

# **Yuwaya Ngarra-li**

## **2020-2023 Evaluation and Learning Report**

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June 2024



# Acknowledgements and Contents

This report summarises the 2020-2023 outcomes and lessons from the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and UNSW Sydney.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li aims to improve the wellbeing, environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett, while refining and evaluating this as a new model of community-university collaboration.

Specific projects in this period resourced by a grant from the Paul Ramsay Foundation focused on reducing Aboriginal young people's contact with the criminal justice system, improving food and water security and care for Country, building Aboriginal community capabilities and control, developing new housing models and reducing fine debt.

The evaluation methodology for Yuwaya Ngarra-li is informed by its context and purpose in working deeply in one place led by a local Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to build and influence broader systems change. A developmental evaluation approach to understanding and documenting progress and impact has been enabled by an embedded Research and Evaluation team at UNSW (A/Prof Ruth McCausland, Dr Rebecca Reeve and Peta MacGillivray) working with long-term external advisor May Miller-Dawkins.

*Suggested citation: R McCausland, R Reeve, P MacGillivray & M Miller-Dawkins (2024) Yuwaya Ngarra-li 2020-2023 Evaluation and Learning Report, UNSW Sydney.*

The authors of this report would like to thank the Elders and staff of the Dharriwaa Elders Group and all Walgett community members who contributed knowledge and information included in this Evaluation and Learning Report. We pay our respects to the custodians and Elders of the Gamilaraay, Ngayiimbaa, Wayilwan and Yuwaalaraay nations in the Walgett region.

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## CONTEXT:

# The Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership

In 2016, the DEG invited UNSW Sydney to work with them longer-term around their vision for positive social change in their community after collaborating on a research study from 2012-2015. The DEG named the partnership 'Yuwaya Ngarra-li' ('vision' in the Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay languages), to reflect that the partnership represents the DEG's vision for community-led development and positive change:

*The DEG aim to restore a robust belonging to thriving families, community and Country, while making our place in the nation and sharing our learning with other communities (Dharriwaa Elders Group, 2016).*

The purpose of Yuwaya Ngarra-li is for the DEG and UNSW to work together to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett, while refining and evaluating this as a model of community-university collaboration: CommUNITY-Led Development.

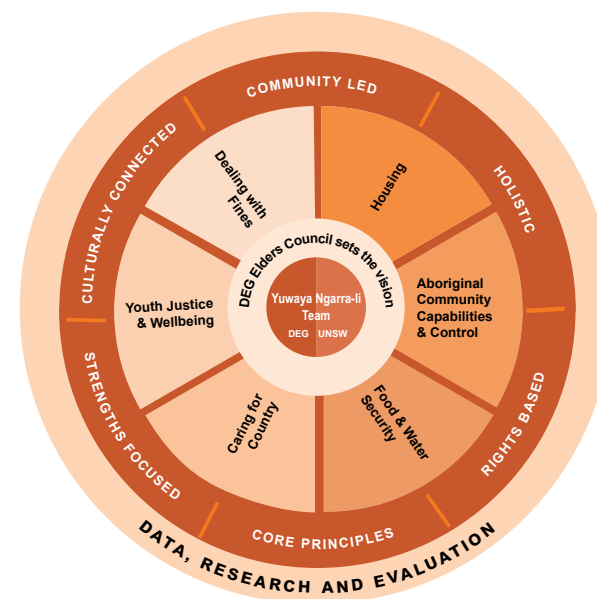
The DEG Elders Council set the vision and protocols for the partnership. The Walgett-based team engages, facilitates, communicates and advocates for community needs and priorities, and provides services and support in key areas. The UNSW-based team is focused on research, learning and evaluation; they coordinate UNSW

expertise, influence and projects that respond to community needs and priorities, while gathering and analysing data to inform and refine Yuwaya Ngarra-li's approach. The teams work closely together to develop, test, reflect on, document and refine strategies, initiatives and models to build learning and the evidence base for community-led solutions.

In 2018 and 2019, the Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) provided funding for a Diagnostic and Planning Phase for Yuwaya Ngarra-li. At the end of that period, PRF committed three years further funding for a Building Phase. Since January 2020, PRF has resourced a core team in Walgett and at UNSW with a specific focus on reducing Aboriginal young people's contact with the justice system, improving food and water security and caring for Country, and building Aboriginal community capabilities and control. Due to a COVID-related underspend, in 2022, new projects focusing on addressing fine debt and housing were resourced and the grant period was extended by six months to June 2023. In 2023, PRF committed a further three years funding to Yuwaya Ngarra-li until June 2026.

## YUWAYA NGARRA-LI

A community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW



## COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

# Executive Summary

## **The Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW contributed to more than 460 outcomes\* from January 2020 to December 2023.**

For Aboriginal people in Walgett, this included 148 outcomes such as addressing \$233,005 worth of fine debt written or worked off while participating in community and cultural activities and accessing mental health services; 50 drought-proof garden beds in the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service community garden produced fresh fruit and vegetables for people with chronic diseases; and \$121,715 worth of meals, water and grocery vouchers provided to community members under financial stress.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li also contributed to 147 place-based outcomes that benefited all people in Walgett, including developing and installing the 'Gali' water kiosk in the DEG shopfront, the only safe source of public drinking water in Walgett. All Walgett residents had access to improved COVID communication, PPE and vaccination options. The Walgett Shire Council provided renewed access to the weir on the river for recreational purposes for all community members after sustained advocacy.

At a systemic level, Yuwaya Ngarra-li contributed to 166 outcomes including influencing government water policy, contributing to the withdrawal of

COVID fines, and having approaches adapted and used by other researchers and communities.

A new holistic model for diverting children and young people from the justice system was designed, tested and refined, creating new positive non-justice pathways to address the social determinants of criminalisation and incarceration. The percentage of Aboriginal young people in Walgett appearing in the Children's Court decreased by 32% from 2016 to 2021.

A new team of Walgett river rangers – the Ngarrangarra-li Walaaybaa (Look After Home Country) Rangers – was established, fulfilling a long-term vision of the Elders. The ranger team are now caring for local rivers, testing water quality and tracking fish and bird life after funding was secured from the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The team of Walgett Aboriginal people employed through Yuwaya Ngarra-li grew to 13 over the three years, working on locally-led projects that are addressing multiple issues of community priority including the poor state of local rivers, over-policing, the lack of affordable healthy food, and energy poverty.

During this time, the DEG became known on the national policy landscape for its advocacy and contribution to providing community-led solutions

to some of Australia's most pressing challenges, including improving testing and vaccination for COVID and addressing the limitations of police-led approaches in times of crisis.

### **What It takes to see these outcomes**

Since the Dharriwaa Elders Group invited UNSW to work in partnership, a great deal has been learnt about what it takes to see the outcomes achieved for Aboriginal people in Walgett as well as at a place-based and systems level:

- Vision and shared values
- Sustained & flexible philanthropic funding
- Reflective practice
- Working holistically across policy domains
- Local Aboriginal staff
- Addressing ongoing racism and remoteness
- University capability to work in a genuinely community-led way

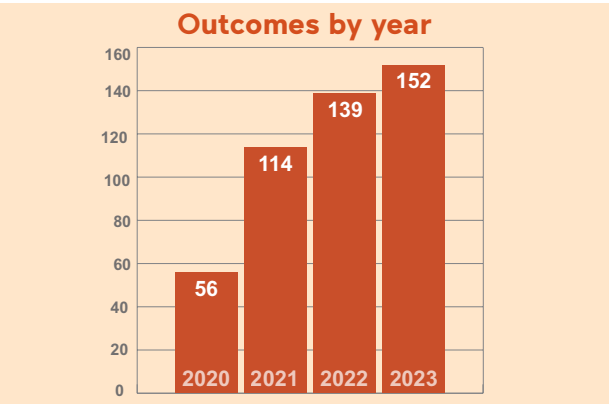
For more discussion on these points, see page 20

\* Outcomes counted were actions by or changes for individuals, organisations, groups or institutions influenced by Yuwaya Ngarra-li, not activities or actions taken by Yuwaya Ngarra-li.



