

A Youth Action Plan for the Gove Peninsula and Surrounding Homelands

2022 – 2024

Gove Peninsula Youth Action Plan Steering Group



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nhulunbuy
corporation



The word Däpaki means non-Aboriginal people;
similar to the term Balanda (European people).

Photos by Nhulunbuy Corporation, Developing East Arnhem Land and
Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation

Design by Alexandra Dolan. Artwork by Wanyubi Marika.

Acknowledgment of Country

We, the Steering Group of the Gove Peninsula and Homelands Youth Action Plan acknowledge Dhalwanṇu, Djambarrpuyṇu, Djapu, Galpu, Golumala, Gumatj, Madarrpa, Mangalili Marrakulu, Munyuku, Daymil, Rirratjinu, Wangurri, and Warramiri – and all the clans of North East Arnhem Land – as the Traditional Owners and of this region on which we are privileged to live and do our work.

We acknowledge the deep connection to language, culture and land of the Yolṇu people and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

A foundation for this Youth Action Plan: The Traditional Owners' Vision for Nhulunbuy and the Gove Peninsula

On 15 March 2021, Traditional Owners for the Gove Peninsula, the Rirratjinu and Gumatj clans, launched 'A new journey together: Traditional Owners' Vision for the Future of Nhulunbuy and the Gove Peninsula'.

The Traditional Owners' Vision is both a powerful statement of the aspirations about the future for the clans that have called the Gove Peninsula and the East Arnhem region home since time began, and a compelling invitation for Däpaki, as well as industry and governments, to share in building that future together.

'Yolŋu and Däpaki will live and work together in harmony in Nhulunbuy, as a leading example for the rest of Australia'

'We will work together to create a stronger and more secure future for generations of Yolŋu and Däpaki to come'.

-Traditional Owners' Vision

The Traditional Owners' Vision provides a strong foundation for this Youth Action Plan: one that is inclusive, and recognises the central role that young people must play in shaping and leading the future of the Gove Peninsula, *'one of the most special places in Australia'.*

'We must empower our young people, who are our future leaders. Our young leaders have helped write this vision. They will be our voice in the future. We should provide support for them to develop as leaders and involve them in making decisions.'

The Gove Peninsula and surrounding homelands



The geographical area covered by this Youth Action Plan is the Gove Peninsula and surrounds. This includes Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala, Gunyarrara, Birritjimi and the Laynhapuy and Djalkiripuyngu homelands.

Further from the Gove Peninsula, the Yolngu communities of Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi and Ramingining and the surrounding homelands are participating in the Gunga'yunga Djamarrkuliny (also known as East Arnhem Land Youth Model), which involves local leadership groups develop plans for activities for young people to grow up strong on country. So, together this Youth Action Plan and the Gunga'yunga Djamarrkuliny, will see locally developed plans for future directions in youth services right across the Yolngu region

Demographics

East Arnhem is truly unique – and the people who live here are too. While there is no consolidated set of data about the specific geographical area this Youth Action Plan covers, the data that are available from the 2016 census reflect just how unique this place is:

- 14,494 people lived in the region known as East Arnhem Land in 2016
- 72.6% of those people identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 30.3% of the Northern Territory's population and just 3.3% of Australia's population
- 44.2% of the people living in East Arnhem are less than 25 years of age - the highest proportion of young people in any region in the Northern Territory
- The Township of Nhulunbuy itself, which is part of the area covered by this Youth Action Plan, has a multicultural population
- The median age of people in Nhulunbuy is 32, with 27.7% of the population aged 0-14 years, compared with Australian wide median age of 38 and only 18.7% of the population aged 0-14 years.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, reference period June 2016)

With such a young population, youth services play a vital role in supporting young people to be healthy, engaged and feel supported and connected to community and to country.

The most commonly spoken languages in the area include Djambarrpuyngu, Dhuwaya, Djapu, Galpu, Gupapuyngu, Dhuwal, Dhuwala, Dhanu and English.

Our Youth Action Plan

The focus of our Youth Action Plan is to understand what all young people across the Gove Peninsula and surrounding homelands believe helps them to grow up to be strong and thrive. It starts with the knowledge that Yolŋu and Däpaki young people growing up here have their own dreams – and unique needs. A one-size-fits all approach to designing youth services will rarely work, and will definitely not help young people to bring out their best.

This Plan also draws on the experience of community members and service providers living and working in this place.

