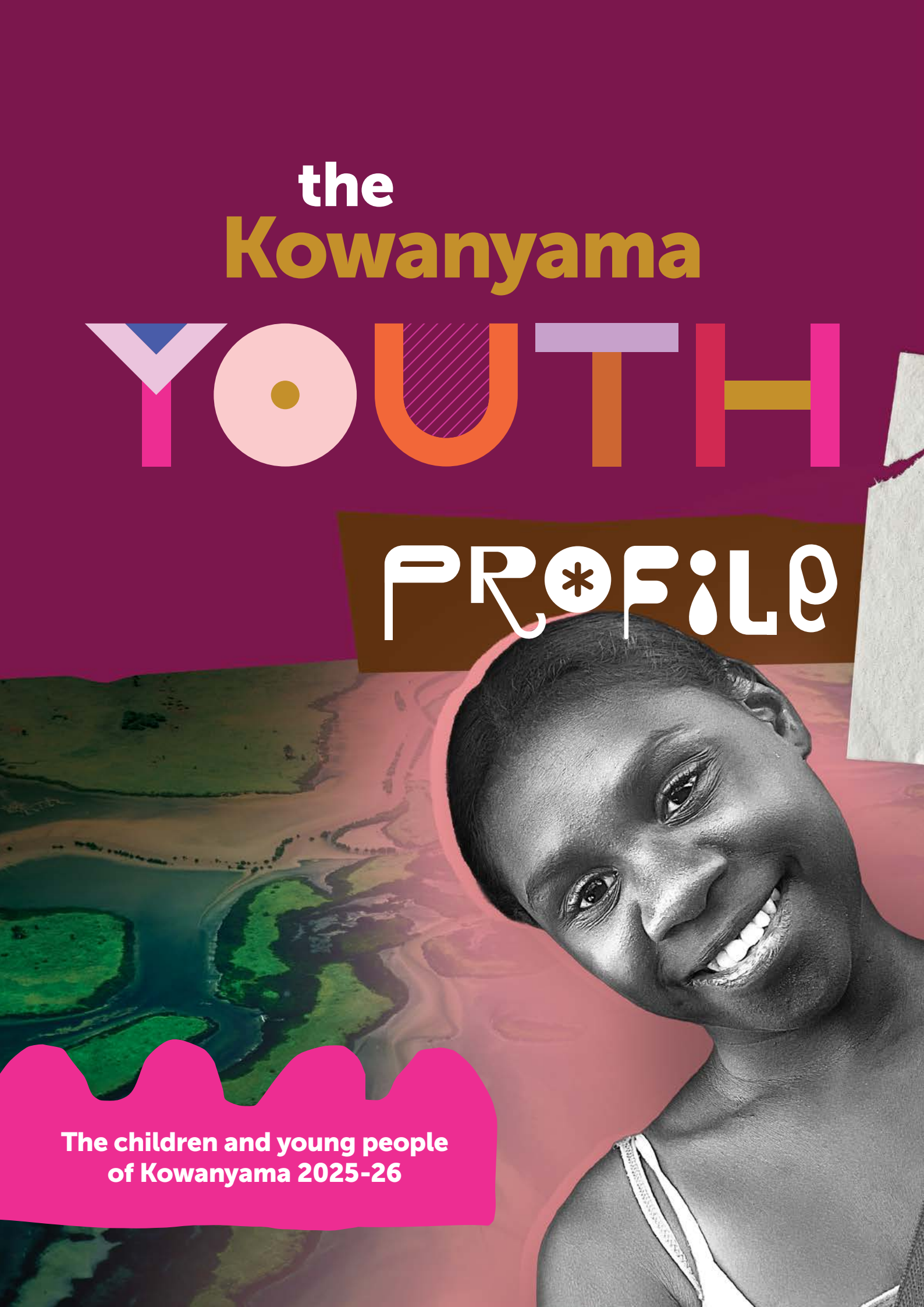
the Kowanyama YOUTH PROFILE



The children and young people of Kowanyama 2025-26

Vision

Country and children link past and future – both need respect and care

We want to see our country healthy. Waterholes still with waterlilies and lagoons healthy. We want to see our country looking beautiful like it was when we first had it. We don't want it to be run down and buggered up altogether. We want to make sure young children say, this is what the old people used to tell us about.

Colin Lawrence, Oykangand Elder, 1993.

At the heart of our Corporate Plan, 'The future of our community is our kids', lies Council's unwavering dedication to caring for Country and developing pathways for our future generations.

Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025-30

Our kids are at the heart of this plan because they are our future. Everything we do today is for them — to make sure they have safe homes, good schools, and a community where they can grow up proud and confident.

Councillor Terri Dick, Mayor, 2025

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following document may contain images and names of deceased persons.

Executive summary

The Kowanyama Youth Profile is part of a process initiated by the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council which will result in the development of the Kowanyama Youth Strategy (part of the Council's Corporate Plan 2025-30). It brings together statistics and stories (of what people have experienced or seen), with tools to help make sense of those findings.

The focus of The Profile is children and young people aged 0 to 24 years of age.

The purpose of the Profile is to:

- Stimulate involvement of community members in discussions and decisions
- Assist Council to define ways forward – the priorities and mechanisms for action, and
- Engage young people in the process, building future leadership capacity.

In summary this work has shown:

- Overall, children and young people in Kowanyama are not doing as well as their peers across Queensland in health, education and social measures.
- All age groups and areas of life are affected and where disadvantage is present early, problems accumulate with age.
- The most important factor behind the disadvantage and poorer outcomes is the child's home and social environment which is shaped by:
  - The realities of living in a remote Indigenous community
  - Limited access to services and opportunities, and
  - Fewer work and economic pathways as young people reach adulthood.

Despite those realities the Profile includes accounts of families that make good with what they have, that use Country and culture to build strong identity, and of young people who persevere and prevail against the odds. All young people have aspirations and goals, opinions and ideas – they want to be heard and be part of solutions.

The next step for Council is to use and build on the Profile – with community and young people – to develop the priorities and activities that will be the Kowanyama Youth Strategy. That will involve important discussions and decisions about the principles and values that underpin the Strategy, and the levers that Council can use to bring about change – be it through policy, its programs and practices, partnerships with key agencies, expectations of other providers, and developing pathways for youth leadership and representation. The task ahead is to ensure that ALL Kowanyama children – regardless of abilities or circumstances – have opportunities to access the means to reach their potential. And to leave no child behind.

