

# Joint Submission to the Productivity Commission – Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

**27 October 2023**

**Co-produced by:**

Allies for Children comprising The Benevolent Society, Life Without Barriers, Key Assets, Act for Kids, Mackillop Family Services, OzChild and Barnardos in partnership and the First Nations Non-Government Alliance.

*We thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide this co-designed submission on the review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We extend appreciation for the extension granted.*

## **PARTNERSHIPS WHICH RECOGNISE AND ELEVATE SHARED DECISION MAKING, CULTURAL AUTHORITY AND FIRST NATIONS SELF-DETERMINATION TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

The draft review on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) identifies the critical importance of solutions designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultural knowledge in order to 'overcome entrenched inequality'.

This submission offers insights to a newly formed partnership between the Allies for Children and the First Nations Non-Government Alliance and the value of such partnerships in amplifying self-determination and shared decision making in the non-government sector specific to Target 12.

Through a series of case studies from founding organisations, the Allies and First Nations Non-Government Alliance demonstrate examples of partnerships with First Nations community-controlled organisations or peaks which have been culturally reviewed by the First Nations NGO Alliance. The cultural reviews explore and assess the approach and the partnerships, with a goal to show what has been effective in the collaboration and why. The reviews offer the Productivity Commission insights into partnership arrangements in the non-government arena which have the direct ability to positively influence Priority Reform Area 1 – Shared Decision Making.

### **ALLIES FOR CHILDREN**

The Allies for Children is a committed partnership of several founding organisations working within the Child, Youth and Family sector. The Allies was formed through a shared belief and commitment that seismic change to advance improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families is best achieved through a partnership approach. Whilst relatively new in formation, the Allies CEO's and their organisations are seeking to advance improved social policy responses and reform within state child protection jurisdictions at scale. The Allies immediate priority reform agenda includes specifically contributing to Target 12 in Closing the Gap and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. This reform commitment includes advocating for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector to be supported with resourcing capacity so future child protection system responses are informed directly by First Nations Leadership and ACCO's, built on shared decision making and with recognition of cultural authority. The future goal of this commitment from the Allies is to support First Nations communities to thrive with children growing in culture and with kin and where child protection responses are needed, they reside within the leadership of community.

### **FIRST NATIONS NON-GOVERNMENT (NGO) ALLIANCE**

The First Nation NGO Alliance is a self-determined group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders working across the Non-Government Child and Family Sector. The Alliance emerged partially in response to the guidance being sought on the intended priority reform area of the Allies for Children. The Alliance members identified the need for a unified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to guide the Allies for Children as they seek to address the over-representation of First Nations children in child protection. Current members of the Alliance are employees within the Allies founding organisations, however in their

capacity as Alliance members and as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, each retains their cultural authority, responsibility and independent voice on matters relating to 'our children and communities too'.

The Alliance members provide cultural leadership within their respective organisations, across practice, strategy, partnerships and policy. They understand the circumstances First Nations leaders face in balancing cultural and community responsibility whilst working within a non-Indigenous organisation, and the risk of feeling isolated or burdened by cultural burnout. The Alliance recognises the specific and important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and Peak bodies and works in partnership with them. The Alliance is positioned to elevate the voice and leadership of First Nations people within non-Indigenous organisations for more effective progress in the reduction of First Nations children in child protection and the restoration of justice to First Nations communities.

In this approach, the First Nations NGO Alliance aims to strengthen the support and influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the NGO sector to contribute to sector reform. The Alliance intends to become a critical friend to the NGO sector, championing community led solutions and funding and harnessing their strength in system advocacy and new ways of working to bring change. This is the basis of the partnership with the Allies for Children.

#### **PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ALLIES FOR CHILDREN AND THE FIRST NATIONS NON-GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE**

Through a formal governance approach, the Allies for Children CEO's seek the direct counsel and cultural direction of the First Nations non-Government Alliance on activities and policy commitments which relate to the experience and outcomes of First Nations peoples. In doing so, the partnership is designed to strengthen the commitment and accountability of the Allies for Children and ensure their activities are directly informed and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

#### **CASE STUDY 1**

##### **Act for Kids Supporting the transition of child protection services to Community Controlled Organisations in Doomadgee**

##### **Background**

Child Protection Safe Houses were introduced by the Queensland Government in 2008. Safe house services were described as short-term placements for children in remote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island communities to ensure "children who require out-of-home care are provided the opportunity to remain connected with their family, culture, language and country" (p.29 of original Safe House Service Agreement 2009).