The purpose of our Youth Action Plan is to identify opportunities to strengthen young people, by ensuring that place-based activities and services to support young people are meeting their needs, and giving them the best chance to grow up strong and to make their aspirations a reality.

This is our first Youth Action Plan for the Gove Peninsula and surrounding homelands – but it won't be the last. The priorities identified in this Plan will be the key focus for the coming two years, and will provide a solid foundation for future Youth Action Plans to reach even further.

What is the scope of this plan?

Youth Action Plan focuses on services for all young people – Yolŋu and Däpaki alike – aged between 10 and 25 years.

It is not the primary purpose of this Youth Action Plan to make recommendations about specialist areas of practice, including the formal education and health services systems, supports for young people demonstrating high-risk behaviours, child protection or youth justice. However, some of the contributions from Yolŋu and Däpaki young people included key insights about these specialist areas. These contributions have been captured in order to honour the voices and concerns that young people (and, to a lesser extent, service providers) shared in the development of this Youth Action Plan.

Who has contributed to this Plan?

This Youth Action Plan has been developed with the guidance of a Steering Group made up of experts involved in youth services provision on the Gove Peninsula and in nearby homelands. Steering Group members include Anglicare NT, ARDS Aboriginal Corporation, East Arnhem Regional Council, Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, Marn Garr Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, Nhulunbuy Corporation, Rirratjinu Aboriginal Corporation and Northern Territory Government agencies.

The voices of young people and the broader community across the Gove Peninsula and nearby homelands have also played a central role in shaping this Youth Action Plan through consultations and survey tools, following in this section.

How was this Plan developed?

The Steering Group considered that deepening an understanding of the perspectives of young people and the broader community was central to ensuring this Youth Action Plan is relevant and evidence-informed. There were two key ways that these perspectives were captured: through surveys and targeted consultation.



Surveys

Two discrete surveys were conducted:

- A dedicated survey for young people, completed by 186 respondents between the ages of 10-25 years – 33% of respondents for the youth survey identified as Indigenous
- A survey for broader community members (including parents, teachers etc), completed by 71 adults over the age of 25 – 45% of community members who completed the community survey identified as Indigenous.

The youth survey asked young people to think about what made them feel strong, and what worries they had as young people right now. The survey also asked young people to share the things they enjoyed doing in their spare time to inform planning for future activities.

The community survey and consultation focused on finding out what community members thought was going well for young people, and areas that were not doing so well.

Surveys were conducted in both online and hard copy forms with community members in their homes and at schools, in places where young people gather, at community events, and during activities in school holidays.

Targeted consultations

A range of consultation approaches complemented the survey, including:

- Interviews and focused discussions with young people, including members of the NT Youth Round Table
- Workshopping current youth services provision on the Gove Peninsula and homelands to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement
- Focused discussions as part of community activities, such as aged care and homelessness service gatherings.

“I encouraged my teenage son to do the survey and I thought I knew what he would say... but when I asked him what his responses were, the answers he did share surprised me...”

The pressures and worries young people [face] are so different from when I was young and I hope this survey and Youth Action Plan leads to better ways for young people to connect to services and to each other in a safe environment.”

- Parent

Youth survey findings

Young people were asked to rate the things that made them feel strong.

The top responses (in order) were:

- Connection to family
- Having a job
- Somewhere safe to live
- Having enough money
- Going hunting
- Connection to culture
- Being out on country
- Joining team sports
- Education
- Being able to express yourself through music

Young people were also asked to rate what they worried about most.

The top responses were:

- Stress and anxiety
- Bullying
- COVID-19
- Negative body image
- Boredom
- Not having enough money
- Family issues
- Stealing/crime/break-ins
- Not knowing who or how to ask for help when you need it
- Feeling safe



Priorities for our Youth Action Plan

Priority 1: Youth friendly spaces for young people after hours and on weekends

Findings

Young people and community members said that there are two key challenges regarding spaces for them to come together in positive ways:

- A ‘drop in’ space in Nhulunbuy for young people to access after-hours and on weekends
- A space for key sport and recreation activities in Nhulunbuy to service the town, as well as the communities and homelands of the whole East Arnhem region.

Young people told the Steering Group members that there are no youth friendly spaces that promote positive engagement, inclusivity and wellbeing for young people in Nhulunbuy. In some cases, even spaces technically open to young people are dictated by regular business hours when young people are generally at school.