"My grandfather used to say go to school… keep learning"

Kowanyama youth

Contents

Vision 2

Executive summary 3

Part 1:
Introduction 5

1.1 Message from the Mayor 5
1.2 Kowanyama is a place of resilience 6
1.3 About the children and young people of Kowanyama 7
1.4 The voices of young people 8
1.5 How to read this profile 10

Part 2:
Data stories of the developing child 11

2.1 Pregnancy: the most important nine months of life 13
2.2 Infancy: baby's biggest tasks are to learn to trust – and to grow 14
2.3 Toddlerhood: building confidence to explore the world in safety 15
2.4 Childhood: learning rules and building skills 16
2.5 Adolescence: building identity and confidence 17
2.6 Young adulthood: taking on roles and responsibilities 18
2.7 Pre-parenting: the environment where families begin and children are conceived 19

Part 3:
The Nest: six building blocks of a child centred community 20

3.1 Being valued, loved and safe 21
3.2 Having material basics 24
3.3 Being healthy 26
3.4 Learning 28
3.5 Participating 30
3.6 Having a strong sense of culture and identity 32

Part 4:
Conclusion 34

4.1 Summary 34
4.2 Next steps - Using the Kowanyama Youth Profile 34

Part 5:
References 36

5.1 References 36
5.2 Guiding Documents 36

Appendices

Appendix 1:
Kowanyama Youth Strategy – Approach and Methodology 38

Appendix 2:
Qualitative Data Stories 40

Appendix 3:
Quantitative Data Sources 50

Part 1:

Introduction

1.1 Message from the Mayor

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Kowanyama and the land on which we operate. I pay my deepest respects to Elders past and present and recognise our emerging leaders—Kowanyama's young people—who will one day lead our community into the future.

To support a strong future for our children and young people, we need a clear picture of how they are going and what else they need to improve their lives. This Profile brings together information about Kowanyama young people from birth to 24 years to help guide that work.

It brings government and institutional data together in one place for our consideration. It also recognises that numbers alone do not tell the full story. As a community, we understand that the full picture goes beyond the numbers. Interviews, youth surveys and community consultations all elevate local voices and identify the priorities we should focus on.

As Mayor, I'm proud to lead a Council that puts children and young people at the centre of our work. Our Corporate Plan 2025–2030 reflects this commitment, and this Profile is the first step toward a Kowanyama Youth Strategy with clear actions to improve outcomes, especially for young people experiencing vulnerability. Council will lead this work, but lasting change will take a whole-of-community effort involving local organisations and service providers. Kowanyama is known as 'the place of many waters'—but it is also a place of many strengths and opportunities. Together, we can build on these strengths to empower our young people to grow strong – in Culture and in Future.

Councillor Terri Dick
Mayor

1.2 Kowanyama is a place of resilience

Nobody knows where the saying *it takes a village to raise a child* began, other than from somewhere in Africa. But it applies to communities around the world and is most obvious in places where the ties of family and bonds of tradition – rather than the trappings of privilege – are foundational, such as remote Aboriginal communities like Kowanyama.

The institutions of the wider society that are tasked with supporting optimal child development in Kowanyama can only effectively do so through relationships of trust that are built on respect, and an understanding of the intercultural and historical contexts that inform the current circumstances – and challenges – confronting contemporary young people and their families.

This report attempts to describe these contexts in detail and urges you to think not only about the problems being presented, but to see a future and the many ways forward for young people.

Importantly, there are significant numbers of young people entering adulthood who have had the top end of opportunity cut off for them and are at risk of being trapped in enduring cycles of disadvantage. There are also young people who prevail despite the odds. The data presented in this report tells a story about resilience, confirming that while vulnerability as children is compounded by economic disadvantage, family and community stressors, and barriers to education, Kowanyama has young people who get through and go on to build healthy, rewarding adult lives. The question is, what do we need to do to ensure as many young people as possible can prevail – and thrive?

1.3 About the children and young people of Kowanyama

Population of Kowanyama 1079

87% of people are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

43% of the population are children and young people aged 0-24

QLD K **56%** **Kowanyama families (approx. 245) with dependent children and young people in the home,** compared to 38% for QLD

QLD K **18%** **Young people that have completed Year 12** compared with 75% of QLD young people

QLD K **22%** **Young people working, studying or training full-time**, compared to 78% of QLD young people

QLD K **62%** **Young people aged 15-24 who are unemployed** compared to 6% of QLD young people

QLD K **79%** **Households classified as low-income** compared to 40% in QLD

QLD K **51%** **Children under 15 years from unemployed families** compared to 11% of QLD families

QLD K **54%** **People living in overcrowded houses** compared to 6% of QLD people.

There is an average of **36 hospital admissions** **per year for children aged 0-17 years**

Highest admission cause across age groups is for **ENT** including otitis media (middle ear infection)

98% **Kowanyama people who have a pre-paid mobile phone or share one**

35% **Often or always have to sacrifice or cut back on food, bills or other essentials to afford internet**

Note: Young people are aged 15-24 years unless indicated otherwise

1.4 The voices of young people

In Kowanyama:

464 children and young people are under 25

224 are over 15

of which

171 live inside the community

53 live outside the community*

** including those who are at boarding schools and technical colleges.*

Surveys and interviews were conducted with 80 young people.
96 community members and service providers were also interviewed. This is what we heard.

Young people already know what works.

They want:

- Strong people around them
- Time on Country
- Things to do (sport, culture, activities)
- Real pathways to jobs and training
- Support to navigate systems.

When these are in place, young people feel:

Strong | Proud | Connected | Able to make good decisions

When they are missing, young people describe:

Boredom | Substance use | Disconnection | Feeling stuck

Key message for community and decision-makers

Young people are not lacking motivation—they are often lacking consistent support, opportunity and clear pathways. The focus should not be on fixing young people, but on strengthening:

Relationships | Culture and Country | Structured opportunities | Simple, fair systems.

Things people said about the big issues for young people

Having strong people around them

> *"...we want parents to be there, because parents the one gunna teach the kids their identity and talk about where they're from."*
>
> *"My grandfather used to say go to school... keep learning."*
>
> *"She went to boarding school and did well because I always pushed her, I always said something to her at the dinner table – her mother and I always talked to her"*

Spending time on Country

> *"Being on country... that's what kept me strong."*
>
> *"... because... a lot of distractions, mental health issues, everything's all in town. But once you set foot back on your country, everything will just, you just release everything now."*
>
> *"Taking young fellas...tell them what it is, the right thing – best to do it out on country."*

Having things to do (sport, culture, activities)

> *"Basketball and touch competitions...kids who were running wild would be good."*
>
> *"Bull catching...physically moving, learning new experience... strict... get up early."*
>
> *"The interest in the community in seeing kids creating and performing... seeing their children representing themselves and their families. Kids are absolutely keen to be involved."*

Having real pathways to jobs and training

> *"Job would help to stay strong and proud."*
>
> *"Junior ranger program...teach them how to do reports and things... they can be that in the future."*
>
> *"Half of this town love to be a stockman. There are some older men near Shelfo who would be good at taking a lead mentoring role with kids."*

Having support to find a way through complicated systems

> *"You need the right IDs to get the birth certificate...its complicated."*
>
> *"Need a youth space – for activities – but also where young people can sort out their applications and stuff."*
>
> *"Make sure our mob are registered...have a voice."*

1.5 How to read this profile

Kowanyama's children and youth will be the community's leaders in the 2030s and 2040s. The Kowanyama Youth Profile (The Profile) is for community members who want all of today's young people to be as prepared as possible for adulthood – as partners, parents, workers – and as leaders. The Profile is the first step in the development of the Council's Kowanyama Youth Strategy 2026-30 providing trusted information to assist Councillors and community leaders decide on priorities for action under the strategy (See Appendix 1: Kowanyama Youth Strategy).

