than simply as a set of discrete cultural activities. The focus, nature and diversity of the programs are unique to KJ, representing not only short-term community-led solutions to contemporary issues, but also taking account of needs of future generations of Martu where some outcomes may not be realised for decades. – *External report: Value of KJ's Cultural Programs*

Ultimately, KJ's community development strategy is a direct response to the scale of structural inequality and trauma experienced by Martu. At this formative stage of Martu community development in a post-colonial context, it is a significant achievement that there is a growing group of Martu that have direction and hope for the future.

For those Martu who are deeply trapped within the trauma of dispossession, particularly those living in towns, the idea of a better life for Martu is barely apprehensible. There is, however, an increasing group who are holding the sense of an emerging new direction, and that it is the work of Martu to bring this about, not just for themselves, but for all Martu. – *External report: Value of KJ's Families Program*

Commitment to putting Martu at the centre

Independent reports on KJ's programs are in agreement that KJ demonstrates a strong commitment to placing Martu at the centre of all programs, both in terms of individuals leading the design and implementation of programs and Martu culture forming the foundation of each program.

A focus on incorporating the Martu world view into all programs at all points has shaped the organisation. – *External report: Value of KJ's Land Programs*

KJ programs are so closely aligned with Martu life that they have become a core way for many Martu to live their culture. A simple example of this is the Ranger Program:

“Many younger Martu now aspire to work as a ranger on country, as this is the living example of satisfying, culturally relevant, and interesting work available to many community members. The simple act of wearing a KJ uniform has become a source of pride for many people.” – *External report: Value of KJ's Land Programs*

Just as the community development approach prioritises the needs of future generations and may not always deliver immediate results, centring programs around the Martu worldview is essential for preserving and strengthening Martu identity for the future. This approach supports the creation of outcomes that may take time to emerge, but which remain aligned with Martu interests and aspirations.

Leading a program with a focus on Martu values and stories, permissions and authority does not bring the immediate program results that impatient land managers are often chasing, but it provides the long-term platform and motivation for connection to place, alongside the confidence to maintain on-country activities beyond the living presence of the current knowledge holders – *External report: Value of KJ's Land Programs*

This commitment to integrating Martu culture and values in all KJ programs is essential to KJ's community development approach, wherein the protection and strengthening of Martu culture is a feature of KJ's programs that empowers Martu people.

Martu and KJ see the preservation and propagation of cultural knowledge not only as intrinsically valuable, but also as essential to the preservation of a distinctive Martu identity, social stability, spiritual wellbeing and native title. The benefits are not only cultural, but also socio-economic and for health and well-being. – *External report: Value of KJ's Cultural Programs*

Genuine intercultural partnerships and methods

Independent reports confirm KJ's commitment to building intercultural relationships and partnerships. These manifest in each program in many ways but some of the most visible identified in independent reports include:

- Land Programs: Combine Martu's deep knowledge and expertise of country and culture with the modern tools and skills of Western land management.
- Cultural Programs: Leverage modern recording and archiving tools to maintain traditional knowledge and practices.
- Social Programs: Depend on strong relationships and close collaboration with partners in the justice system to achieve meaningful outcomes for Martu participants.
- Families Program: Integrates the requirement for Western early childhood education with the need for cultural education for young Martu children.

As outlined in the *External report: Value of KJ's Social Programs*, genuine intercultural partnerships require mutual understanding and respect between parties. Work can only progress when both Martu and non-Martu take time to understand each other's perspectives:

Martu and whitefellas must each learn about the other, to be able to come together into the intercultural space where a new way of working can be formed with a coming together of both systems. Each side must gain knowledge about how the other works and thinks, to see the possibility and potential of engaging with

the other and to be prepared to forego familiar ways of working and preconceptions about ‘the right way of working’. – *External report: Value of KJ’s Social Programs*

The MLP has been instrumental in enabling Martu to build these partnerships. Through the MLP, relationships are developed via forums such as cultural immersion camps, on-Country trips with Martu, and regular meetings and presentations held in cities across Australia.