Outside Nhulunbuy, both young people and youth service providers have identified that young people in Gunyarrara and Yirrkala lack safe, youth friendly spaces to spend time after business hours and on weekends. Service providers also indicated that the hours that services are funded to operate often do not align with when young people are most available to engage.

Challenges and opportunities

Beyond dedicated ‘youth’ spaces, the deep desire for adequate sports and recreational facilities in Nhulunbuy was clear. This is consistent with the call in the Traditional Owners’ Vision ‘to enhance community and sports facilities to make Nhulunbuy a healthy and exciting community, with more programs to make sure that town facilities are used by Yolŋu. We will host sports competitions and exchanges, bringing together clubs and communities from across East Arnhem and the rest of Australia’. There is a prime opportunity to consider these calls alongside critical cyclone sheltering infrastructure for Nhulunbuy in the near future.

Finally, not all communities and homelands had a covered space that was accessible and suitable for sporting activities and group recreation activities. Many young people have expressed frustrations that these spaces are often run down, and not appealing places for young people to choose to spend time.

Recommendations and actions

1. The Steering Group recommends the creation of a youth-friendly drop-in space in Nhulunbuy

Action 1A: The Northern Territory Government will work with the Australian Government to establish a dedicated drop-in centre and service in Nhulunbuy, which operates in the afternoons/evenings during school terms, as well as broader hours on weekends and school holidays.

Action 1B: In turn, the Steering Group commits to invest time and energy in co-designing the model for a drop-in centre – together with governments and young people – and be involved in coordination and establishment of this space. The Steering Group also commits to support service providers to work together to ensure well-coordinated and connected services for young people who access this space.

2. The Steering Group recommends the establishment of a regional multipurpose sport and recreation space for youth-oriented activities in Nhulunbuy

Action 2: The Northern Territory Government will work with the Australian Government and other stakeholders to secure funding a multi-purpose space in Nhulunbuy for sport and recreation and cyclone shelter for the Gove Peninsula and homelands.

3. The Steering Group recommends working towards appropriate recreational spaces in homelands

Action 3A: The Steering Group should work with larger homelands to understand their needs for community use facilities to support young people and families who live there.

Action 3B: The Northern Territory Government will engage with the Steering Group's findings about the needs of homelands for community use spaces, and explore opportunities to support or advocate for funding for such spaces.

4. The Steering Group recommends building up recreational spaces in Gunyangara and Yirrkala

Action 4A: The Northern Territory Government will work with Traditional Owners, East Arnhem Regional Council, Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation, Darrariyal Aboriginal Corporation and other stakeholders to secure funding to construct the planned Yirrkala multi-purpose youth and recreation hall and Gunyangara Youth Centre.

Action 4B: The Steering Group commits to working with service providers to advocate for expanding and/or strengthening existing youth spaces in Gunyangara and Yirrkala as well as flexibility in funded hours of operation to allow service provision in to the evening and on weekends.



Priority 2: Collaborative, coordinated approaches to both funding and youth service provision

Findings

Community members and service providers reflected throughout consultations that the efforts in 2021 to increase collaboration and coordination between youth service providers had been well-received. Activities and events encouraging Yolŋu and Däpaki to come together during school holidays were among some of the strongest examples of those efforts. There was strong interest in continuing such initiatives, recognising that this way of working can be – at least a first – somewhat more resource intensive than siloed approaches.

Often, the vast distances in more remote areas such as homelands see young people miss out on youth activities and youth services. This can be because service models are not designed for the way that many Yolŋu families live in this area: they do not factor in either remote delivery options, or the coordination between services that is a necessary response to the mobility of young people and families between homelands, communities and Nhulunbuy.

Yolŋu leaders from across East Arnhem often patiently explain (and re-explain) to government and service providers about the inherent strengths that young people raised in Yolŋu culture have within them. At the same time, Yolŋu leaders have repeatedly raised concerns that some of the measures that governments and services providers look at to determine whether young people are thriving miss some important parts of the story. In particular, while young Yolŋu rarely act out against other people, often intergenerational trauma presents in the form of self-harm behaviours such as volatile substance abuse and suicide. The Steering Group is of a view that while there is much optimism about the future of the Yolŋu, and hope for the emerging generation of young people, it is important to Yolŋu that wherever possible, the full story of their young ones is understood, so Yolŋu and Däpaki can take meaningful steps forward together.