# Summary of Outcomes

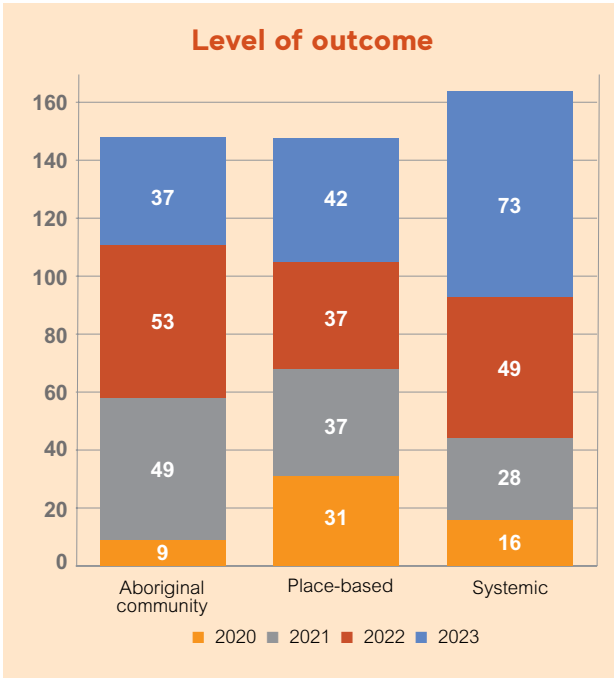
In the period 2020-2023 Yuwaya Ngarra-li contributed to 461 identifiable outcomes – actions by or changes for individuals, organisations, groups or institutions influenced by Yuwaya Ngarra-li. Outcomes were collected over time from external communications, research, media, records of meetings, staff reflections and internal logs. We believe that this set underestimates outcomes – particularly benefits to individuals from advocacy by DEG’s community troubleshooters and other direct support that isn’t always recorded in detail. However, we are confident it is a credible set that helps us understand how and under what conditions Yuwaya Ngarra-li is having an impact.



The 461 outcomes demonstrate the growing influence and impact of Yuwaya Ngarra-li over time, from 56 outcomes in 2020 to 152 in 2023 (see Outcomes by year graph above).

The outcomes make clear the distinctive contribution of this place-based initiative led by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, oriented to contributing to broader shifts in systems that impact conditions in that place. Yuwaya Ngarra-li has demonstrated impact in Walgett and a growing influence beyond Walgett – in the far west region, across NSW, nationally, and also with practice and research contributions recognised internationally (see Level of outcome graph to the right).

Analysis of the level of outcomes demonstrates another important dimension of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li holistic approach to improving wellbeing and caring for Country in Walgett: that while the focus is on the Aboriginal community, there have been just as many outcomes that benefit everyone in Walgett. These place-based outcomes include environmental improvements, better access to COVID communication, testing, PPE and vaccination, and the creation of publicly accessible clean drinking water.



The table on the next page highlights examples of outcomes contributing to each goal, organised by the level of outcome.

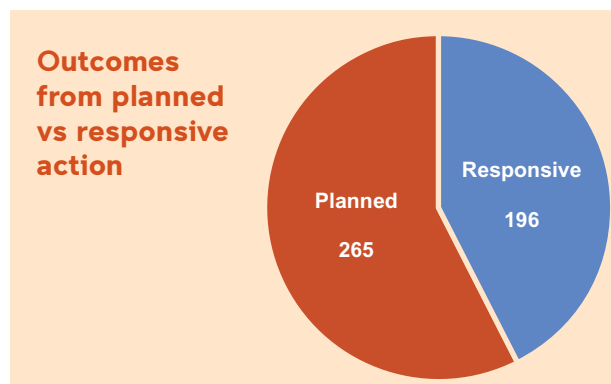
# Examples of Outcomes Contributing to Long-Term Goals

YUWAYA NGARRA-LI GOALS	ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY OUTCOMES	PLACE-BASED OUTCOMES	SYSTEMIC OUTCOMES
<b>Reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people successfully complete youth justice conferencing processes, improving diversion from the criminal justice system and engagement with support services and school, after support from DEG staff.</li> <li>Young people supported to access ID cards and other documents to reduce criminalisation.</li> <li>\$233,005 worth of fine debt written or worked off through the Dealing with Fines program, including Work and Development Orders involving accessing mental health treatment and participation in community activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased use of diversionary options under the Young Offenders Act by police in Walgett since the development and implementation of the Two River Pathway to Change youth diversion model.</li> <li>Improved coordination between Walgett police, courts and DCJ representatives through the Holistic Working Group facilitated by DEG/Yuwaya Ngarra-li.</li> <li>Cleaning up of Walgett waterways and public gathering spots on the river along with improvements to DEG's Walking Tracks by Dealing with Fines team clients participating in Work and Development Orders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LECC Monitoring Report on the NSW Police Force Aboriginal Strategic Direction 2018-2023 specifically highlights Walgett fines and the work of DEG as evidence of need for systemic reform in police practice.</li> <li>NSW Police stop using STMP on young people ahead of a LECC finding of maladministration based on the evidence of over-policing of Aboriginal children and young people from NSW Police data, including in Walgett as illustrated in YN publications.</li> </ul>
<b>Improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50 water-efficient garden beds in WAMS community garden producing average of 39 kilos of produce per month, supplying WAMS clients with chronic diseases and other Aboriginal community members through the Food and Water for Life program.</li> <li>\$121,715 worth of fresh food boxes, drinking water and grocery vouchers provided to Aboriginal families in Walgett during times of financial hardship including COVID lockdowns and floods via DEG fundraising drive through website and social media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School implements healthy canteen plan on recommendations from School Reference Group and DEG, with nutrition advice from YN collaborators.</li> <li>NSW Government commits funding to enable emergency repairs to re-open Walgett pool for summer in response to advocacy by DEG and others.</li> <li>Improved access to COVID testing, PPE, vaccination and related data in Walgett after DEG and WAMS advocacy supported by YN.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal Government announces rethink of proposed reforms to funding of aged care services like those run by DEG after advocacy on potential negative impacts including in YN Briefing Paper: Caring for Elders, Community and Culture.</li> <li>Food and Water for Life program profiled for United Nations Food Systems Summit on Walgett ACCOs community-led solutions.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training and employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60 refurbished laptops distributed to Walgett and Collarenebri students to support home learning during COVID lockdowns after DEG facilitated donations from philanthropists.</li> <li>8 Aboriginal staff of DEG accessed TAFE NSW training including certificates in community services and ecosystem management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved access to vocational education and training courses for students at Walgett Community College after consultant engaged by DEG/YN to develop VET proposal with the School Reference Group is employed to implement program by Walgett Community College.</li> <li>Cert II in Ecosystem Management delivered locally at Walgett TAFE for the first time after DEG advocacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT expands its Civil Law of specialist fines solicitors to receive timely and quality legal advice and Legal Aid NSW puts more resources into Work Development Order support following effective collaboration in the model developed by DEG/YN through its Dealing with Fines program.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased sustainable management of water and Country</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elders spending more time on Country around Walgett and passing on cultural knowledge to Ngarrangarra-li Walaaybaa Rangers and other community members.</li> <li>Increased local knowledge of water policy through community education and yarning sessions held at DEG and online.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The only public source of filtered drinking water available through GALI kiosk in DEG shopfront.</li> <li>Renewed access to the Namoi and Barwon rivers near Walgett weir following 20 year effort by DEG to ensure ongoing access to the weir site and river.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NSW Government withdraws 7 Water Resource Plans for over extraction of rivers including 5 plans with water shares for all floodplain harvesting in the northern basin after long-term advocacy by DEG and others.</li> <li>International journal Nature cites DEG and WAMS-led community survey as eg of the power of the HWISE tool in measuring and holding governments accountable.</li> </ul>
<b>Greater Aboriginal community control and capability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13 local Aboriginal people employed by DEG/YN at end of 2023.</li> <li>Community members have access to family history sessions from NTSCorp historian with DEG support.</li> <li>Aboriginal community priorities inserted into Plan of Management of Lightning Ridge Opal Reserve after DEG advocacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved crisis response by Walgett Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) as a result of including representatives from DEG and WAMS demonstrating critical role of ACCOs in coordinating and communicating local response.</li> <li>Submission for new resources for social housing by Walgett Shire Council includes local housing data compiled by YN following invitation by General Manager to DEG.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NSW Government using YN's work on linked administrative data to improve access for small communities in the future and operationalisation of Indigenous Data Governance.</li> <li>Treasury highlights DEG/YN's work on improving government contracting and procurement in <u>Indigenous Expenditure Report 2021-22</u>.</li> <li>DEG-led YN publications used in university social work, health and criminal justice course materials.</li> </ul>

# Summary of Outcomes

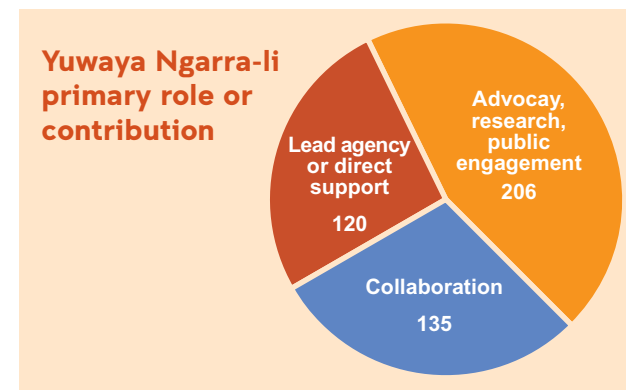
The outcomes provide insights into how Yuwaya Ngarra-li contributes to change. Firstly, the outcomes demonstrate three primary roles:

- 206 outcomes were the result of advocacy, research and public engagement efforts
- 135 resulted from collaboration with other agencies or institutions
- 120 were produced through direct support, for example directly working with community members or groups.