Section 3.1 of the original Service Agreement (2009) has a General Provision:

*The residential care and family intervention service provider (if not a local organisation) is expected to formally work in a partnership with the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community and/or local council and/or local non-government agencies to build, over time, a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owned and managed service. This includes developing a local Indigenous workforce. The service provider must establish formal partnership arrangements which include provisions in relation to authority*

*structures, decision making, conflict resolution, processes for skills sharing/upgrading and transfer of auspice.* (p.30 original Service Agreement, 2009).

Over the last decade of Act for Kids' delivery of safe house services in Napranum, Aurukun, Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw and Doomadgee, the service has endeavoured to fulfil the responsibilities outlined in the above general provision of the original agreement. Act for Kids have been committed to this despite the provision subsequently being removed from the funding schedule. Over this period Act for Kids:

- Held an initial conference in Cairns in 2008 with Traditional Owners from the Western Cape York Peninsula safe house communities and formalised a partnership and joint commitment to children and young people.
- Developed representative community Reference Groups from which Act for Kids seeks cultural and community expertise, guidance and approval for safe house service delivery (including approval for staff to work in community). Those Reference Groups have been in place since that time.
- Commissioned research from SVA Consulting to develop stakeholder program logic models for outcomes from the safe houses, in particular seeking community opinions on "ownership" and "transfer of auspice".
- Commissioned community consultation research from Monash University to explore and understand community expectations and beliefs around "ownership" and "transfer of auspice".
- A team that included a Doomadgee Traditional Owner, Act for Kids SafeKIDS leaders and Monash Researchers presented the research findings and process of engaging with communities to the National Diversity Conference in Darwin.
- Held a SafeKIDS conference in Cairns where this was discussed in greater detail with Traditional Owners, Reference Groups, staff and Far North Queensland Departmental leaders.
- Worked with Reference Groups and Child Safety Services to successfully reunify more than 130 children with family and kin through the safe houses.

The results of the extensive community consultations undertaken through these activities has indicated communities want [more] "ownership" of safe house services, but that the meaning of "ownership" has not always been consistent with the Western concept of the word. Ownership has been described by community members as being able to own child protection issues and have meaningful input to the operations of the safe house, including who works there and how things are done; not necessarily to be ultimately responsible for every aspect of the delivery of the services themselves.

### **Safe House Legacy in Community**

Over the last decade, over 90% of Act for Kids Safe House staff have been recruited locally from the communities. Some of these staff members have been working in the program for more than 10 years. The Reference Groups are formed from the local Traditional Owner groups and most of the Reference Group members have been supporting Safe House operations for the whole period of the program. There are currently more than 100 people working in Act for Kids Safe House services, with more than 90% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 90% are local residents of Napranum, Aurukun, Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw and Doomadgee.

## **Doomadgee Safe House**

Through extensive consultations and close working relationships in each of the safe house communities Act for Kids delivers services, Act for Kids has observed the high level of engagement, stability and commitment of the Doomadgee Reference Group. Because of this it was the view of Act for Kids that the Doomadgee safe house provides an opportunity to develop a Community Controlled Organisation to take on auspice for the safe house funding. Discussions with the Doomadgee Reference Group and Traditional Owners (without commitment to any specific outcome) identified a strong desire from the community for this to occur.

With the Reference Group a staged process was developed that would potentially involve:

- The Queensland Government and Act for Kids working with the Doomadgee community to create a new entity (ideally a “CATSI” established under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*) including governance and management structures in preparation for transfer of auspice.
- Ensuring continuity of the availability of quality out-of-home care for children in Doomadgee through the transition. The new organisation would sub-contract Act for Kids to deliver safe house services via a service level agreement. This would extend to administration/grants management and governance in the near term. Subject to the wishes of the Community, the ultimate goal is for complete self-governance and operation of the new organisation.