Challenges and opportunities

Youth services funding across the Gove Peninsula and homelands, as well as East Arnhem more broadly, is provided by the Australian Government, through the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and Northern Territory Government agencies. National and Territory datasets partly inform those funding decisions. The Steering Group is concerned that reliance on data and metrics that do not make sense for this region could be leading to underinvestment in youth services in the region and its communities. There are opportunities for the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government to work more closely together to support the coordination of youth services delivery, and measures of both need and success, that are fit for purpose, and recognise the unique service delivery context of place.

Whilst the Steering Group will continue to advocate for increased youth investment in priority areas, the Group also recognises that there are opportunities to optimise the value of the current NTG Youth Activities Grant funds and other programs for activities that engage all young people in the region, during term time and throughout school holidays.

A key consideration of contemporary service system reform is the need for more ‘joined up’ services from the user perspective. Consultation findings do not reflect a ‘joined up’ system for young people who may be internally mobile within the region. While remoteness and distance might pose an obstacle, there are opportunities for existing funded service providers to strengthen communication and coordination to ensure young people have a chance to engage consistently with youth services and activities, wherever they are.

Recommendations and actions

1. The Steering Group recommends that the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government work closely with young people and communities to ensure that youth services are fit for purpose according to culture and place.

Action 1: The Northern Territory Government will work with the Australian Government to improve youth services in communities, homelands and Nhulunbuy by:

- Inviting an appropriate representative of the National Indigenous Australians Agency to join the Youth Action Plan Steering Group membership and ensure that the implementation phase of this Youth Action Plan, and other youth services initiatives in the region, are well coordinated across all levels of government
- Undertaking detailed mapping of youth services and needs on the Gove Peninsula and surrounding homelands, to identify areas that require improvement and areas of duplication in service delivery. This could include broader mapping of services in the Yolŋu region in time. This mapping will be provided to the Steering Group for review and to assist in informing future actions, and in time, might include the development of a directory to guide young people in accessing relevant services
- Working in partnership with young people and communities to develop and ensure that measures of need and success used by government to inform investment are fit for purpose according to culture and place, where possible
- Improving contracts and grants processes to ensure that funded service providers are required to participate and contribute to collaborative and coordinated youth service approaches.

2. The Steering Group recommends strengthening collaboration between youth services and governments to support joined-up service delivery

Action 2: The Northern Territory Government, through the Regional Youth Programs Coordinator, will consult with the Steering Group to inform how the Youth Activities Grants and other Northern Territory Government youth grants are allocated in future, particularly to ensure:

- All activities supported by the grants are responsive to emerging needs of young people, such as those that might present from thematic insights in other forums across the region
- A mix and balance of options for holiday programs and after school activities, including:
- Activities inclusive of all young people (these will often involve multiple service providers working collaboratively, and might require flexible funding approaches)
- Activities tailored to the needs of specific groups of young people.

Priority 3: Young people feel safe and connected to their community and services

Findings

Young people tended to assume that in order to access services they might need, they themselves needed to be experts in the service system to 1) understand what services were available, 2) self-identify their need for a service, and 3) self-refer to the relevant service.

Young people also said that they do not know where to go to access services. Survey and consultation findings suggested that across many young people – Yolŋu and Däpaki alike – ‘services’ in this sense ranged from the possibility of accessing mental health care plans through GPs to homelessness programs. They do not know what services are available in the region for them to access, and many worry that they do not feel as though they have anyone to talk to outside their family and friends.

Challenges and opportunities

Young people do not know what services are available to them on the Gove Peninsula, and do not know how to access services, or are unable to due to financial barriers. While service gaps sometimes exist, in many cases, it appears as though existing local services would have been able to meet the needs of young people had those young people either been aware of the services, or had appropriate referrals been made.

Recommendations and actions

1. The Steering Group recommends that work be undertaken so that young people know what services are available to them

Action 1A: The Northern Territory Government, through the Regional Youth Programs Coordinator, will work with members of the Steering Group, and local generalist and specialist service providers, to identify publicly available sources of information about a range of services that could be relevant to young people, and consider opportunities to build awareness about those services, including through schools and other service providers.

Action 1B: In turn, the Steering Group commits to identifying actions to ensure that youth services providers are supported to:

- Create safe environments for young people to feel comfortable to express their needs for more specialised services/supports
- Make appropriate referrals to specialist services so that young people do not need to be experts in the service system in order to access the supports they need to thrive.



Other important findings through consultations

Throughout the consultation process to develop this Youth Action Plan, a number of recommendations were raised that the Steering Group acknowledges are not within its scope. Nonetheless, these are important issues affecting young people and have been captured here to inform future work by governments and stakeholders.