An important insight that has emerged from analysis of outcomes is that a significant proportion (over 40%) emerge from responsive rather than planned action taken by the Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li. This includes responding to emerging political issues (e.g. proposed water legislation), providing support to community and speaking out for approaches or resources needed during times of crisis (e.g. floods, COVID, local supermarket burning down), and being responsive to what is happening in Walgett at a particular time (e.g. spike in fines, closure of the local pool).

The ability to act responsively in service of long-term goals is enabled by clear principles guiding the work, alongside flexible philanthropic funding that can support relevant adaptations to priorities or approaches as conditions change, opportunities arise or lessons are learnt. In this period, new approaches to community priorities – on fine debt, housing, and energy poverty – were able to develop into active areas of work with new partnerships due to the responsive approach of Yuwaya Ngarra-li and its flexible funding.



*From page 10, the report highlights the outcomes for Yuwaya Ngarra-li projects on Youth Justice and Wellbeing, Dealing with Fines, Water and Country, Aboriginal Community Capabilities and Control, and Housing Models. Other outcomes recorded related to areas such as infrastructure, data, health and wellbeing not connected to those projects.*

# Yuwaya Ngarra-li Evaluation & Learning 2020-2023

## Questions

Q1

What are the contributions of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership to improving the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett?

Q2

What is being learned about this as a model of community-university partnership in setting up, managing and maintaining the conditions for individual, community, place-based and systemic change?

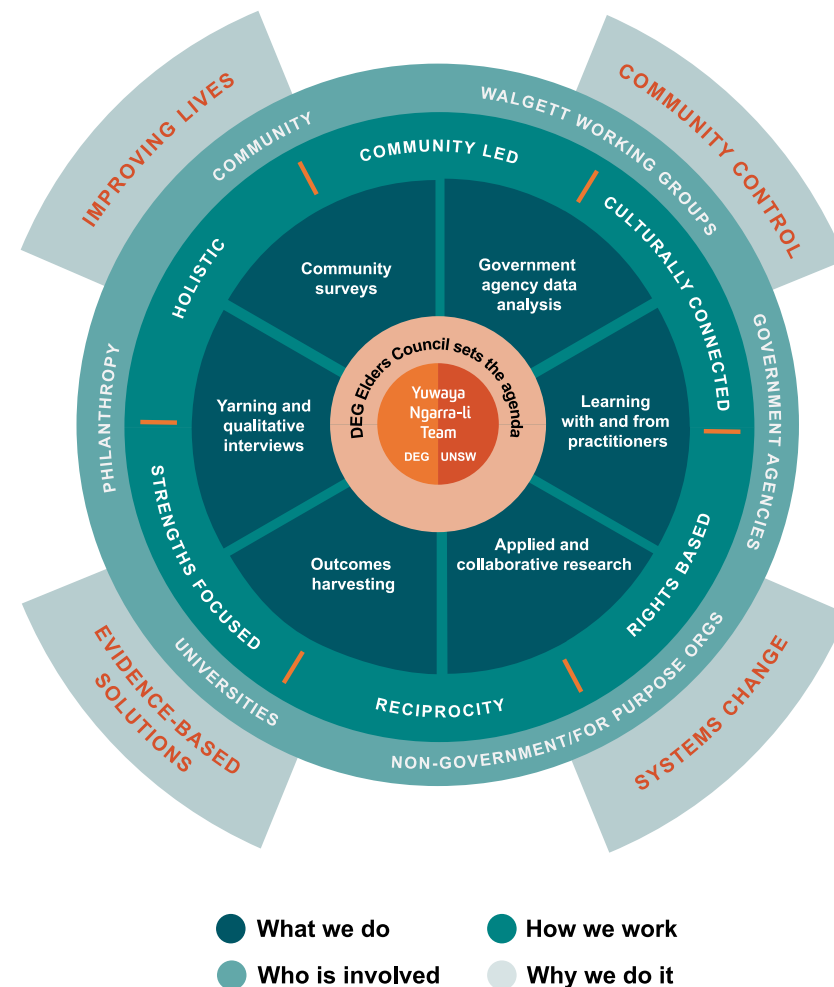
## Methodology

Yuwaya Ngarra-li has taken an embedded, developmental and mixed methods approach to evaluation.

An embedded approach has made sense based on the nature of the community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW, bringing the university's expertise to create the basis for integrated and ongoing learning, evaluation and research.

A developmental approach has been appropriate due to the aim of developing and testing a new model of supporting Aboriginal community-controlled initiatives and university partnership, with a focus on actionable learning for the benefit of the Walgett community and to be shared more broadly.

## Yuwaya Ngarra-li's approach to research and evaluation





## Yuwaya Ngarra-li Projects: Activity & Results



**YOUTH  
JUSTICE &  
WELLBEING**



**DEALING  
WITH  
FINES**



**WATER &  
COUNTRY**



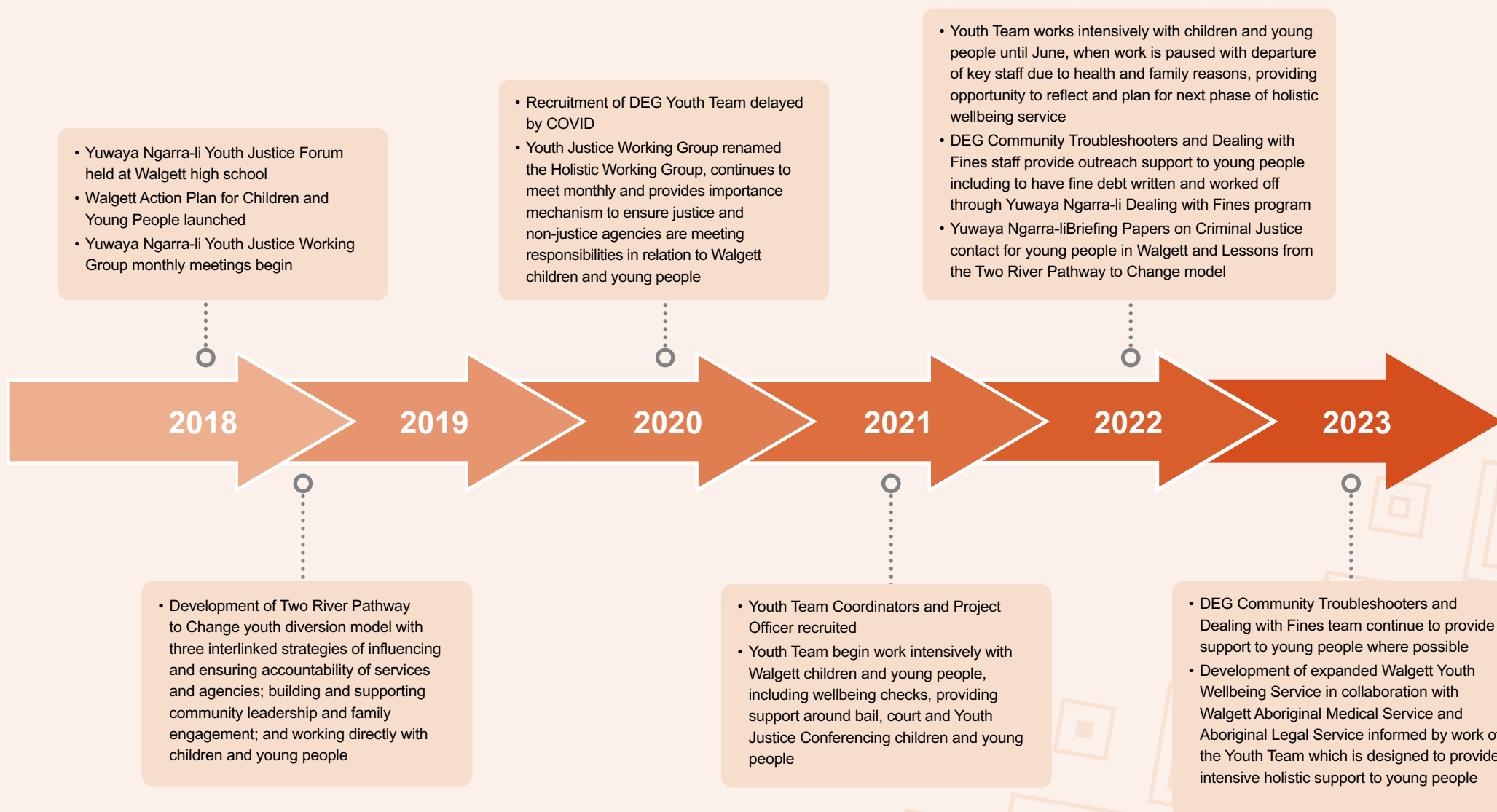
**ABORIGINAL  
COMMUNITY  
CONTROL &  
CAPABILITIES**