### **Specific Proposal (variations of which was put to the Queensland Child Safety Minister (of the time) in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021).**

*We are seeking commitment from the Queensland Government to partner with the Doomadgee community and Act for Kids to develop a Doomadgee Community Controlled Organisation based on the current Safe House Reference Group that will take on auspice for the Doomadgee safe house funding.*

*We would like to arrange a meeting with Doomadgee Traditional Owners and the Minister and Director-General to discuss options for the safe house in Doomadgee.*

## **Act for Kids Governance**

The Board created a First Nations Working Group (FNWG) in 2016. The FNWG reports directly to the Act for Kids Board. Members include two First Nations Directors, three other Directors, CEO, ED Service Strategy & Growth, Director Service Strategy and Partnerships and external stakeholders including First Nations stakeholders. The aim of the FNWG is to provide high level governance and business support and decision making around our First Nations Strategic Goals, our Reconciliation goals and the goal of transitioning safe house services.

## **Development of Gunawuna Jungai Ltd (GJL)**

Along with all the other work that had occurred since 2008, in 2016 at the request of the Doomadgee Traditional Owners Act for Kids started using resources to scope what a Community Controlled Entity would look like for them. This was largely the work of the FNWG. King & Wood Mallesons did a background paper on what the development of a CCO would entail and options for whether or not it should be related to Act for Kids (at the request of the Doomadgee Traditional Owners). The scope of the entity changed over time with work intensifying in 2021-2022 and culminating in the registration of GJL in late 2022.

Despite a positive response from 2018 on, the Queensland Government and Department of Child Safety did not commit to act on the proposal until 2022. At that time, the Department committed to working with the Doomadgee community on the transition of the safe house. In September 2022, the Doomadgee safe house contract was renewed for a period of two years, with the specific goal of transitioning the service to GJL. The plan was for a steering group to be formed of GJL, the Department and Act for Kids to drive the plan for transition, however, this still has not eventuated.

GJL has worked hard to nominate Doomadgee as the Queensland and Australian Government Closing the Gap trial site. They are working with multiple government departments across jurisdictions within the place-based partnership model and the justice reinvestment approach. The work has stalled at many times because of government processes being misaligned with cultural processes. An example is the development of contracts which have commenced as standard legal documents, with GJL fighting to have them made into cultural place-based partnership agreements. The other barrier appears to be funding, with departments being unwilling or unable to pay the costs of capability, growth and capacity building for GJL, despite wanting them to take on an enormous project load for the Closing the Gap and Qld Govt targets (e.g. delegated authority).

### **Act for Kids' Investment**

It would be difficult to put a monetary value on the investment since 2008 in the goal of transitioning safe house services. The ultimate goal was self-determination for these communities, with the only real progress made in Doomadgee to date, which is disappointing.

The human investment was years of time, travel and community engagement by the leader of the SafeKIDS program and the (then) Executive Director of Services. In 2018, Kieran became Director of Service Strategy and Partnerships and 50% of his time in that role was invested in our First Nations goals. Since 2021, almost 100% of his time was devoted to working with the Doomadgee community. In 2020 the CEO increased investment in time and resourcing from the Executive Team, Board and corporate partners towards assisting Doomadgee to achieve their goals.

If you included the cost of the time of everyone devoted to the project over many years, the costs of travel, accommodation, consultation with lawyers, pro bono support, financial support from our corporate partners and other resourcing, the monetary cost to date would be in the millions.

### **FIRST NATION NGO ALLIANCE REFLECTION:**

The Service agreement specified a need to establish a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a view to build and transfer services to the community. This included supporting the ongoing operating viability of an entity, including developing workforce, skills, and governance.

This case study highlights several critical ingredients that a partnering organisation can do to authentically honour an agreement like this with communities including:

- **Respecting the role and cultural authority of Traditional Owners** in negotiations, and the value it brings with time and trust.
- **Valuing the important role of Aboriginal leadership** in partnerships and the subsequent organisational responsibility to these individuals being asked to broker relationships and lead negotiations with communities.