There are FOUR key features to the Strategy – the FOUR Ms – Model, Mindset, Metric and Map.

The first two feature in The Profile. The Model is a way of thinking about the building blocks of child wellbeing. We have selected a model called **The Nest** to gather data and to guide Council decision-making in strengthening environments that support the wellbeing of children and young people. The Mindset – **brain health** – is used to present data in a way that helps Council think about policies to promote the best possible conditions for brain development and healthy minds.

Part 2 brings these two concepts together through publicly available government data about the community. This is organised in a seven-stage story – the developmental journey of Kowanyama's children from pregnancy to age 24.

Part 3 goes deeper. The government data in Part 2 is important – but it does not do justice to the experiences, thoughts, feelings and ideas of community members. To capture that critical information, the Model – The Nest – is used to give a more detailed and personal understanding of community circumstances through the voices of residents and workers in Kowanyama – including young people.

This has been done to show how the Model and the Mindset can be used, and to:

- identify important problems and opportunities for young people,
- stimulate contributions and opinions from across the community, and
- help guide the building of a strategic approach for the Strategy.

Part 4, the Conclusion, describes how, under Council leadership, the Kowanyama Youth Profile can be used as a tool to realise the potential for community members, service providers and governments to work together to develop and implement a collaborative four-year Youth Strategy and Action Plan, using the remaining two Ms – the Metric and the Map.

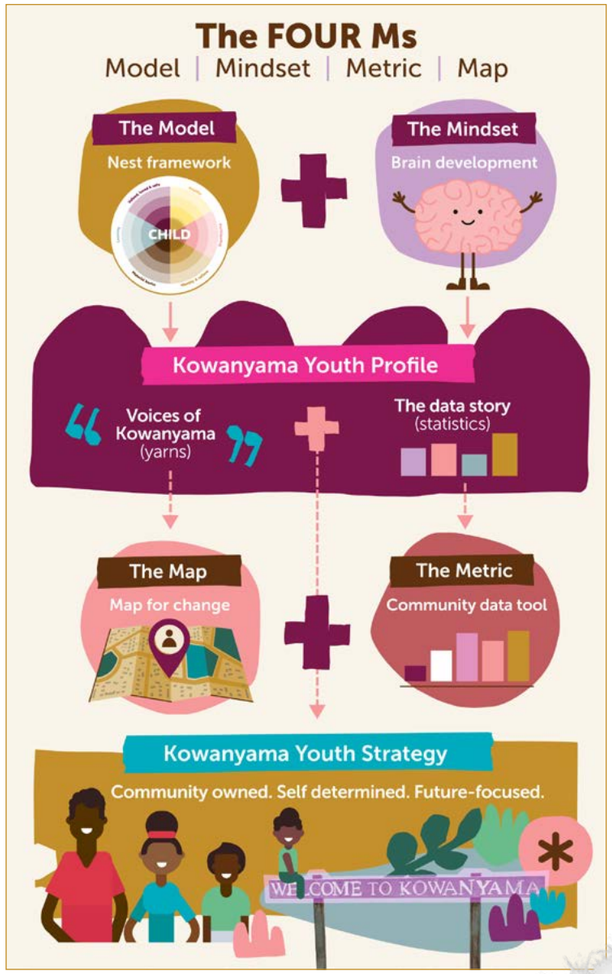


Figure 1: The Kowanyama Youth Profile will inform the Kowanyama Youth Strategy through the FOUR Ms: Model, Mindset, Metric and Map.

Part 2:

Data stories of the developing child

Building healthy brains and bodies so that children, young people and their families thrive, is a primary focus for Council and is at the heart of the Kowanyama Youth Strategy.

Healthy brains and bodies grow in healthy environments. Healthy environments provide the building blocks for children's development by supporting good sleep and nutrition; safe places to play, learn and participate in sport; ways to engage in creative activities, digital media and cultural practices; and healthy relationships.

This seven-page data story is built on the idea that healthy brains are thoughtfully cared for from the beginning of life, and that risk and harm are passed on environmentally and developmentally across generations.

The story brings together the two concepts – the Model (The Nest) and the Mindset (Brain Health) – in a developmental journey across the seven familial stages from birth to parenting. These are: Pregnancy, Infancy, Toddlerhood, Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Pre-parenting (getting ready to be a parent).

Using these concepts together helps explain how home, community and broader social conditions affect children and young people in their everyday lives. It also helps identify areas where services, programs and local action can make the biggest difference.

For each of the seven life stages, three important bits of data have been selected. Two of those come from public government reports. We believe most (but not all) are reliable. The third data point in each stage is a data gap – important information that we SHOULD know about – but don't. The videos below help to explain these ideas:

1. What Surrounds Us, Shapes Us *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xodw-CDwuI*
2. We Are All Brain Builders *https://tqkp.org.au/resources/we-are-all-brain-builders-video/*

Email *TQKP@aracy.org.au* for more information.

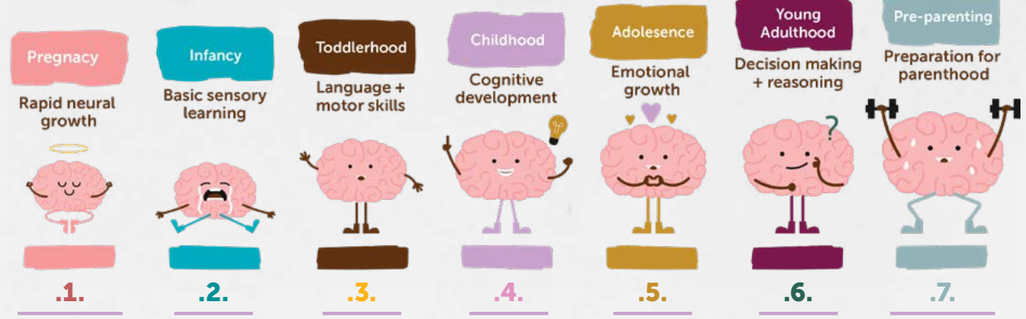


Figure 2. Brain Health across seven familiar stages. Brain Health comes from healthy relationships, food, sleep, movement, play and (eventually) work.

How to read the data stories

For each of the three data points selected, visual images show:

- which areas of the Nest are affected (such as health, safety, learning or participation)
- whether outcomes for children and young people in Kowanyama are tracking positively compared with Queensland, and
- how Kowanyama is tracking in terms of supporting good brain health.

'Brain building' is not a silver bullet, but it is an essential in order to maximise the chances of children and young people thriving, and to address the inter-generational transmission of trauma and adversity and disrupt enduring cycles of disadvantage. (M Hogan TQKP: Brain Building in Queensland – Years 2 & 3 in Review).