**HOUSING**

## Timeline of Activity

# Youth Justice & Wellbeing



# Results: Youth Justice & Wellbeing

GOAL	KPIs	DATA SOURCES	RESULTS
Develop, implement and refine a holistic evidence-informed and locally developed diversion program to reduce Aboriginal young people's contact with the justice system and improve alternative opportunities and pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less than 10% of Aboriginal children &amp; young people appear in Children's Court</li> <li>Aboriginal community members report greater understanding &amp; accountability re: police powers and conduct</li> <li>30% increase in self-reported rates of belonging, safety, support &amp; wellbeing by young people in program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BOCSAR data</li> <li>Census data</li> <li>Community surveys (46 adults and service providers surveyed for baseline in 2018 and 2019)</li> <li>Children and young people surveys (49 Aboriginal children and young people surveyed for baseline in 2018 and 2019)</li> <li>YN program logs</li> <li>Research and evaluation workshop notes</li> <li>Reflection and planning session notes</li> <li>YN progress tracker</li> <li>YN outcomes harvesting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two River Pathway to Change youth diversion model developed, implemented and refined.</li> <li>7.8 % of Aboriginal children &amp; young people aged 10-17 appeared in Children's Court in 2021 (Census comparison year)</li> <li>DEG provided direct assistance to 144 Aboriginal community members to improve accountability re police powers and conduct</li> <li>Rates of belonging, safety, support &amp; wellbeing by young people not able to be measured in follow up surveys in reporting period.</li> </ul>

Since 2020, Yuwaya Ngarra-li has made significant progress and impact in relation to its community-led model of diversion from the criminal justice system, contributing to 101 outcomes. The Two River Pathway to Change model was further developed, tested, documented and refined during this period, informed by international evidence and local priorities that gives simultaneous attention and directs strategies at the systemic, community and individual level to effect change.

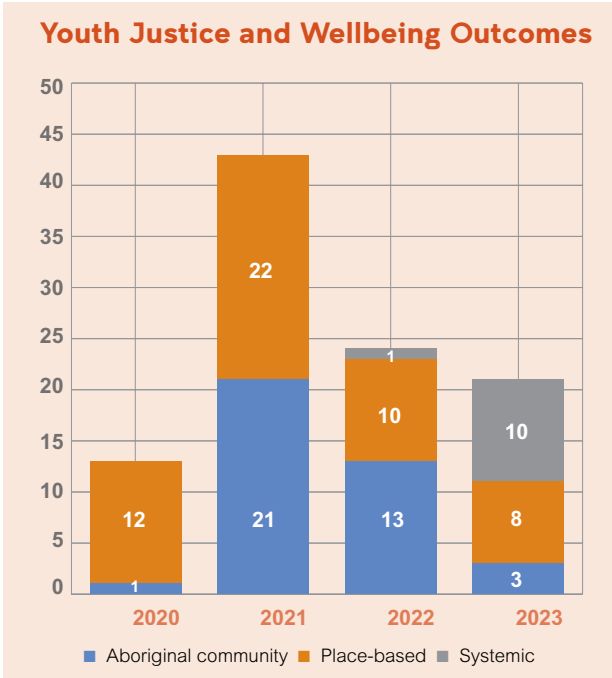
This included:

- Influencing and ensuring accountability of services and agencies e.g. monthly Walgett Holistic Working Group involving justice and non-justice actors
- Building and supporting community leadership and family engagement e.g. working with WAMS and the ALS to build ACCO collaboration
- Working directly with children and young people through outreach by community troubleshooters, workshops, wellbeing checks and intensive support provided by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Youth Team in 2021-2022.

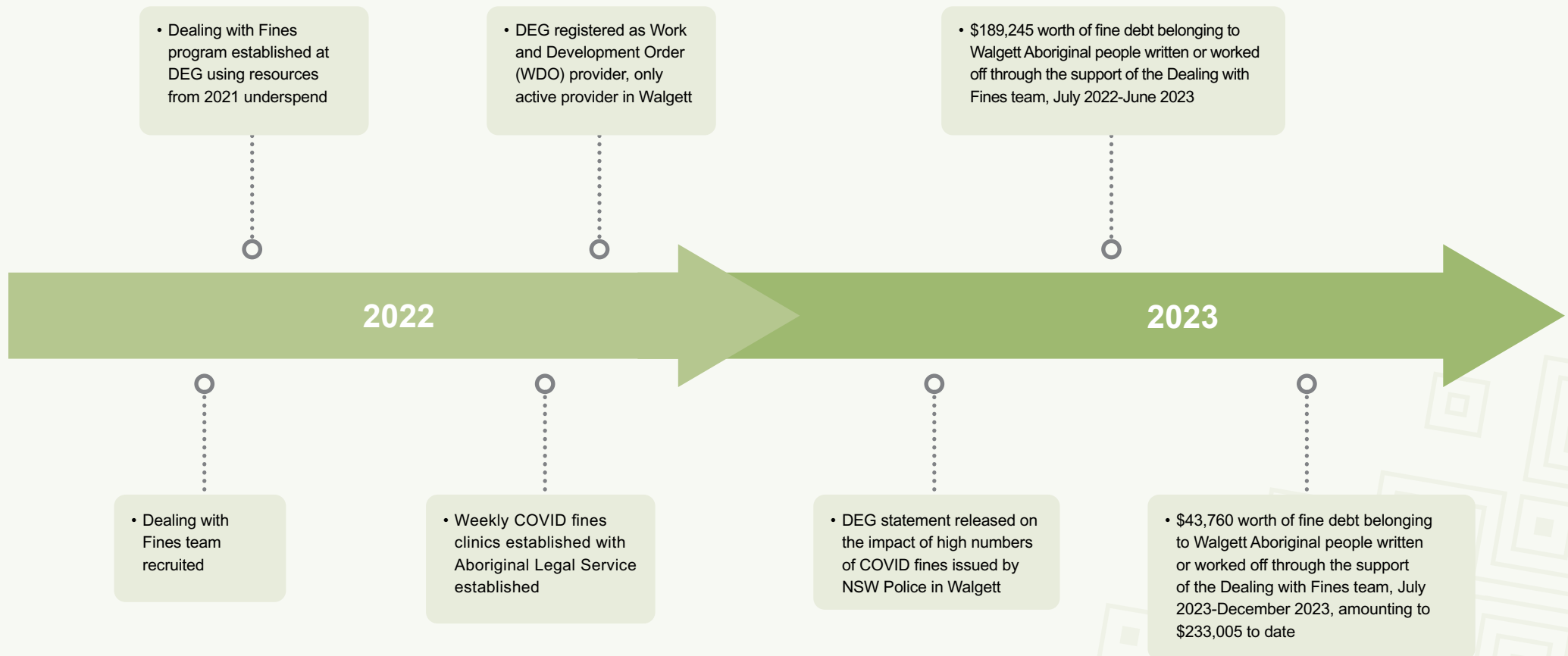
As a result, the KPI of less than 10% of Aboriginal children & young people appearing in the Children's Court was exceeded, with the most recent available data indicating it to be 7.8% (a figure that there will be capacity to track and measure more precisely in the future with Yuwaya Ngarra-li's customised linked administrative dataset).

DEG provided direct assistance to 144 Aboriginal community members around criminal justice-related matters. This included intensive support of 17 young people by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Youth Team that operated from June 2021 to June 2022. The impact of the youth team is visible in the outcomes. Their work fed into the development of the Dealing with Fines program that achieved significant outcomes since it was established in 2022.

In 2023, the approach and lessons from the Two River Pathway to Change program underpinned the development of a new Walgett Youth Wellbeing Service through a collaborative process between DEG, WAMS and the ALS. That service is due to begin operation in Walgett in 2024.



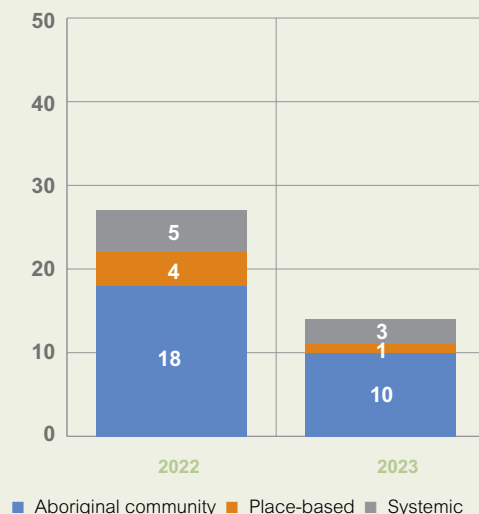
# Dealing with Fines



## Results: Dealing with Fines

GOAL	KPIs	DATA SOURCES	RESULTS
Develop a Work and Development Order (WDO) program so the DEG, as an approved WDO sponsor, can support Walgett Community members to have their fines written off or to sign up to the WDO and facilitate WDO activities they can engage in to clear fine debts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the number of people supported to have their fines written off or to participate in WDO activities to clear their fines</li> <li>Calculate the total amount of fines written off via the WDO program</li> <li>Compile case studies that illustrate the links between fine debt and criminal justice pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revenue NSW fines dashboard</li> <li>Dealing with Fines program data</li> <li>YN outcomes harvesting</li> <li>Research and evaluation workshop notes</li> <li>Reflection and planning session notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEG registered as WDO provider and Dealing with Fines program designed, established and operational</li> <li>\$233, 005 of fine debt cleared with the support of the Dealing with Fines team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$82, 792 worth of fine debt worked off via the DEG WDO program</li> <li>\$150, 213 worth of fine debt written off with legal advice from the ALS</li> </ul> </li> <li>From July 22-June 23, 37 people supported to work off their debt through WDOs and 50 people supported to have their debt written off with legal advice</li> <li>From July 23-Dec 23, 13 people supported to work off their debt through WDOs and 15 people supported to have their debt written off with legal advice</li> <li>5 case studies of WDO clients compiled</li> </ul>

Dealing with Fines Outcomes



The Dealing with Fines project was established in 2022; Walgett community members received the highest rates of COVID fines in NSW, and a COVID-related underspend enabled the employment of the Dealing with Fines team at the DEG. It has emerged as an exemplar of Yuwaya Ngarra-li's strategy and strengths, contributing to 41 outcomes since then.