- **Developing two-way cultural governance processes** where cultural authority and decision making meets corporate governance to negotiate, share leadership and hold each other accountable.
- **Investing in a local workforce strategy** which brings many benefits including engaging a workforce reflective of and committed to their community. In this partnership, 90% of the workforce (90/100) are local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have stayed for the life of the partnership affording significant benefits for all involved.
- **Transition pace determined by community / community organisation** with this partnership established over a decade ago and yet to be transferred due to Government 'misalignment'.
- Whilst an agreement and steering committee has now been established to support an intended transition period, largely credited to the advocacy of this partnership, it highlights the absence of a ready contracting processes to deliver on the very service agreement that this partnership was based.
- **Community led Solutions and funding** sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities best placed to determine and authorise a response to a community need or request. As indicated in this example, this may include asking others to deliver aspects of the work on behalf of the community or organisation. Authority to do this, as in this example is largely limited or / and enabled via contracting and commissioning.

### CASE STUDY 3

#### The Benevolent Society and Institute for Urban Indigenous Health Partnership

##### Background

In Southeast Queensland, The Benevolent Society has partnered with the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) to collaboratively deliver the Early Childhood Approach. First Nations families are consistently underrepresented in the design and delivery of services. The partnership works to change this - reducing barriers to services and cultivating trust within communities through a culturally meaningful and client-centred approach.

##### Context

The Benevolent Society has been the NDIS Early Childhood Partner in the Community since 2018, delivering the Early Childhood Approach for the Brisbane, Beenleigh-Redlands, Caboolture - Strathpine regions. Since 2020, this work has been extended through an innovative partnership with the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH). Evidence shows that the single biggest factor in improving health and social outcomes for Indigenous people is self-determination<sup>1</sup>. When First Nations people have control of the design and delivery of services in their communities, it is more likely these services will be culturally safe and responsive.

The significance of First Nations leadership has been evident in The Benevolent Society/IUIH partnership. The first of its kind in Australia, the partnership has increased the impact of services in the region by ensuring First Nations families have access to culturally appropriate supports. Over the last three years this partnership has lifted the number of First Nations families engaging with the Early Childhood

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<sup>1</sup> M Bamblett & P Lewis, 'Detoxifying the child and family welfare system for Australian Indigenous peoples: Self-determination, rights and culture as the critical tools', *The First Peoples Child & Family Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, pp. 43–56



Approach from below the population level to significantly above<sup>2</sup>. The rate of NDIS plans being utilised by First Nations families to support their child's development through the Early Childhood Approach has also continued to grow, in large part due to the work maintaining relationships across each child's life trajectory - including across both UIH and The Benevolent Society's services through the embedded partnership. For example, each family can maintain the same key contact for supports both within their Aboriginal Medical Service and The Benevolent Society's Early Childhood approach. Through this key relationship, families are also supported to access other government and community services to ensure that wrap-around services can be provided where there are additional areas of need.

### **Why this partnership works**

#### **It ensures self-determination and actively works to close-the-gap.**

Services that have the greatest impact for First Nations families are led and designed by the First Nations community. This program works because UIH is the lead – they are the recognised authority, while The Benevolent Society's role is to support and provide a seamless pathway in the application and planning process for NDIS services. The model has been set up to ensure service delivery is led by our First Nations community, with The Benevolent Society funding a leadership position that is employed and sits within UIH. This position leads all decisions on service design for First Nations families.

#### **It takes a culturally meaningful and client-centred approach.**

The partnership ensures First Nations families are engaged through culturally appropriate processes, allowing for a better experience, less confusion and reduced stress. This has included connecting families in community outreach programs such as local caravan park BBQs, First Nations playgroups, and events in the community. By considering the cultural appropriateness within each step of the application process, families in the region are more comfortable accessing and engaging with Early Childhood Approach services.

#### **It leverages relationships with existing community leaders, practitioners, and professionals.**

Equitable access to supports for First Nations families is a significant challenge for Early Childhood Approach services. A plan by itself is not enough. It needs the right facilitation – led and designed by the First Nations community. This partnership reduces the barriers to engagement by working within an existing environment of trust within the community. By working as a connector between supports and services the need for families to relive or retell their stories is reduced. This soft entry to engagement is a strength of the partnership. Streamlining access through (informed consent) information sharing protocols between organisations assists with both engagement and retention of families.

### **Next Steps**

The success of this partnership has seen the partnership grow from funding one position to now funding four positions. These positions include a leadership level position as well as three 'navigation partner' positions (one for each funded region).