Training and jobs to support young people staying in the region

Both Yolŋu and Däpaki young people in Nhulunbuy and surrounding communities said that they have to leave the area to access tertiary education and jobs. Young people have said that they want to stay here for both further education and employment opportunities; they want to find jobs that will allow them to stay here and have access to housing for that purpose.

Access to tertiary education within the region is currently extremely limited, which could be one reason that young people expressed feeling that they were not ready to join the workforce on completing school. Young people also expressed that it feels as though they need to make a choice between staying in the region and accessing further education.

At the time of developing this Youth Action Plan, a number of exciting initiatives are beginning to kick off, which might see tertiary/training pathways become more accessible in the region, including, but not limited to:

- Implementation of the Education Engagement Strategy 2022-2031, which includes a deeper consultation stage for families and communities within the East Arnhem region throughout 2022
- Vocational education and training (VET) in schools: School based training as a pathway to employment and training
- Partnerships within existing organisations and employers to providing training and apprenticeships
- Broader VET offering across the East Arnhem region, specific to growing industries in the region
- A Charles Darwin University pop-up campus in Nhulunbuy.

The Steering Group hopes to continue to be involved with workforce development and training initiatives, to ensure that the voices of young people about their aspirations for local and regional opportunities beyond secondary education are heard and understood through the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. The Steering Group would also like to support a better understanding of the unmet needs of young people (for example, housing and transport) that can be a barrier to them staying in the region.

Consistent approaches to case management and coordination forums

A number of forums operate within the Gove Peninsula and homelands to ensure case management and coordination across a range of service providers for young people and families who are at risk. It is important that these forums are well coordinated and work together for young people and families. The Steering Group is aware and involved with a range of such forums including the Multi-Agency Community and Child Safety Team (MACCST), Family Safety Framework (FSF) and the Gunyanjara Complex Case Meeting (GCC). Community members have reflected that in the absence of service coordination, they experience fatigue from over-servicing or under-servicing, which can lead to diminished engagement with a range of services – or worse, families worry young people will fall through the cracks altogether. Some service providers have reflected that while valuable, these forums can be sporadic and that a more consistent approach would provide maximum benefit for community and services.

Although case management generally involves specialist service provision, there are significant opportunities for more general youth service providers to ensure their offerings are responsive to emerging needs from such forums. What's more, youth service providers are keen to avoid disengagement in activities that could strengthen and support young people. Therefore, the Steering Group intends to advocate for greater consistency in case management and coordination forums and linkages to understand how youth services investments can best complement specialist supports.

Young people have access to safe accommodation

Steering Group members have heard that there is no local accommodation option for young people who are experiencing homelessness, whether for short or long periods on the Gove Peninsula or in surrounding communities and homelands. There are multiple reasons why a young person might need somewhere alternative to stay, including, domestic and family violence and family or intimate relationship break down. Regardless of the reason for needing accommodation, in the absence of safe accommodation options in the area, the closest emergency accommodation is located in Darwin, forcing young people in already difficult circumstances to consider not only leaving their home, but also their country, school, known service providers and support systems.

In light of this challenge, the Steering Group will look for opportunities to advocate to governments to support a feasibility study to be conducted on the Gove Peninsula and homelands to understand the need for short stay/ emergency accommodation options for young people.





‘This better change things!’

– Young survey respondent

What are the next steps for this plan?

This Youth Action Plan marks the start of lots more work!

From now, the Steering Group and the Northern Territory Government will work closely to develop an implementation plan to progress the goals set out in this Plan, and continue to engage with youth service providers and organisations on the Gove Peninsula and homelands to support collaboration and positive engagement with young people.

Our Youth Action Plan will be reviewed in 12 months’ time, with the view to evaluating and producing a new plan in 2024.

Thank you

The Steering Group would like to thank the many young people and community members who contributed to this Youth Action Plan. We hope that we have honoured your insights and perspectives, and we look forward to continuing to talk with you as we put this Plan into action.

In turn, the Northern Territory Government would like to thank the members of the Steering Group. In addition to workshopping and wrestling with the many ideas on the table, members of the Steering Group invested countless hours in direct engagements with young people and community members to ensure that their voices would be central in our Youth Action Plan.

Without those efforts, this Plan would not have the solid foundation of local experience, let alone the vision of local dreams for the future of all young people from this remarkable part of Australia.

2022 – 2024

Gove Peninsula Youth Action Plan Steering Group