> "People in this community don't just sit in a position of helplessness... they are very good at identifying where things need to change, who holds the levers and how things can be done better."
>
> Service Provider

2.1 Pregnancy: the most important nine months of life

The first few months of pregnancy builds the baby's brain for everything from movement and breathing to memory and emotional connection. What affects the family affects mum, affects the baby's brain.

.1. FIVE OR MORE ANTENATAL VISITS DURING PREGNANCY

Valued Loved Safe	92% KOWIE	91% QLD	ON TRACK
Material Basics			
Healthy			
Learning			
Participating			
Identity & Culture			

Regular checks make mums confident and bubs safer. Kowie is doing OK in the first year..

What does it mean for brain health? Regular checkups for pregnant women is important to pick up problems and to keep mum and bub healthy –including bub's brain.

KOWIE – doing well

.2. SMOKING IN PREGNANCY

Valued Loved Safe	65% KOWIE	11% QLD	5.5 X HIGHER
Material Basics			
Healthy			
Learning			
Participating			
Identity & Culture			

It's clear: Smoking causes harm to pregnant women and their babies. More Kowie babies are at risk.

What does it mean for brain health? Smoking in pregnancy can affect growth including the bub's brain.

KOWIE – not good

.3. OTHER DRUG USE IN PREGNANCY

Valued Loved Safe	? KOWIE	? QLD	DATA GAP
Material Basics			
Healthy			
Learning			
Participating			
Identity & Culture			

It's clear: Drug use causes harm to pregnant women and their babies. We don't know about Kowie.

What does it mean for brain health? Alcohol and other drugs can affect the unborn baby and cause permanent damage to the brain.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- By birth, babies have ~86 billion brain cells.
- Brain cells start forming just weeks after conception.
- Stress hormones can cross the placenta and shape brain wiring.

2.2 Infancy: baby's biggest tasks are to learn to trust – and to grow

In the first year of life, the brain doubles in size. By age two or three, a toddler's brain is about 80-90% of its adult size and is forming over one million new nerve connections (synapses) every second.

.1. IMMUNISATIONS ON TRACK IN THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

96% KOWIE | **94%** QLD | **ON TRACK**

Informed and responsible mums have immunised babies. Kowie is doing OK for BABY immunisations.

What does it mean for brain health? Childhood illnesses, like measles, can cause serious brain damage. The best protection – for baby and the community - is full immunisation.

KOWIE – doing well

.2. LOW BIRTH WEIGHT (Less than 2500 grams)

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

14% KOWIE | **6%** QLD | **2.3 X HIGHER**

For babies – good things DON'T come in small packages. Healthy babies have healthy weight. More Kowie babies are at risk.

What does it mean for brain health? Small babies are more likely to have health problems - including in the development of the brain and nervous system.

KOWIE – not good

.3. POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

? KOWIE | **?** QLD | **DATA GAP**

Postnatal sadness is common and serious depression can occur after giving birth. It can and SHOULD be identified and treated – for mum and bub.

What does it mean for brain health? Depressed mums may have serious difficulties caring for their babies. That can affect the brain and how bubs develop secure attachments.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- Babies form 1–2 million connections every second.
- A baby's brain doubles in size in the first year.
- Early relationships literally build brain architecture.

2.3 Toddlerhood: building confidence to explore the world in safety

90% of a child's brain growth occurs before the age of 5. Positive experiences build resilience. Toxic stress (abuse, neglect, poverty) can harm the brain's structure and can cause long-term challenges.

.1. ENROLLED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (Kindy)

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

100% KOWIE | **96%** QLD | **ON TRACK**

Getting a head start is exactly that – brain building for skills and relationships. Kowie is doing OK getting kids enrolled – BUT they also have to stay.

What does it mean for brain health? Early safe, stimulating environments optimise brain development through exploration, play, predictability and practice.

KOWIE – doing well

.2. SUBSTANTIATED NOTIFICATIONS OF HARM (Child Safety)

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

40.5/1000 KOWIE | **5.4/1000** QLD | **7.6 X HIGHER**

A child MUST feel safe to take on challenges, be confident, develop meaningful and respectful relationships. Too many Kowie kids are at risk.

What does it mean for brain health? Trauma can harm the developing brain resulting in problems with thinking, feeling and developing trusting relationships.

KOWIE – not good

.3. DISABILITY

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

? KOWIE | **?** QLD | **DATA GAP**

Special needs kids only make up ground if their problems are recognised and their needs addressed – early. Our figures about Kowie are not good – we don't really know.

What does it mean for brain health? Testing for disabilities in Indigenous children is not adequate. Kids with subtle brain problems are unrecognised and their needs unmet.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- By age 3, the brain uses twice the energy of an adult brain.
- 90% of brain growth happens before age 5.
- Talk, play, and reading rapidly grow language circuits.

2.4 Childhood: learning rules and building skills

Around ages 6 to 12 the child's brain is being shaped for how it is used. Brain areas become stronger when they are used more often. Other areas are pruned so the brain is more efficient, and give impulse control, concentration, and the ability to manage emotional and social information.

.1. AEDC (vulnerable in 2 or more domains)

- **Valued Loved Safe**
- **Material Basics**
- Healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Identity & Culture

71% KOWIE | **14%** QLD | **5 X HIGHER**

Developmental delays for nearly three-quarters of kids means some widespread and early adversity. Many more Kowie kids will need special services.

What does it mean for brain health? As brain systems mature so does thinking. If not on track there are developmental delays that can make learning even more difficult.

KOWIE – not good

.2. PREVENTABLE EPSIODES OF CARE (hospitalisation)

- **Valued Loved Safe**
- **Material Basics**
- **Healthy**
- Learning
- Participating
- Identity & Culture

28/1000 KOWIE | **24/1000** QLD | **SLIGHTLY HIGHER**

Avoidable hospitalisation is that – avoidable. – which also avoids child and family trauma that goes with illness and separation. Kowie families and service providers can do better.

What does it mean for brain health? Preventable illness may be because carers aren't health aware, or effective services are less available. It's traumatic to the whole family.

KOWIE – doing okay

.3. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

- Valued Loved Safe
- Material Basics
- **Healthy**
- **Learning**
- Participating
- Identity & Culture

? KOWIE | **?** QLD | **DATA GAP**

Most adult mental health disorders start early and are not recognised. Hidden emotional problems are probably very common for Kowie kids – but we don't know.

What does it mean for brain health? Disruptive kids stand out. Those who are sad, lonely or anxious don't. All have long term effects on self-confidence and social adjustment.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- The brain keeps what it uses and prunes the rest.
- Practice strengthens focus, memory, and self-control pathways.
- Skills become more automatic as networks specialise.

2.5 Adolescence: building identity and confidence

Adolescence is a time of mismatch as the "emotional brain" (limbic system) rapidly develops while the "control system" (prefrontal cortex) develops more slowly.

.1. SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (Semester 1 2024)

- Valued Loved Safe
- Material Basics
- Healthy
- **Learning**
- **Participating**
- **Identity & Culture**

35% KOWIE | **84%** QLD | **LESS THAN HALF**

Out of school is out of sight for kids with special needs who miss out on learning, socialising – and help. Many more Kowie kids who need that help miss out.