Our work in this space has seen the NDIA include the stipulation in all Community Partner Contracts, that Partners in the Community *must have established partnerships with their local Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisation in delivering their contracted requirements*. The Benevolent Society believes

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<sup>2</sup> For example: 1,144 of 11,777 or 9.7% of access decisions in our three regions are represented by children who are Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander, this is significantly above the population level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our three regions of: Caboolture/Strathpine 3.9%; Brisbane 1.8% and; Logan/Beenleigh 4.2%.



that this is a step in the right direction - but continues to advocate that services designed for First Nations families should be led by ACCOs that work in partnership with like-minded NGOs to ensure that services are accessible and equitable for all.

### **Grandmother's Story <sup>\*3</sup>**

**Grandmother has been caring for her granddaughter (5 years) from the age of 3 months in a kinship care arrangement.** Both grandmother and granddaughter identify as First Nations people. The granddaughter has developmental delays that are impacting on her grandmother's ability to continue to care for her granddaughter.

**The family was overwhelmed.** When the IUIH/TBS ECA Partnership team visit, they identify through yarning that while the NDIS was the family's primary concern, additional concerns exist around schooling, mental health, and carer fatigue. The family are becoming concerned about their ability to care for their granddaughter and the grandparents' relationship is being particularly affected by the stress.

**The grandparents were able to access free IUIH supports due to the partnership and warm referral.** They were linked in with a paediatrician and allied health professionals after completing a 715-health check with the GP. This flowed to referrals for further supports and allowed Grandmother to gain access to the NDIS through the partnership.

**Moving forward the partnership team connected Grandmother to external support that assisted with the granddaughters' schooling concerns.** One key area was school exclusion, as the school required the granddaughter to be collected by 12 o'clock every day. During the planning meeting Grandmother disclosed the school had even sent a letter advising her granddaughter would no longer be welcome unless her emotional development improved. Grandmother had been led to believe the 12pm exclusion was normal - that the school was helping. The partnerships team advised Grandmother the school had a responsibility to be inclusive – so should be focused on building capacity so teachers were able to properly support the granddaughter. Another First Nations service was brought into advocate. They organised a community Elder to accompany Grandmother to the school and discuss the exclusion and its effect on the family's life.

**Overall, it was an incredible outcome for the family.** IUIH and The Benevolent Society worked together as a team and together connected the family to even more services. So much support was wrapped around Grandmother - she is positive now that she can continue to care for her young granddaughter.

### **FIRST NATION NGO ALLIANCE REFLECTION:**

This partnership highlights the importance of placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the heart of service design and delivery. To genuinely seek to understand barriers and to work with others to sustain engagement and subsequent outcomes. A community approach to providing services. Critical elements supporting this approach include:

- Integrated and co-located health and social service supports led by an Aboriginal Community Organisation. This includes outreach activities to support engagement.
- A 'no wrong door' way of operating, where a holistic approach to supporting families is beyond the single point of service. In the grandmother's example provided, the exclusion at school was jeopardising the kinship arrangement and indeed the rights of the grandchild to access

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<sup>3</sup> Grandmother's Story was told as part of digital story for The Benevolent Society and IHIU with consent to share given by the family on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2021.

education. As a trusted support to the family, the partnership was able to coordinate additional supports that helped sustain the kinship arrangement and retain important services.

- Client centred services and support through co-design builds trust and culturally safe practices and services. Its foundations are respect which is essential to engaging and sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement. The success of this partnership is subsequently noted in the increased engagement well above the population.

#### **CASE STUDY 4**

##### **Life Without Barriers and SNAICC – National Voice for our children**

##### **Background**

In 2020, Life Without Barriers and SNAICC announced a partnership that was the first of its kind in scale and breadth. The partnership brings together one of Australia’s largest providers in out-of home (OOHC) care, Life Without Barriers (LWB) and SNAICC the Peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The partnership committed LWB to three core arenas of direct investment with the support and guidance of SNAICC to leverage the organisations own operations and sphere of influence in key areas including:

- Transition of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children care arrangements currently with LWB to community controlled within 10 years
- Investment by LWB to advocate for and with community-controlled organisations and the sector to direct funding and resourcing into community controlled entities.
- Active partnering with the sector to support other organisations currently providing OOHC to work towards transitioning care arrangement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to community control
- To advocate and work with Peaks, community control, the sector and Government to increase investment in early intervention and rapidly curb the rate of First Nations children coming into child protection.