The outcomes achieved by the MLP in the early years of the program allowed Martu to gain knowledge (ninti) about the mainstream world, confidence (palya) within themselves to engage with non-Martu stakeholders, and to see the potential for partnership with non-Martu (kujungkarrini). – *External report: Value of KJ’s Social Programs*

Martu capability and confidence built through the MLP has laid the foundation for genuine intercultural partnerships between Martu and non-Martu, partnerships which enable and sustain the impact of KJ’s work.

The value of the KJ approach to partnership is clear for the non-Martu institutions that interact with Martu communities on a daily basis

Non-Martu engaging with Martu communities through mainstream institutions such as the police, courts and other government agencies want to work with Martu in a new way. They know that these institutions have historically failed Martu and that business as usual is not working. But finding a new path forward is difficult. The KJ model has enabled Martu and non-Martu to form these new partnerships through multiple KJ programs and activities, including:

- **Martu Leadership Program.** Centres two-way learning between Martu and non-Martu and includes educating non-Martu in the Martu way through activities like immersive trips on country. The MLP has built partnerships with companies, many government and non-government agencies in the criminal justice system, philanthropic organisations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- **Yiwarra Kuju Program.** Depends upon productive partnerships between Martu and non-Martu working in the justice system. Key partners include WA Police, magistrates and courts, WA Department of Justice, WA Department of Corrective Services, Roebourne Regional Prison Prisoner Review Board, Aboriginal Legal Service, Legal Aid, the Mental Health Commission, and the agencies involved in the Yiwarra Kuju Regional Governance and Executive Governance Groups (which, as well as the agencies above, include representatives from BHP and from WA Department of Communities, WA Treasury, Murdoch University, Pilbara Development Commission and the Department of Premier & Cabinet).
- **Ranger Program.** Combines the deep knowledge and expertise of country and culture with the modern tools and skills of Western land management. Key partnerships with external agencies include the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; WA Department of Agriculture; Rangelands NRM; tertiary institutions and other organisations.
- **Cultural Knowledge Program.** Leverages the capacity and skill of KJ staff and archiving institutions to ensure the long-term preservation of Martu knowledge and language. KJ has partnerships with major State and national cultural institutions including Battye Library, WA State Library, Berndt Museum, AIATSIS, National Library and National Film & Sound Archive.

Non-Martu reflections on partnering with Martu

Non-Martu see how genuine partnership with Martu is the key to achieving outcomes for Martu communities. The following reflections from people working outside KJ but alongside Martu highlight the progress that has been made in building partnerships and mutual understanding. Over time, these partnerships have deepened, with non-Martu gaining a clearer appreciation of Martu culture and ways of thinking. This has led to greater alignment between Martu and non-Martu priorities and ultimately, effective approaches.

“I think of reconciliation as a coming together and understanding each other’s cultural differences and accommodating those differences. A lot of us don’t realise the breadth of how different traditional Martu ways of thinking are to ours. As soon as you start talking about those differences, that’s what starts making the gap smaller.” – *Katherine Perincek, Senior Associate, Herbert Smith Freehills (2018)*

The need for genuine partnership between Martu and non-Martu is exceedingly clear in the context of the justice system, given the high rates of incarceration and offending among Martu people. Historically, government and justice agency responses have failed to address this issue effectively. In response, KJ has helped to facilitate meaningful engagement and collaboration between Martu and the justice system, efforts that are now beginning to produce better outcomes for Martu people. Those involved in the Pilbara justice system have observed the value of these genuine partnerships:

“Bringing the criminal justice system together with Martu people, it allows you to gain a unified approach to what is a white law system that was created initially without taking into account a whole other set of law that is cultural law.” – *Melita Medcalf, Aboriginal Legal Service (2018)*

“Elders come to meetings to talk about issues and problems that Martu are facing...this supports us to develop a good understanding of issues Martu are facing and about Martu people in general. We have built a strong partnership with the Martu community. Our relationship is a lot stronger than it used to be. There is better cultural understanding which supports delivering better service and response to incidents involving Martu people.” – *Pilbara Superintendent, WA Police (2024)*

The Yiwarra Kuju program stands out as an example of where genuine collaboration between Martu and non-Martu stakeholders is vital in the effective design and delivery of the program. As a platform for structural change in the justice system, Yiwarra Kuju requires buy-in from system actors who are willing to work in fundamentally different ways. It is the generosity and openness of both parties that allow genuine partnerships to form.