What does it mean for brain health? Adolescents build brain potential and control impulses by being part learning environments that promote norms and social roles – School

KOWIE – not good

.2. SUPERVISED AND UNSUPERVISED ORDERS (Youth Justice)

- Valued Loved Safe
- Material Basics
- Healthy
- **Learning**
- **Participating**
- **Identity & Culture**

49.6/1000 KOWIE | **3.1/1000** QLD | **16 X HIGHER**

Kids with youth justice usually have serious problems; those kids are more likely to end up in jail – or worse.

Many more Kowie kids are on a path to more problems – for themselves, their partners and the community.

What does it mean for brain health? Brain development difficulties lead to behaviour problems and poor decisions – that lead to court. And big problems in adulthood.

KOWIE – not good

.3. YOUTH DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- Valued Loved Safe
- Material Basics
- **Healthy**
- **Learning**
- **Participating**
- **Identity & Culture**

? KOWIE | **?** QLD | **DATA GAP**

Keeping kids away from any drug use is a no-brainer – and reduces risk for later serious problems. But we don't know much about Kowie youth and drug use

What does it mean for brain health? Early drug use (including tobacco) is a risk for drug problems later – which harms the body, brain, relationships and the community.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- The emotional brain develops faster than the control system.
- Teen brains are highly sensitive to rewards and peers.
- The brain is highly adaptable—but also more vulnerable to stress.

2.6 Young adulthood: taking on roles and responsibilities

Brain development doesn't stop at 18 or even 21. The prefrontal cortex "control system"—responsible for high-level planning, impulse control, and decision-making—continues to mature into the mid-20s, or even early 30s.

.1. YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT COMPLETION (15-24 years)

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

18% KOWIE — 75% QLD — **6 X LOWER**

Options are fewer and the future tougher without a qualification of some sort. That applies to most young adults in Kowie.

What does it mean for brain health? Beginning adult life with no qualifications means fewer opportunities, less security and more stress on the body, brain and family.

KOWIE – not good

.2. BREACHES OF DVO

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

197/1000 KOWIE — 12/1000 QLD — **16 X HIGHER**

When carers fight bystanders are also casualties – including kids. Many more Kowie homes are at risk.

What does it mean for brain health? Nobody feels safe when violence threatens the family – everyone is stressed and the cycle goes on. That's bad for brains and minds.

KOWIE – not good

.3. ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

? KOWIE — ? QLD — **DATA GAP**

Young adults who abuse alcohol and drugs are often – or will be – parents. They, their partners and family are affected. We don't know how many have alcohol or drug problems or how to best help them.

What does it mean for brain health? Alcohol and drug abuse harms brains, including unborn babies. It also damages relationships, families and the community.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- The brain keeps developing into the mid-20s (and beyond).
- The prefrontal cortex supports planning and impulse control.
- Life experiences continue to reshape brain pathways.

2.7 Pre-parenting: the environment where families begin and children are conceived

As baby's brain develops during pregnancy and after birth – so do the brains of mums (and dads). Parents' brains are rewired too – to be more efficient, empathic and attentive to baby's needs.

.1. UNEMPLOYMENT (15-24 years)

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

62% KOWIE — 11% QLD — **6 X HIGHER**

No job – less money – more stress – poor options and decisions. Kowie is a tough place to start a family.

What does it mean for brain health? Without a job there are less options in life, less money for basics and more stress leading to ill-health, poor decisions – more stress.

KOWIE – not good

.2. OFFENCES AGAINST PERSON

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture

257/1000 KOWIE — 16/1000 QLD — **15 X HIGHER**

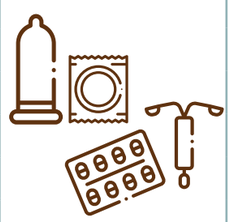
Being stressed and feeling unsafe makes it harder to find a trusted partner and plan a family. Feeling safe is harder in Kowie.

What does it mean for brain health? Fighting in the community causes everyone to feel unsafe. It's hard to trust in the future if you don't feel trust in others.

KOWIE – not good

.3. EFFECTIVE SEX EDUCATION

Valued Loved Safe
Material Basics
Healthy
Learning
Participating
Identity & Culture



? KOWIE — ? QLD — **DATA GAP**

All young adults should have confidence about sexual rights, risks and resources to stay safe and healthy – that means reliable and trusted sources. We don't know about Kowie.

What does it mean for brain health? DStaying sexually safe and healthy is essential for making life's most important decisions – when, how and with whom to share intimacy, and to become a parent.

KOWIE – not known

Did you know?

- Parenting rewires the brain for empathy and bonding.
- Both mothers and fathers show brain changes after a baby arrives.
- Responding to a baby strengthens caregiving brain circuits.

Part 3:

The Nest: six building blocks of a child centred community

Valuing and highlighting the voices of people who live and work in Kowanyama, this section presents data stories that demonstrate ways Council can support community leaders to create environments in which children and young people can thrive.

As the elected authority, Council plays a critical role in shaping the systems and environments that influence the lives of children and young people. Through the Kowanyama Youth Strategy, Council will apply a children's wellbeing framework—The Nest—to guide future policymaking and investment to strengthen community places and spaces and maximise impact.

The Nest, developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY), is used widely across Australia. The question behind The Nest is: What are the core building blocks (at the level of the child, family, community and system) that are necessary for an environment that enables every child to reach her or his potential as an adult?

In The Nest there are six building blocks (or domains) that support positive outcomes for all children and young people: 1) being valued, loved and safe; 2) having material basics; 3) being healthy; 4) learning; 5) participating; and 6) having a positive sense of identity and culture.

When things are going well in all the six domains, it can mean that:

- Every child is thriving.
- Every family is supported and connected.
- The community is resourced and enabled to raise thriving children and young people.
- Government is creating the systems and environments young people need to thrive, and is reducing the barriers, inequities and adversities that get in the way (Qld Kids Partnership).

This section provides a snapshot of how Kowanyama is tracking across each of The Nest domains. The next 12 pages highlight what young people and families told us about strengths and challenges in each, and so, provides opportunities for service providers and systems to respond to the issues that these young people and families have said are priorities for them.