*“What we know is that there is no evidence that the heavy use of fines has benefited our community or achieved any public health outcome. Now we must take precious resources from our front-line services to address the harm caused by the heavy use of Public Health Order fines in Walgett by police officers.”*

Statement by the Dharriwaa Elders Group, 5 May 2022. (<https://dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/DEGStatement5May2022.pdf>)

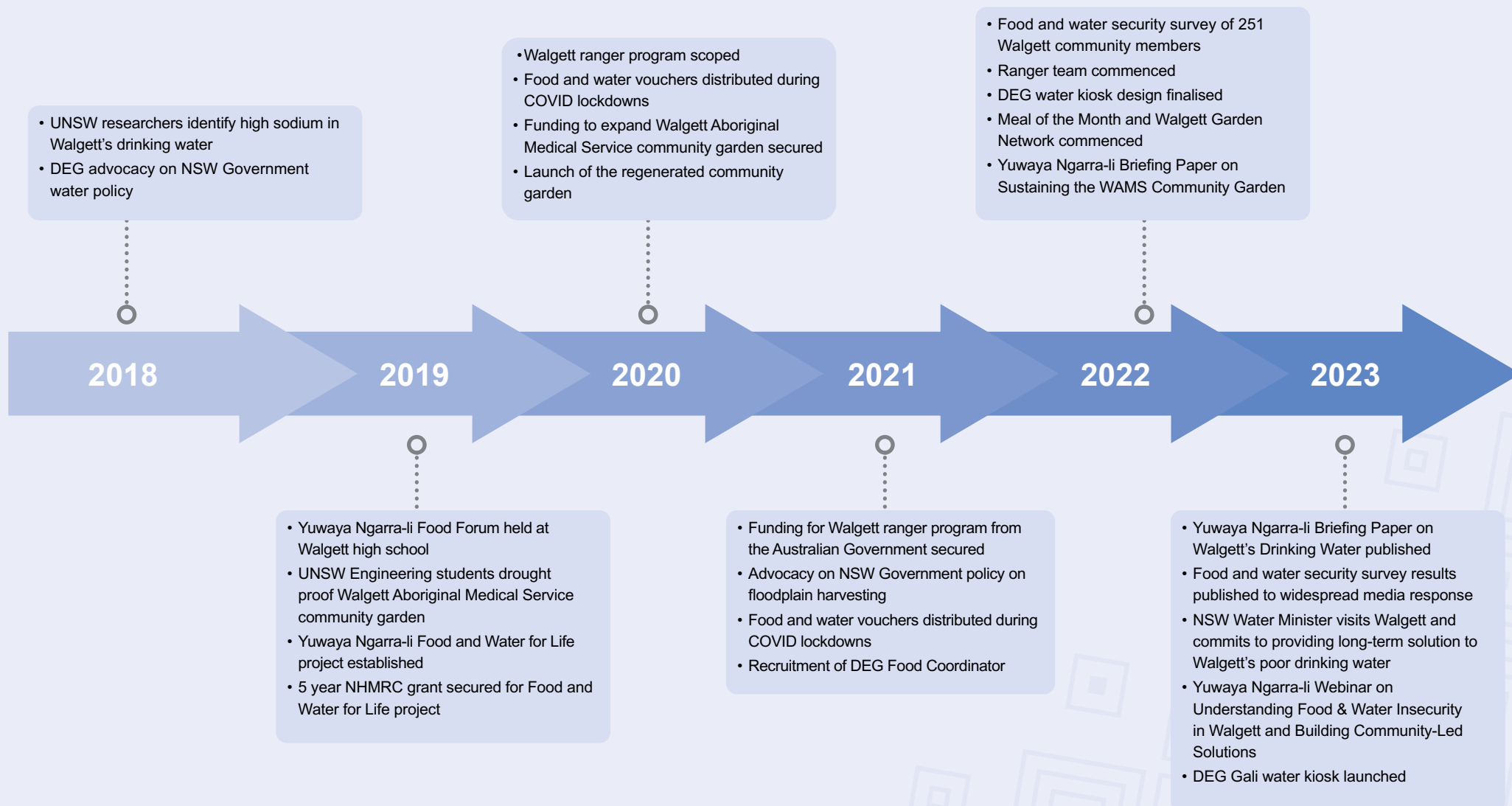
It combines three key roles that DEG and Yuwaya Ngarra-li can effectively play: direct support to community members; collaborating with and building capability of both ACCOs and mainstream agencies; and advocacy and public engagement grounded in data and research.

Outcomes have been achieved through a strong community-led team at the DEG, along with expert support from UNSW advisors and the ALS Civil Law team and Legal Aid.

Sustained advocacy from DEG and Yuwaya Ngarra-li and analysis of fines and policing data helped to draw attention to how fine debt locks people out of education and employment and increases criminalisation, and contributed to systemic efforts to have fines withdrawn.



# Water & Country



Results:  
Water & Country

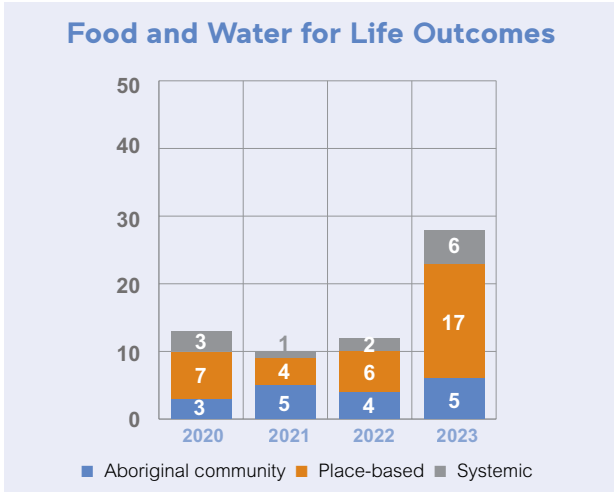
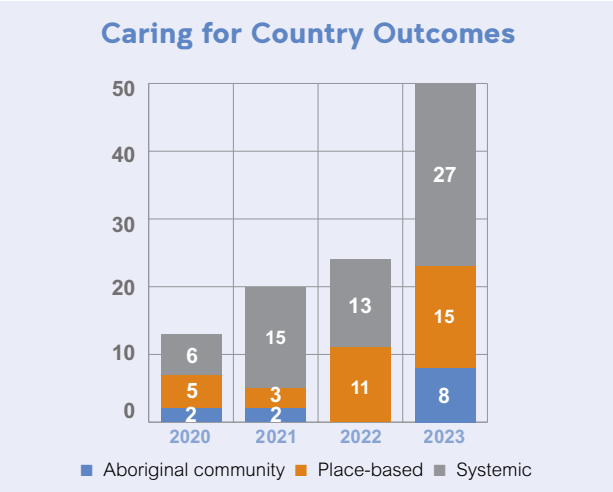
GOAL	KPIS	DATA SOURCES	RESULTS
Influencing improved community access and sustainable management of water and Country, focusing first on access to safe drinking water and the development of on-Country activities and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100% of Walgett population have access to safe drinking water</li><li>• 100% of households with people with chronic diseases have access to regular supply of locally grown fruit &amp; vegetables</li><li>• 6 Aboriginal people employed in on-Country and water ranger program</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surveys of 251 community members of levels and experiences of food and water insecurity</li><li>• Water quality testing</li><li>• Water kiosks installed and maintained</li><li>• Community garden output</li><li>• Walgett AMS client data</li><li>• Funding contract</li><li>• YN staff employed</li><li>• Research and evaluation workshop notes</li><li>• Reflection and planning session notes</li><li>• YN outcomes harvesting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food and Water for Life program established and operational</li><li>• 100% of Walgett population have access to safe drinking water as a result of DEG and others' advocacy and design and installation of DEG Gali water kiosk</li><li>• 100% of households of people with chronic diseases have access to regular supply of locally grown fruit and vegetables through WAMS community garden enabled by effective irrigation solutions and expansion supported by YN. The Food and Water for Life program also improving community access to fresh, healthy meals through Meal of the Month, IGA Healthy Supermarket collaboration, meal deliveries and food vouchers</li><li>• 8 Aboriginal people employed in Walgett river ranger program</li></ul>

This area of Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work saw significant growth and impact since 2020, from the community surveying and advocacy associated with food and water security and the establishment of the Elders' long-term vision for a local ranger program. The breadth of work in this area led to a shift to categorising it as two projects: Food and Water for Life and Caring for Country.