Life Without Barriers has previously provided direct insight to the Productivity Commission about this partnership and its intent. The model of the partnership is enabling wide scale collaboration with state based community controlled organisations. Within each state and territory, the organisation is formalizing partnerships with ACCO’s to prepare for the transition of care arrangements. The partnership of SNAICC offers key engagement with ACCOs and also ensures accountability of LWB to the agreed approach on transitions. The partnership has supported the establishment of the Allies for Children and created broader sector engagement with the peak on its agenda for First Nations children.

##### **FIRST NATION NGO ALLIANCE REFLECTION:**

This partnership was delivered within a framework of the organisation Elevate RAP which requires a substantial transformation project to be central to its commitments. The Partnership commits to a number of public deliverables which LWB is accountable for and is a first of its kind for both organisations and for the sector and provides a blue print for others to follow including:

- A shared purpose and commitment – LWB Elevate RAP commitments and the Transformation Project acknowledges and reflects SNAICC’s Family Matters report and broader agenda and amplifies progress towards these priority reform areas.
- The Partnership has enabled a strong commitment towards Target 12 in Closing the gap in over-representation for First Nations children in care
- Demonstrates respect for SNAICC’s cultural authority and provides important cultural governance which is critical to shared decision making
- Expands the sphere of influence beyond LWB’s own organisations response in stepping away from care for First Nations children, but to ensure its journey encourages and supports other organisations to follow
- The partnerships is built on strong governance across the organisations and ensures the proper representation and leadership of First Nations people within LWB and accountability at senior levels
- Genuine good will to share resources and opportunities and to unite on key agendas and to truth tell when it isn’t easy or working.
- To share and give in relationships that serve the purpose and commitment of this partnership

## **CASE STUDY 5**

### **Key Assets, Wunan Foundation and Ngowar Aerwah – East Kimberley**

#### **Background**

Key Assets first commenced services in the East Kimberley in 2015. It was recognised at the time that Key Assets were strangers in that country, and that there was much the agency did not know, nor could ever know about the complex culture of the region. Key Assets sought from the beginning to build relationships and develop trust with local people and organisations. Relationships were built through a number of initiatives, including formal and informal meetings, speaking on local radio, participating in local events and setting up a small office in the premises of a large ACCO, and engagement with local Elders. These relationships took many years to establish and relied on trust, commitment and a willingness to spend as much time as needed to demonstrate a commitment to staying in the region beyond the cycle of Government funding. Eventually formal partnerships with two significant ACCOs, the Wunan Foundation and Ngowar Aerwah, were formed.

Key Assets learned that authentic partnerships with local people required us to be clear about what we had to offer and what was unique about the service and approach, but more importantly what would not work and how we would need to adjust the approach to service delivery. The importance of committing long-term and remaining resilient through the inevitable set-backs and challenges was key to working in such a remote area.

Key Assets built relations and employed local people and anchored the service with Key Assets staff. It was clear that service development, especially in more remote areas requires a whole of organisation approach and a commitment from Board level down to investment of resources, time and demonstrating a willingness to listen, learn and walk with the many partners in the community who had multi-generational stories and experience to share. Key Assets demonstrated a commitment to contribute to the community beyond the funded Government Services.

In 2022 a successful service mapping project was completed in the East Kimberley, delivered in partnership with Binarri-binya yarrowoo (BBY) the 'backbone' organisation supporting the implementation of Empowered Communities. The purpose of the project was to gain greater visibility of community needs and the services available to children, young people and families in the East Kimberley to meet those needs, so that people could be better supported not just for the cycle of government contracts but well into the future.

#### **FIRST NATION NGO ALLIANCE REFLECTION:**

Establishing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations is always dependent on relationships built on trust and time. This case study highlights that the process is often lengthy, with some organizations needing to earn the right to be a partner, with the following key learnings reflected:

- Organisations must be intentional in their commitment, including having a willingness to stay at it for as long as it takes, including when it is tough.
- Understand a partnership may require an all-organizational commitment, with the Executive and Board collaborating throughout the partnership – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to do business with the highest authority, so respect theirs.
- Understand that any partnership needs to be both-way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organization more astute to their needs, and how a partner might meet them.