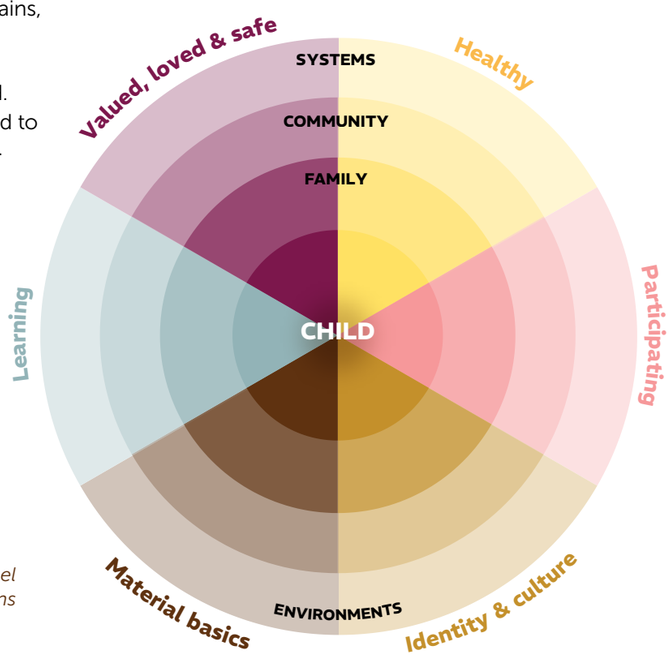


Diagram 3: The ARACY Wheel of Wellbeing with 6 Nest domains

3.1 Being valued, loved and safe

To develop trust and confidence, children need stable relationships at home and in the community. When this goes well, they feel valued, loved and safe at home and in the community.

Key message

Children and young people want strong people around them – family, mentors and Elders. Those who must spend time away from community, and those with disabilities need extra support to keep them feeling safe and to know they are valued and important to others.

Supportive, stable homes for children and young people

Many children and young people live in unstable environments due to community and family pressures – despite strong collective care – with families facing barriers to providing safe, secure homes.

What we heard

Community members were deeply concerned that infants and young people are growing up in increasingly unstable households. Contributing factors include overcrowded housing, limited employment, few recreational opportunities, and the impacts of sorry business, alongside harmful alcohol and drug use and unmet physical and mental health needs.

Concerns were raised about babies spending their critical first years in loud, unpredictable homes, children being unsupervised at night and exposed to domestic and family violence, and older young people lacking support to transition into adulthood.

While children are strongly loved and valued by families, Elders, and the wider community, there is insufficient support for parents and carers to consistently provide safe, stable, and nurturing home environments.

What this means

- Some children's early development is being affected by unstable environments.
- Children who are leaving school early are less well equipped for adulthood.
- Community strengths are not being adequately supported.
- This is increasing the risk of long-term involvement with social, health, and justice systems for children and young people.

Opportunities for action

- Strengthen early intervention, family and parenting support, and culturally safe health services for families .
- Address housing, employment, and youth recreation gaps.
- Support transitions to adulthood through mentoring, life skills, and education pathways.
- Back community-led, strengths-based solutions and collective care for young people.

> ***Kids just need safe places where they can be kids — especially when they are small.***
> **Community member**
>
> ***Overcrowded housing makes it hard for babies. It's noisy, people coming and going, hard for mums and bubs to settle.***
> **Community member**
>
> ***I love being at home in Kowanyama, but I'd like to live on my own with my child. I just want to be in control of my own household to focus on the things I'm capable of doing for him. I think about that nearly every day.***
> **Young mother 25+**

Keeping grounded: young people who move in and out of community

Many children and young people spend long periods away from home, creating both challenges and opportunities for staying connected to family, culture and Country.

What we heard

Young people leave Kowanyama for a range of planned and unplanned reasons. Secondary students attend boarding schools for up to 40 weeks a year, young women travel to Cairns for the final month of pregnancy, and children are placed in out-of-home care outside the community. Others may be in youth or adult detention, receiving medical treatment or rehabilitation, supporting family members, or relocating for education, training, and employment opportunities not available locally.

Families are concerned about the struggle to stay connected with young people during these absences, and how best to support them for a successful return.

What this means

- Students are disengaging from education early due to isolation and homesickness.
- Cycles of reoffending for youth in detention are being entrenched if community supports are not in place on their return.
- Families are often facing 'choiceless choices' trying to access schooling and social services.
- The risk of losing future leaders and cultural knowledge increases with separation from family, Elders and Country.

Opportunities for action

- Strengthen return-to-community support systems, including post-detention pathways and formal notifications of unplanned returns from schools.
- Improve information sharing between key services to maintain connection while young people are away.
- Expand education, training, and employment pathways in/out of community.
- Create programs that keep young people connected to culture and Country while they are away, and enable them to share them with the wider world.

DATA POINTS

- **68** Young people (15-24 years) voluntarily living outside of Kowanyama, including **15** boarding students
- **Less than 15** Young people were on Youth Justice supervised orders and/or restorative justice in 2025
- **32** Children were under Child Protection Orders in 2025

> *I want a blue card so I can support my family. I want my sister to grow up in community - not far away from us [in foster care]*
>
> **Kowanyama Youth - F 18-24**

> *[When I was at boarding school] I was thinking about being out there on Country all day. Coming back ...and going out camping was about connecting.*
>
> **Kowanyama Youth - F 18-24**

Keeping connected: young people with disabilities

Around 4 in 10 students at Kowanyama State School have a diagnosed or imputed disability, highlighting the scale of future need and the importance of early and ongoing support.

What we heard

Families described challenges navigating complex disability systems, including long wait times, difficulty providing evidence, and concerns about children being 'labelled'. Some are not accessing supports such as Disability Support or Carer Payments, and some young people disengage from NDIS plans due to limited experiences of benefit.

Access to services is limited, with allied health professionals mostly fly-in, fly-out and no NDIS-registered providers based in Kowanyama. School is a key access point, but low attendance can mean missed assessments and early intervention. Awareness of supports is also low. Social inclusion is impacted because accessibility supports are not available in community spaces, for example, large events at the MPC can be too loud and stressful.

What this means

- Less than 20 young people in community have an NDIS Plan, and only 29% of the funding available to them is being used.
- Problems with the system mean that families who are already struggling financially are unable to access benefits and supports they are entitled to.
- Children and young people with disabilities are missing out socially.
- Young people are at risk of leaving school without adequate supports for future participation as adults.

Opportunities for action

- Advocate for better access to essential health professionals and NDIS support.
- Increase GP access for sign-off of NDIS and mental health care plans.
- Increase community awareness of supports available to them.
- Grow a local disability workforce.
- Improve accessibility of community spaces.
- Include young people with disability in future planning.

DATA POINTS

- **50% of 36 NDIS Plans** held by Kowanyama people in 2025 were young people (0-24 years)
- **0** NDIS service providers based in Kowanyama
- **39%** Kowanyama students recognised with a diagnosed or imputed disability, compared to 25% in Queensland

> *I don't think that people in the system get the crisis in the NDIS in Kowanyama... given the number of kids with a disability in the school, there is an avalanche of demand coming and no providers here to take care of those issues.*
>
> **Service Provider**

3.2 Having material basics

Confidence and skill-building requires that parents, carers and households have fundamental resources including stable income for food, clothing and hygiene, appropriate housing, and community infrastructure for connection, recreation and safety. When this goes well, households have the essentials that kids and young people need.

Key Message

Young people said they need access to money and their own housing – to get what they need here and now to be able to set up and plan for their future.

Financial independence

Financial independence is a key step for young people in Kowanyama to transition into adulthood, yet many face significant barriers to earning and managing income.