“The Yiwarra Kuju governance meetings are a safe space where it feels like you’ve ‘come of age’ with Aboriginal people. There is a mutual respect and both Martu and non-Martu feel like they are being heard. The space is quite different to any other environments around...There is a genuine partnership of working and designing with Aboriginal people. This partnership is really rewarding, and it delivers outcomes that are actually making a difference.” – *Director, People Place and Community, Pilbara Development Commission (2024)*

“The work [Yiwarra Kuju] is more meaningful than just lip service or delivering a government program. We are actually working with Aboriginal groups and being able to design it with them. It’s really rewarding and knowing you’re delivering things that make a difference” - *Director, People Place and Community, Pilbara Development Commission (2024)*

Stakeholders at the highest levels of WA Police have expressed deep appreciation for the generosity Martu have shown in welcoming them to community through KJ-facilitated trips. These experiences have shifted perspectives and built a stronger foundation for mutual understanding. The following reflections highlight the importance of this shared understanding in creating outcomes for Martu:

“It has been a real eye opener for me...it is very easy to sit in the ivory tower of the city and think you know what’s going on. But until you actually visit a community and meet the people, and I must say, be met with such warmth and generosity, it’s difficult to really understand the issues that are occurring and to hear it from the mouths of Martu and not some filtered version of the story you’re getting in the city, it’s been a very rich experience and information I’ve really valued.” – *Craig Ward, then Assistant Commissioner of WA Police (2018)*

“I’m seeing here a pathway for hope and a pathway for a future, which we’ve got to walk hand in hand with...If we can adapt the elements of traditional Martu law, combine that with the elements of the criminal justice system, and find a meeting point in which they can both work alongside each other, that is an idea

that both Martu and Government agencies should pursue...The first part is to sit down and listen, to acknowledge that things can improve and then collectively work in unison.” – *Chris Dawson, then Commissioner of WA Police (2018)*

One of the most significant forms of partnership between Martu and non-Martu has occurred on Country, through KJ’s land programs and in particular, the ranger program.

“I think Parks and Wildlife have a lot of contemporary science skills, and a lot of contemporary land management skills. And I think when we pair that up with Martu traditional skills and the way that Martu view landscapes, I think the partnership really leads to a dynamic, robust way of managing landscapes out there, and I think it’s very successful.” – *Alicia Whittington, Regional Manager (Pilbara), Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions*

From the perspective of non-Martu actors in the land management space, the merging of modern land management techniques and tools with the traditional knowledge of Martu is producing impressive outcomes for the Pilbara environment.

Many of Australia’s arid lands have suffered serious declines of native fauna as a result of introduced predators and declining habitat quality resulting from feral herbivores...Although these same threats are present in the Martu lands to some extent, ongoing management by the Martu people through KJ, especially of fire and feral camel control, means that habitat quality is exceptionally high compared with other Australian arid lands”. – *The Nature Conservancy, ‘Martu Living Deserts Project – Phase III Final Selection Study’*

Individuals and agencies have shown willingness and success in working with Martu in this new paradigm

The Productivity Commission’s review of progress under the Closing the Gap Agreement calls for a paradigm shift in the way government operates: from top-down control, to genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But real innovation and doing things differently are inherently uncomfortable. So far, governments have not lived up to the aspirations of the Agreement, and this paradigm shift has not yet occurred. Making this shift would require government agencies to move beyond their departmental comfort zones and into an intercultural space, one that demands letting go of assumptions and being genuinely open to alternative ways of working.

“[Government agencies] are used to being in control but this is different...this causes nervousness in the room.” – *Officer of Department of Justice (2024)*

Some individuals and agencies have shown a willingness and success in working with KJ and Martu in this new paradigm. One clear program-level example of this is KJ’s Social Programs and specifically, how Yiwarra Kuju emerged out of the MLP. In this program, key players in the WA Department of Justice and connected agencies have committed to working with Martu in a new way – way that has been conceptualised and is being delivered in partnership with Martu. The development and implementation of the Social Programs, including Yiwarra Kuju, by MLP has demonstrated an openness from non-Martu partners and readiness to embrace innovation and this discomfort. Social programs are genuinely Martu-conceived and are addressing specific issues that have been identified by Martu, and ongoing learnings voiced both by community and observed by mainstream institutions are being used to adapt implementation rather than adhering to preconceived program requirements design.