The Food and Water for Life project, bolstered by an NHMRC grant, has contributed to 63 outcomes with increasing systemic impact. The Yuwaya Ngarra-li community surveys of the levels of food and water insecurity amongst Aboriginal community members in Walgett led to high level media and policy engagement and commitments to improve the quality of drinking water and river health in Walgett and elsewhere. Locally coordinated Food and Water for Life initiatives and the thriving of the WAMS community garden are making a difference in the daily lives of people in Walgett and providing a scalable model for other communities.

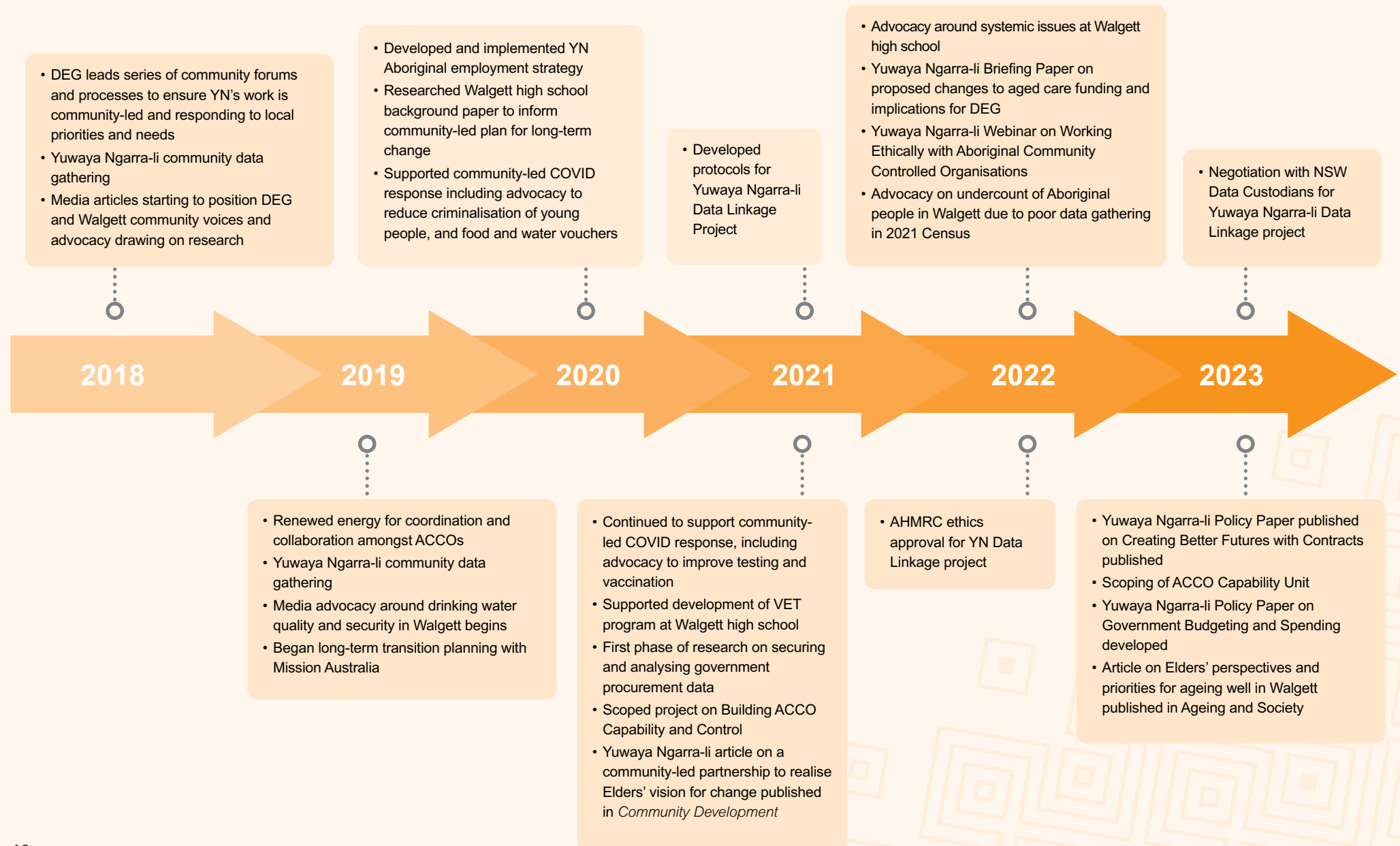
The Caring for Country project contributed to 107 outcomes over the past 4 years, stemming from DEG's leadership on a national, state and regional level and advocacy to improve river health in particular regarding floodplain harvesting. Along with this was the funding, establishment and implementation of the Walgett river ranger program.

DEG, with support and advice from key university collaborators, is increasingly setting the agenda for national debate and policy in this area.



## Timeline of Activity

# Aboriginal Community Capabilities & Control



# Results: Aboriginal Community Capabilities & Control

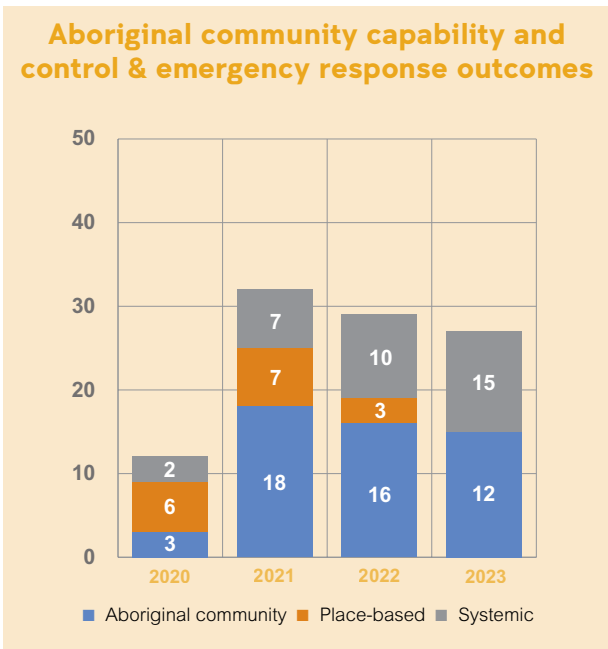
GOAL	KPIs	DATA SOURCES	RESULTS
Grow the leadership, capability, collaboration and influence of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, current and emerging community leaders and the YN team including through local Aboriginal employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased positive visibility and engagement of local Aboriginal voices in media, policy and politics</li> <li>At least 60% of Yuwaya Ngarra-li staff are Aboriginal</li> <li>30% of government and nongovernment services provided by or in partnership with Walgett Aboriginal community-controlled organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community surveys (46 adults and service providers and 49 children and young people surveyed for baseline in 2018 and 2019)</li> <li>Log of Walgett Aboriginal community-controlled organisation-led policy activities, influence and impact</li> <li>YN staff employed</li> <li>Walgett grants and contracting data</li> <li>Research and evaluation workshop notes</li> <li>Reflection and planning session notes</li> <li>YN outcomes harvesting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>44 DEG policy outputs (eg submissions, evidence to government inquiries, media appearances, publications)</li> <li>Significantly increased positive visibility and engagement of local Aboriginal voices in media, policy and politics</li> <li>85% of DEG staff and 60% of UNSW staff are Aboriginal</li> <li>Not currently possible to measure % of govt and non-govt services provided by or in partnership with Walgett Aboriginal community controlled organisations due to lack of transparency and accessibility of data on government contracts</li> </ul>

Since 2020, the building and centring of Aboriginal community capabilities and control in Yuwaya Ngarra-li’s work has been a key enabler of all other areas as well as an area of significant achievement in itself. Important DEG-led efforts have resulted in 49 outcomes relating to ACCO capability and control, with a further 50 outcomes associated with community-led emergency response and community troubleshooting. Walgett Elders and community voices have been prominent in national media stories on topics as varied the government’s response to COVID, food and water security, floodplain harvesting and homelessness. DEG and Yuwaya Ngarra-li’s agenda setting on food and water security in particular has led to Ministerial visits to Walgett and commitments to long-term solutions to safe drinking water that is having systemic impact. Important learning has been embedded within the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team about how to recruit, develop and retain Aboriginal staff members that provide a model that could be embedded elsewhere.