What we heard

One in three young people (15–24) reported having no income, often due to barriers such as limited access to Centrelink, lack of identification, and no bank accounts. Employment opportunities are limited, with only 32% reporting any work, mostly casual or short-term. Only two young people surveyed earned enough to rely solely on wages.

Some young people leave Kowanyama to seek work elsewhere. Others face barriers such as low financial literacy, and shame and uncertainty in accessing support. Lack of income was linked to mental health challenges and, in some cases, involvement with the justice system.

What this means

- Persistent youth unemployment is embedding the risks of longterm welfare dependence, social disengagement, and preventable contact with justice and health systems.
- Barriers to obtaining ID, to banking and getting access to online services is preventing young people from taking their places in work and training.
- Kowanyama continues losing young talent seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Opportunities for action

- Create a youth friendly Help Hub for banking setup, ID acquisition, Centrelink navigation, and digital skills.
- Normalise helpseeking by embedding culturally appropriate support, mentors, and peer advocates.
- Increase youth voice in planning employment solutions to ensure services match real needs.
- Expand supported work experience and preemployment programs within council, local businesses, and community organisations.
- Strengthen local employment pathways through coordinated partnerships (e.g., RISE, Many Rivers, local employers).

DATA POINTS

- **20%** of young people (15-24) don't have their own bank account
- Young people surveyed (16-21) reported that:
  - **10%** rely on wages only
  - **19%** rely on a mix of wages and Youth Allowance
  - **32%** rely on Youth Allowance only and
  - **39%** have no income

> *I don't want to be on Centrelink - I don't want that to be my life*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 17**
>
> *I just want a job - with enough money [to take care of] myself*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 16**
>
> *They need opportunities to get what they need, to get out and do other things – have a white card – can go and get job, like main roads etc*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 22**

Housing

Access to safe and stable housing is a growing concern for young people in Kowanyama, with high demand and limited supply placing pressure on families and future planning.

What we heard

Most housing in Kowanyama is social housing, and only 44% of households are in appropriately sized homes. Many families need at least one additional bedroom, and 1 in 8 children are on the housing waitlist, reflecting widespread overcrowding and temporary living arrangements.

Young people reported limited understanding of the housing application process and often lack required documentation such as identification or proof of income. Long wait times discourage engagement, with some describing the system as "too hard" to navigate. Young people also want clearer pathways to secure housing in the future, including home ownership.

What this means

- Overcrowding is harming people's physical and mental health, increasing stress, and disrupting children's education.
- A limited understanding of the housing system is preventing young people from planning for a stable adulthood and is increasing housing insecurity.
- Without early support, many remain in unstable housing, limiting employment, cultural responsibilities and community participation.

Opportunities for action

- Strengthen youth access to housing through a youth 'housing readiness' program to build tenancy skills, provide support with documentation and future planning.
- Leverage housing investments to improve youth-appropriate design and streamline applications.
- Create pathways to home ownership and link housing to broader youth transition planning.

DATA POINTS

- **Less than 10** Kowanyama young people have completed housing applications
- **57%** homes require at least one extra bedroom, with 10% requiring more than 4 extra bedrooms
- **20** New residential homes to be built in Kowanyama 2025-2030

> *Build more houses so I can buy one when I'm older*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 14**
>
> *A first time mum and baby living in a three bedroom house with more than 12 people — that's really hard.*
> **Community service provider**
>
> *Overcrowded housing makes it hard for babies. It's noisy, people coming and going, hard for mums and bubs to settle.*
> **Community member**

3.3 Being healthy

Children's physical, mental and emotional growth needs change with time and are most critical through pregnancy and early years. Parents, carers, children and young people, require knowledge and access to health system resources appropriate to age and ability. When this goes well, parents, carers and young people are health-aware and can access the services they need.

Key message

For a long healthy life, children need a good start to life and strong support during the challenging years of adolescence. Mums and bubs in Kowanyama are doing well. Young people leaving school – often early – are falling through the cracks between child and adult health services, particularly mental health.

Early years support for parents and children

Kowanyama families show strong engagement with antenatal care and early health services. Almost all women attend at least five antenatal visits, and 86% of babies are born at a healthy birthweight, indicating a strong start to life for many infants.

What we heard

Fathers can feel excluded from the birth of their children. Women often choose a family member to support them in Cairns for the final stage of pregnancy and birth. Fathers who also wish to attend often cannot due to financial barriers for travel and accommodation.

Young mothers described stress and cost in preparing for a baby, with most essential baby goods needing to be purchased outside Kowanyama before or after birth. Parents also reported needing support to navigate systems such as birth registration, parenting payments, and other entitlements.

While Playgroup is available, many young parents feel isolated or "stuck at home" and would like more activities such as baby swimming classes. Overcrowded housing can make it difficult to establish calm routines for newborns, with one family describing a first-time mother and baby living in a three-bedroom house with more than 12 people.

What this means

- Strong antenatal care is supporting healthy birth weight babies.
- Some fathers are feeling disconnected from early parenting roles because they haven't been able to be part of the birth process.
- Young parents are experiencing financial stress and social isolation.
- Overcrowded housing is impacting infant wellbeing and routines.

Opportunities for action

- Expand parent–baby activities and parent groups.
- Improve housing options for new families.
- Support young parents to navigate systems and services after birth.

DATA POINTS

- **17** Average births in Cairns per year of Kowanyama babies
- **13 %** of young people (15-24 years) surveyed are parents
- **0** new parents in 2025 were under 18 years

> *She was positive and confident about the pregnancy. She kept working and had aunties around her the whole time. Good support makes a difference for mum and baby.*
>
> **Kowanyama youth - F 25+**
>
> *More mums and bubs stuff would help — like baby swimming, places where mums can go and relax with their babies.*
>
> **Kowanyama youth -F 18-24**

Young people's health checks

For adolescents and young adults in Kowanyama, getting yearly health checks, immunisations and follow-up care is critical for their long-term health and mental wellbeing.

What we heard

Many understand the importance of health care and some report recent contact with services – because they were asked to attend rather than seeking care independently. Some were unsure what treatment they had received and were confused about whether they had been vaccinated.

Barriers to seeking help include discomfort in health settings, concerns about confidentiality, and anxiety about being asked personal questions or attending without support. 21% of young people are being tested for STI's each year, of those 39% are testing positive.

Others reported not having recent health checks, though recalled earlier ones delivered through larger, social clinics attended with friends. There is also limited understanding of health risks such as sexually transmitted infections, smoking, and poor sleep. Young girls want help with female hygiene resources and report having to miss school when they don't have them.

What this means

- A lack of health knowledge is increasing the risks of harmful behaviours.
- Sexually transmitted infections that are not found can become chronic and affect young people's ability to start a family.
- Gaps in preventative care are contributing to poorer long-term health outcomes.
- Ongoing health issues contribute to reduced life expectancy.

Opportunities for action

- Strengthen the focus on youth health education and promotion activities.
- Deliver health checks through regular, integrated, youth-friendly community events.
- Make feminine hygiene resources freely available in school and youth settings.