Government staff and senior civil servants have reflected on their experiences working with Martu in the Social Programs and the impact of the MLP. They have consistently highlighted the importance of innovation, flexibility, and pushing the boundaries of conventional thinking. They have also stressed the importance of trusting that Aboriginal people understand what they need better than anyone else.

“Government needs to learn that Elders and community know what they need and what will work, as opposed to just wanting to deliver a service. If there is a strategy and it can work in the parameters of

government, it should be enabled.” – *Manager, Pilbara Reform, Department of Communities (2024)*

“KJ is highly regarded in Government as a trusted partner working in the best interests of Martu and helping to develop the next generation of Martu leaders.” – *Craig Ward, Executive Director, Remote Aboriginal Communities – Emergency Mobilisation Unit, WA Dept of Premier & Cabinet*

“The MLP has encouraged government to think differently and trust that Aboriginal people understand their issues better than anyone else and what’s needed to support them in how they want to create a better future for their people” – *Officer at Department of Justice (2024)*

“[Government agencies] need the opportunity to be flexible and to be able to try something different. We should be able to try push the edges a little bit, even if it is still within the same parameters...I feel more confident pushing back on Government because I’ve seen working with KJ and Martu works” – *Director, People Place and Community, Pilbara Development Commission (2024)*

Aboriginal-led innovation does not exclude non-Martu stakeholders such as government officials. In order to attract funding, solutions must in some way deliver what government values. This is not a contradiction, but an extension of a genuine and authentic partnership in an intercultural space, one built on mutual respect and shared benefit. Martu and non-Martu are working in partnership, and both play an active role. Government is not automatically taking the lead, but instead being open and ready to innovate alongside Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Ultimately, these reflections demonstrate that government has shown both willingness and capability to work within a new paradigm alongside Martu. KJ has been highly successful in enabling these partnerships to flourish, and government agencies are beginning to see the outcomes of this approach.

The effectiveness of the KJ Model

The evidence presented above demonstrates that the KJ Model has been highly successful.

Martu see and value KJ as a Martu organisation – as their organisation, and as their strategy and means to shape a future for Martu people in contemporary Australia. This is most strongly seen where KJ has supported Martu to create and implement new solutions to address the issues that matter to Martu.

Non-Martu stakeholders and institutions consistently assess KJ’s programs and approach as effective, high performing and unique. Most importantly for the non-Martu perspective, KJ can point to multiple examples where government agencies have been willing to work in a new paradigm – in forming partnerships and relationships with Martu, listening to and respecting Martu perspectives, and being open to creating new programs and processes – and learned that this delivers significant value and better outcomes for all sides.

The KJ Model works for Martu, and it provides important lessons and opportunities for how governments might make the paradigm shift that is needed to deliver real outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Appendix 2: Review findings on Closing the Gap

The below table summarises the Productivity Commission and Coalition of Peaks findings on the first three Priority Reforms. The first three reforms have the greatest relevance for how governments engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. The fourth reform, which focuses on government use and management of personal data, is important, but less directly aligned with the type of systemic change the KJ Model is positioned to support.

“Government’s aspiration” <i>Priority Reforms outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap</i>	“The reality” <i>Findings from the Productivity Commission and Coalition of Peaks’ reviews</i>
<p>Priority Reform 1: Shared decision-making. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.</p> <p>Priority Reform 1 commits governments to share decision making through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy partnerships • Place-based partnerships • Reviewing and strengthening existing partnerships 	<p>Productivity Commission</p> <p>Headline: Governments have not fundamentally shifted their operating model; many still consult on predetermined outcomes, reflecting a ‘government knows best’ mindset.</p> <p><u>What’s working well</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some governments have demonstrated that shared decision-making through genuine power-sharing is possible (e.g. Victoria’s Treaty process; the COVID-19 response). However, these examples have relied on individual leadership and sustained advocacy from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities <p><u>What’s not working well</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships are often viewed by governments as an output or deliverable, rather than as mechanisms for empowering shared decision-making and self-determination. Place-based and policy-level partnerships have been slow to establish. • Grassroots organisations and regional priorities are underrepresented in decision-making and governments tend to work with organisations that are viewed as ‘creatures of government’. • Limited timeframes and funding are impeding the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to participate fully in partnerships, when core service delivery work is a priority. <p>Coalition of Peaks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships often fall short of true power-sharing. Governments frequently default to consultation models rather than relinquishing control and embedding shared authority. • A shift to ‘right relationships’ is needed. This requires mutual recognition, shared authority, and governments rethinking hierarchical, colonial structures .