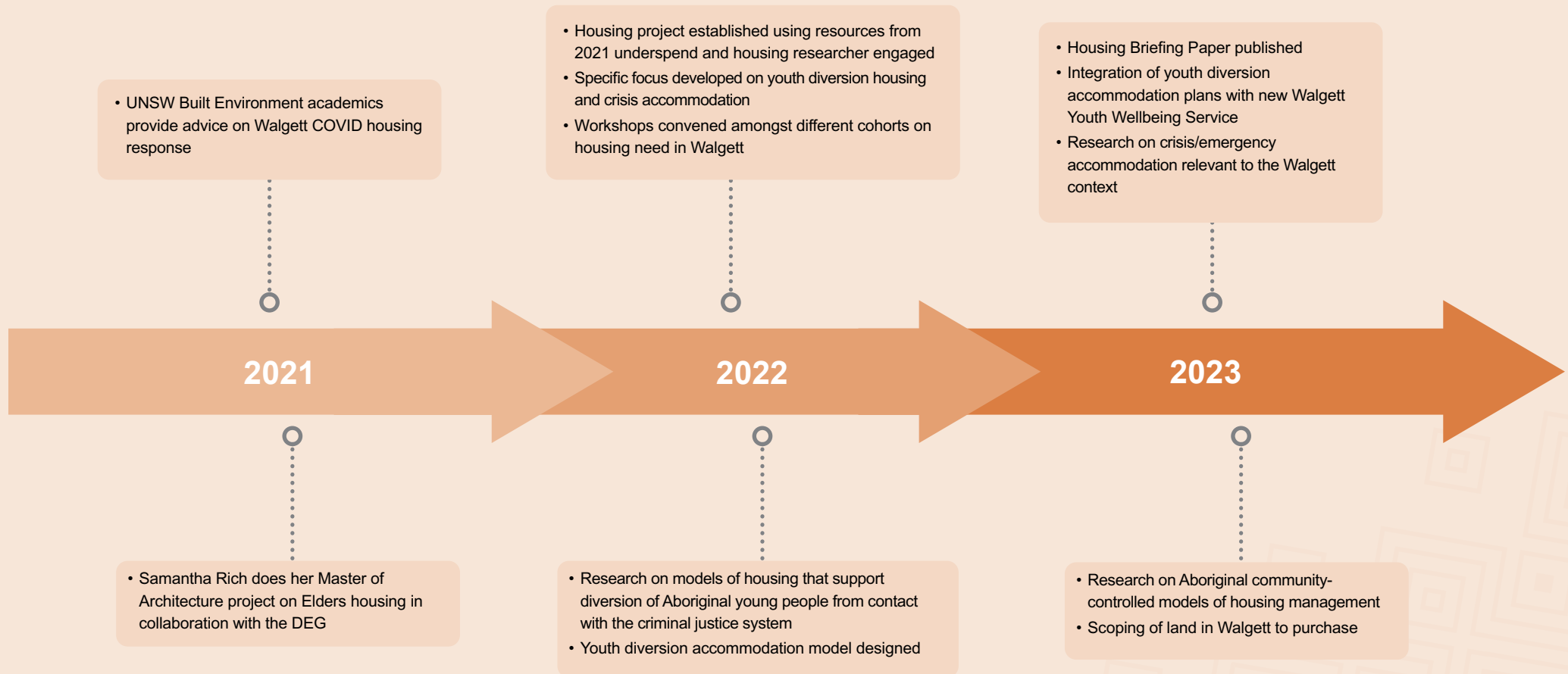
Yuwaya Ngarra-li is also developing a new ACCO capability unit that could provide an innovative model enabling ACCOs to flourish and lead change in communities across NSW nationally that could enable significant progress in Closing the Gap targets and self-determination.

“ Since 2020, thousands more people have heard of the Dharriwaa Elders Group and our vision for change. We have spoken up about the state of our rivers, of our drinking water, of governments failing to act to protect our community during COVID, about over-policing and homelessness in Walgett. And we have worked to build community-led and evidence-based solutions that create long-term change and that others can learn from.

Virginia Robinson, Secretary of Dharriwaa Elders Group.  
(<https://www.paulramsayfoundation.org.au/news-resources/community-led-change-spotlight-on-yuwaya-ngarra-li> )



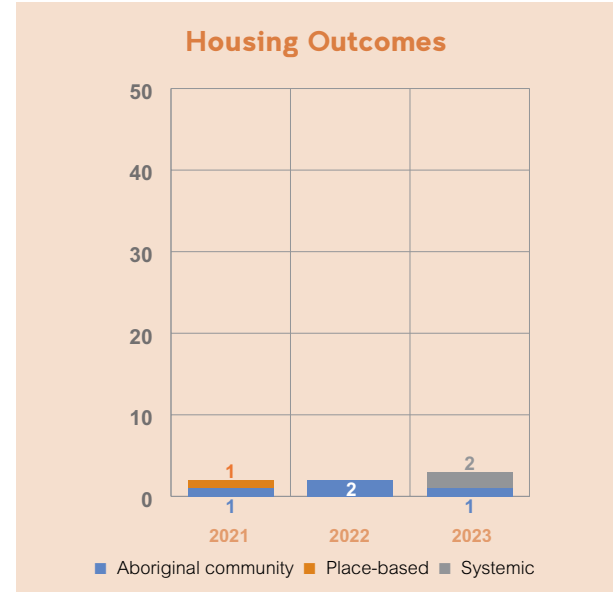
# Housing Models





Results:  
Housing Models

GOAL	KPIs	DATA SOURCES	RESULTS
Design and implement a housing research project with an initial focus on accommodation designed to reduce Aboriginal young people's contact with the justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A fully scoped model of accommodation that provides a pathway to reduce the contact of Aboriginal children and young people with the criminal justice system</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Designed and scoped youth diversion accommodation model</li><li>Housing workshops data</li><li>Walgett housing briefing paper</li><li>YN outcomes harvesting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fully scoped model of accommodation that provides a pathway to reduce the contact of Aboriginal children and young people with the criminal justice system</li><li>Facilitated 8 workshops with Walgett stakeholders, including Elders, DEG staff and others from Walgett Aboriginal community- controlled organisations to identify all current community housing needs</li></ul>



While housing shortage and quality has been a long-term concern for the DEG and others in Walgett, the level and severity of unmet housing need during COVID brought fresh attention and momentum to this area, leading to seven outcomes. A COVID-related underspend allowed Yuwaya Ngarra-li to engage Wiradjuri housing researcher Samantha Rich to progress the development of models of housing that could respond to community priorities and the local context including accommodation to support the diversion of young people from the justice system, crisis accommodation and Elders housing.

Samantha's Master of Architecture Elders housing project housing project has received multiple awards, and the innovative youth diversion accommodation that has been designed to be a core element of the new Youth Wellbeing Service aims to address the social determinants of justice for Aboriginal young people in Walgett and elsewhere.

“The research that DEG has had me undertake shows the dire need for supported accommodation for the homeless and those very close to homelessness in Walgett. Those who are homeless are often shipped out of town, or placed in motels where their safety cannot be guaranteed. Otherwise, family will generally support and carry the load of housing the homeless which puts pressure on the home situation and also puts pressure on the housing to perform in ways it was not designed for. We have seen all this in our work and are designing different caring accommodation solutions so that wellbeing is prioritised for the Walgett Aboriginal community.”

Samantha Rich quoted in DEG and WAMS statement on homelessness in Walgett.

([https://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/DEG\\_WAMSSStatementHomelessness13July23.pdf](https://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/DEG_WAMSSStatementHomelessness13July23.pdf))

# Learning from Yuwaya Ngarra-li as a Model for Change

Q1

Since the Dharriwaa Elders Group invited UNSW to work with them in partnership, a great deal has been learnt about what it takes to see the outcomes achieved for Aboriginal people in Walgett as well as at a place-based and systems level.

Key findings are:

## Vision and values

Being led by the DEG's vision for change and underpinned by shared values and working "at the speed of trust" has meant Yuwaya Ngarra-li has been able to **adapt and respond to changing conditions and community priorities as needed, bringing demonstrated and sustained impact**. The alignment of Yuwaya Ngarra-li's approach with UNSW strategy and the demonstrated commitment of the university to learn to work in a community-led partnership has been key. The core principles as articulated by the DEG of being community-led, culturally connected, strengths-focused, holistic and rights-based have grounded decision making, research protocols and daily practice, enabling for example effective local responses during COVID lockdowns when the community was facing over-policing and food shortages.

## Sustained philanthropic funding

Having a philanthropic partner supportive of learning and taking a community-led approach since 2018 has been a critical success factor. The DEG has identified the ways in which it has enabled them to speak out strongly on issues affecting their community, where others have been concerned about jeopardising government funding if they do so, for example on the erosion of rivers due to government mismanagement. As evidenced by the balance of planned and responsive outcomes, **it has been important that timelines and deliverables are flexible to accommodate working in a community-led holistic way**. Clear and shared plans have been important, but so has being able to respond quickly to crises and new priorities as they emerge. PRF's support for this approach, for example allowing use of a COVID-related underspend to resource new projects to deal with fine debt and develop new housing models, has been important.

## Reflective practice

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership at its core is about doing things differently, which has required the team to explore a range of processes and practices to **centre community leadership, catalyse systemic influence, and enable ongoing learning and adaptation**. The DEG and UNSW teams developed regular processes of reflecting together, in person and online. These reflection sessions have been important for building capability amongst team members to reflect on progress against goals and on documented outcomes, **allowing the team to examine where progress is being made and why, and where approaches might need to shift** – for example, identifying the need to build a new youth wellbeing service with accommodation in collaboration with the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT to appropriately meet the needs of young people in contact with the justice system. May Miller-Dawkins' role as an advisor with deep working knowledge of Yuwaya Ngarra-li's approach and work has been invaluable.

# Learning from Yuwaya Ngarra-li as a Model for Change

Q1

What is being learned about this as a model of community-university partnership in setting up, managing and maintaining the environment for individual, community, place-based and systemic change?

## Working holistically

Working holistically as part of a long-term community-university partnership has enabled Yuwaya Ngarra-li to **understand the systemic nature of local challenges and barriers to change**. Evidence of place-based impact has been tracked across all areas, and reinforced just how connected those areas are – for example, reducing young people's contact with the criminal justice system is not just about improving police and court use of diversionary mechanisms, but also reducing the criminalising effect of fines and improving housing options, along with education and employment pathways. The value of DEG's leadership and Yuwaya Ngarra-li engagement across different policy domains has been evident across all outcomes. For example, the DEG's strong nationally recognised voice on water issues, and Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work on data sovereignty and government contracting, has meant DEG and Yuwaya Ngarra-li were increasingly listened to and known for agenda setting on key matters of policy reform. A holistic approach also enabled identification of institutional barriers – for example, current approaches to contracting and procurement that undermine Aboriginal community controlled organisations taking on the delivery of local services, despite government commitments to this under Closing the Gap.

## Local Aboriginal staff

Building a local workforce of Aboriginal staff is **critical to embedding and building progress successfully in community-led initiatives, but this requires appropriate long-term commitment**. Many of the outcomes Yuwaya Ngarra-li has seen are due to the relationships, skills and dedication of Walgett-based Aboriginal staff; their work as community troubleshooters and advocates is not a 9-5 job, and the DEG does important work on a daily basis enabling its staff to respond to community needs, such as food and water insecurity and fine debt. Yet the intergenerational disadvantage, racism and poor local education outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people in Walgett means that staff often need to be recruited from elsewhere in the short term to bring the capacity needed and mentor and train up local staff. A major barrier to this is the lack of available housing in Walgett and challenges with attracting staff with the level of expertise, understanding and flexibility to work in the way that is necessary to build capabilities and community-led impact over time. Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work on designing a model of ACCO capability building that responds to the reality of contexts like Walgett is encompassing what has been learnt in order to build a systemic response.

## Addressing racism and remoteness

Despite all the progress identified in this report, it is not possible to give an adequate picture of the work of Yuwaya Ngarra-li without identifying the ongoing impacts of institutional racism and remoteness in Walgett. The town's drinking water is slimy and unpleasant to taste and is high in sodium, and this disproportionately impacts Aboriginal people who are more likely to experience chronic diseases and be unable to afford bottled water. The significant effort around surveying community members about the levels of food and water insecurity and testing water quality over time to provide the evidence to advocate for systemic changes needed to improve Walgett's drinking water supply, such as a functioning reverse osmosis system and public filtered drinking water kiosks around town, have led to widespread media coverage, multiple commitments by political leaders, and engagement by stakeholders at all levels of government – and yet still the only safe source of public drinking water in Walgett is in the DEG's shopfront. Some of the barriers to change are technical resulting from Walgett's remoteness; however, some are clearly attributable to racist attitudes and systemic failures. This takes a toll on local ACCOs who continue to face intractability around basic rights such as safe drinking water while also working tirelessly to build their own community-led solutions to issues such as criminalisation of young people and fine debt. Vigilance and persistence in addressing racism and remoteness has been critical to achieving and sustaining progress.

# Learning from Yuwaya Ngarra-li as a Model for Change

## University commitment and capability

From the outset, a long-term commitment and capacity building on the university side was identified as a core focus for Yuwaya Ngarra-li. Academic success is conventionally oriented to peer-reviewed publications and competitive grants that reward individual specialisation and career progression rather than collaboration and community priorities and timelines. However, there has been **significant increase in the capability to work in a genuinely community-led way at UNSW since partnering with the Dharriwaa Elders Group, developing practical knowledge around working as an effective intermediary and contributing to impact in key areas.** What has made a difference at the university end has been strong leadership support for the Elders' vision for change, alignment with UNSW strategy, cultural inductions run by Aboriginal Yuwaya Ngarra-li staff at UNSW, key academics committed to learning and working differently, and the UNSW Yuwaya Ngarra-li team being prepared to play multiple roles depending on what is useful – data analysis, mixed methods research and evaluation but also providing specialist advice, coaching, resources, and connecting with broader networks as needed.

Being guided by the Elders' vision and core principles, as well as centring community outcomes, Yuwaya Ngarra-li has contributed to the securing of multidisciplinary research grants, publications in international journals, national awards for Masters projects, global case studies and university impact rankings. UNSW staff have been increasingly sharing what has been learnt through working in partnership with the Dharriwaa Elders Group in different ways, including via Yuwaya Ngarra-li webinars and publications, for audiences in the university, Aboriginal community-controlled, for purpose, government and philanthropic sectors.



Yuwaya Ngarra-li process for developing and refining its initiatives

# Publications 2020-2023

Earle N (2022) [Sustaining the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Community Garden.](#)

Earle N, Spencer W, McCausland R, Futeran P, Webster J & Leslie G (2023) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Walgett's Drinking Water.](#)

Flanagan M & Miller-Dawkins M in collaboration with Spencer W & McCausland R (2022) [Creating better futures with contracts, Yuwaya Ngarra-li Policy Paper.](#)

Hickey V, Spencer W & Webster J (2020) ['Walgett community unites to tackle pandemic-related food shortages', Croakey, 8 April.](#)

MacGillivray P (2020) ['When public health becomes punitive, rather than supporting communities', Croakey, 8 April.](#)

MacGillivray P; Reeve R & McCausland R (2023) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Dealing with Fines.](#)

MacGillivray P; Sands Z; McCausland R; Spencer W & Miller-Dawkins M (2024) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Lessons from the Two River Pathway to Change Diversion Model 2018–2023.](#)

McCausland R (2018, updated 2022) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Protocol.](#)

McCausland R; Spencer W; MacGillivray P; Robinson V; Hickey V; Baldry E & McEntyre E (2021) ['CommUNITY-Led development: A partnership to realize Aboriginal Elders' vision for change', \*Community Development\*, pp. 1-19.](#)

Miller-Dawkins M; Spencer W & McCausland R (2024) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Processes to enable community-led, systemic and collaborative change.](#)

Reeve R; McCausland R & MacGillivray P (2022) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Report: Has criminal justice contact for young people in Walgett changed over time? Analysis of diversions, charges, court and custody outcomes 2016-2021.](#)

Reeve R; McCausland R; MacGillivray P & Robinson V (2022) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Data Linkage Protocol Version 2 October 2022.](#)

Reeve R; McCausland R; MacGillivray P & Robinson V (2024) [Community-led diversion of Indigenous young people from the justice system: The role of government administrative data, \*International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice\*, p. 100650.](#)

Reeve R; McCausland R; MacGillivray P & Robinson V (2024) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Data Linkage](#)

Rich S (2023) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Housing in Walgett.](#)

Robinson V (2020) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Brief: Core Principles of our Partnership, Dharriwaa Elders Group.](#)

Robinson V & McCausland R (2023) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li submission: Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia, submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission.](#)

Tonkin T, Deane A, Trindall A, Weatherall L, Madden T, Moore B, Earle N, Nathan M, Young S, McCausland R, Leslie G, Bennett-Brook K, Spencer W, Corby C, Webster J & Rosewarne E (2023) [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Community Briefing Report: Food and Water for Life, Key findings from the Food and Water Security Surveys in Walgett.](#)

## Webinars

**Ethical Research with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xa7avZ7eYBc>

**Community-led Research, Government Data, and Indigenous Data Governance**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7ebiMPx-Ss&t=1s>

**Understanding Food & Water Insecurity in Walgett and Building Community-Led Solutions**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tYpFWOpzXU>

**Elders housing: In Conversation with Samantha Rich, Wiradjuri Masters of Architecture graduate**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0cKznq0qvE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0cKznq0qvE)

**Dealing with Fine Debt**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU9PCAx1p0Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU9PCAx1p0Q)