Priority Reform 2: Building the community-controlled sector.

There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.

Priority Reform 2 commits government to build the ACCO sector through two mechanisms:

- Sector strengthening plans (SSPs), which identify measures to build the capability of specific sectors
- Expenditure reviews and funding prioritisation efforts, which seek to increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

Priority Reform 3: Transforming government organisations.

Governments, their organisations

- Clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities are required. Many parties remain unclear on what shared decision-making should look like in practice.

Productivity Commission

Headline: Governments have not yet shifted from service delivery to sector development, which is the core intent of this Priority Reform.

What's working well

- There has been some progress against the two mechanisms, with multiple SSPs being delivered and a few jurisdictions have undertaken funding reviews and are beginning to move towards commissioning approaches that prioritise ACCOs.

What's not working well

- Generally, while the transfer of service to ACCOs is occurring in some jurisdictions, efforts are slow or ad hoc and do not reflect the systemic changes necessary to transform service systems.
- The SSPs are not always driving transformative change. Many SSP actions predate the Agreement or lack detail, timeframes, and resourcing, limiting their utility and enforceability.
- ACCOs are still seen as funding recipients rather than key partners in delivering outcomes, and services are often transferred into the ACCO sector without redesigning them to align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and measures of success.
- Short-term and inflexible funding continues to limit ACCO sustainability and investment in ACCO capacity and infrastructure remains inconsistent and inadequate.

Coalition of Peaks

- Funding cycles are short-term and burdensome. This undermines sustainability and places unnecessary pressure on ACCOs.
- Self-determination is constrained. Overly bureaucratic processes, heavy reporting, and government-set targets/timeframes stifle community-driven agendas.
- Accountability is one-way. Current mechanisms focus on governments holding ACCOs accountable through reporting, without reciprocal structures to hold governments accountable to communities for their own commitments and performance.

Productivity Commission

Headline: Overall, governments have not yet demonstrated the will or mechanisms to deliver the deep institutional reform envisioned. Lack of

and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.

Priority Reform 3 commits government to transformation that includes six elements:

- Systemic and structural change
- Improving accountability
- Changing how they respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Identifying and eliminating racism
- Embedding and practicing meaningful cultural safety
- Improving engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

progress on Priority Reform 3 is putting the other Priority Reforms and the Agreement as a whole at risk.

What's working well

- Governments are pursuing actions aligned with the six transformational elements to varying degrees of effectiveness, including:
 - Rolling out cultural capability training.
 - Developing strategies to increase employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the public sector.
 - Conducting self-assessments to evaluate current practice and plan improvements.

What's not working well

- However, these actions are largely piecemeal and often lack relevance to the deeper task of organisational transformation.
- Governments have taken a narrow view of racism, focusing mainly on individual behaviours (e.g. through training and employment initiatives) rather than confronting the structural and systemic drivers of institutionalised racism.
- Cultural safety efforts are mostly limited to cultural competency training programs, which alone are insufficient to shift organisational culture.
- Transformation requirements do not extend to service providers funded by government. Any progress in that sector relies on organisational goodwill, not accountability mechanisms.

Coalition of Peaks

- Systemic transformation is lacking. Progress has been inconsistent, with piecemeal approaches instead of structural reforms.
- Racism remains a core barrier. Governments have yet to meaningfully address structural and systemic racism within their organisations .
- Cultural safety initiatives are inadequate. transactional, compliance-based exercises that fail to lead to meaningful or sustained change
- Independent accountability is urgently needed. Current mechanisms do not ensure transparency or systemic transformation .



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