DATA POINTS

- **0.4 %** Kowanyama young people have an up-to-date health check
- **55 years** Median age of death, compared to 80 years for Queensland

> *Some people (our age) are sad , don't leave the house - feel shame to go talk to counsellors.*
>
> **Kowanyama youth -F 15**
>
> *Shame to go to the clinic. Family will ask questions and that stops young people going.*
>
> **Community member**
>
> *Posters and stuff to get people to go to the clinic and have health check and stuff. Could be work experience for kids at the clinic.*
>
> **Kowanyama youth -F 18-24**

3.4 Learning

Children learn through experiences and interactions at home, in school and in the community. Formal and informal learning environments should contribute to growth regardless of ability or attitude. When this goes well, learning is valued and effective opportunities and services are available.

Key message

Lifelong learning requires access to learning opportunities both in and out of community and must be accessible to those with disability. Young people aged 15–17 are particularly vulnerable, often 'falling off a cliff' between school completion and access to other pathways.

Learning opportunities after year 10

What we heard

Young people showed strong interest in further study. One group identified nine TAFE courses they wanted to pursue but did not know how to enrol or how they could study from Kowanyama. Another wanted to complete a certificate course in Cairns but could not due to travel and accommodation costs.

Key barriers include limited Year 11–12 boarding school places, especially for students re-engaging, and many courses being unavailable to those under 18. There is also low awareness of financial supports, limited local study infrastructure, and missing identification documents required for enrolment.

What this means

- Many young people are only reaching Year 10 education, a sizeable number are dropping out along the way.
- This reduced access to secondary education is leading to social disengagement and limited pathways to other learning.
- The risk of unemployment is high.
- Disengaged adolescents have an increased risk of mental ill health.

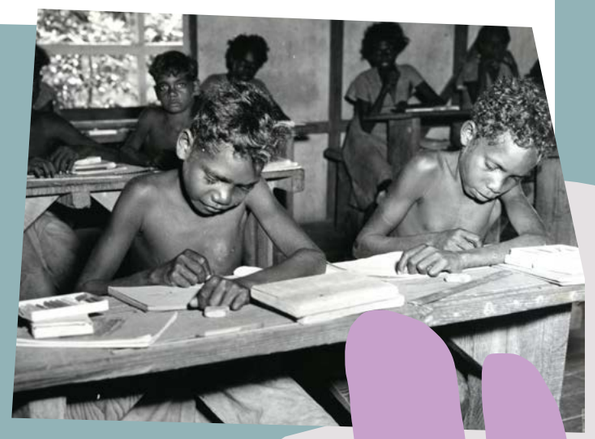
Opportunities for action

- Provide one-on-one case management for young people aged 15–17.
- Strengthen coordination and navigation into education and training pathways.
- Build partnerships with TAFE and other providers to expand study and work experience options in community.

DATA POINTS

- **18%** Young people (15-24 years) have completed Year 12 or equivalent
- **50 %** of young people (15-24 yrs) want to complete further study or training
- **8** Young people enrolled in Year 11 and 12 in 2026

> *At 15, I still don't think they're ready to go to work full time, and it means they disengage, in essence, from 15 unless they've gone to boarding school.*
> **Service provider**
>
> *When it was over [COVID-19] there was no clear path back [to boarding school]. He felt bored and unsure what to do next. He thought about repeating the year, but never did. Without support around him, school slowly slipped out of reach.*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 21**



Learning for earning – young people as the future workforce

Community members expressed strong concern about limited local employment options for young people in Kowanyama, with many roles currently filled by external workers. There is a shared view from community, Council, and service providers that building a local workforce is essential for long-term self-sufficiency, leadership, and community strength.

What we heard

Young people need clear pathways into training, apprenticeships, and employment. Several initiatives are already supporting this goal. Kowanyama State School has supported 14 community members, including five young people, to enroll in a Certificate III in Early Childhood and Care through TAFE's Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP). Council has partnered with Tec-NQ to support boarding students with local work experience. Year 10 students at the school can also complete a Certificate II in Remote-Area Work Readiness, with similar traineeships available at other organisations.

However, barriers remain. Blue card requirements limit opportunities for some providers who want to work with under-18s. Some training cannot be accessed locally so requires travel. Coordination between organisations is limited, leading to missed opportunities and weak alignment between training and local workforce needs.

What this means

- Building a local workforce is constrained by limited entry into local employment pathways for young people.
- There is a continued reliance on external workers.
- Training opportunities are being lost due to inefficient coordination.
- The risk of young people disengaging from education and training systems is significant.

Opportunities for action

- Map current and future workforce needs.
- Develop youth transition pathways.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools and employers.
- Explore options for local training and study hubs.

> *I finished year 12 - I want work, not Centrelink.*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 17**
>
> *What do we need for when we're older and fathers? Jobs really so we can support our kids.*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 16**
>
> *I love seeing people doing TAFE in community.*
> **Kowanyama youth - F18**
>
> *After Year 10 there's nothing. Too young to work, not in school – just walking around.*
> **Community member**

DATA POINTS

- **50 %** Year 12 Graduates (15-24 years) are currently engaged in employment, education and/or training
- **22** Secondary students (15-17 years) will be seeking work or further education in the next 3 years
- **1 in 4** Young people (15-24 years) surveyed said one-on-one support (case management) is key to getting work

3.5 Participating

Community is made up of individuals who develop purpose through participation (family, school, work, community, culture). Children require opportunities to be respectfully heard, and to develop agency. When this goes well, what kids need to participate with others and develop responsibility, is available.

Key message

Young people need places and spaces to spend time together, participate in activities and develop leadership skills. They want to make sure that kids with disabilities can be included.

Building Pathways for Future Leaders

For children and young people in Kowanyama to become future leaders, they need opportunities to understand leadership and develop skills through meaningful participation. Young people expressed interest in roles such as Mayor or Councillors, and want to better understand how Council makes decisions, including how funding is allocated. In 2025, Council supported students to attend Council meetings, with further opportunities planned for 2026.

What we heard

Young people are already demonstrating "invisible" leadership. This includes supporting peers experiencing mental or physical health challenges, organising trips on Country, and encouraging friends to access services. Young adults also take on responsibilities such as accompanying family members for medical or boarding school travel, or caring for children and Elders when carers are away.

Digital skills are also increasingly important for future leadership. Most young people rely on mobile data, but expanded community Wi-Fi is improving access to information, education, and employment. However, this also introduces risks, including exposure to online gambling and predatory behaviour.

What this means

- Limited established pathways are restricting young people's understanding of leadership and decision-making.
- Informal leadership roles being undertaken by young people are often unrecognized, but essential to the community's wellbeing.
- Improved digital access is increasing both essential opportunity and exposure to online risk, so young people require adequate support.

Opportunities for action

- Expand youth participation in Council and community decision-making.
- Recognise and support informal leadership roles among young people.
- Build digital literacy and online safety skills to support future leadership capability.

DATA POINTS

- **0** Young people (15-24 years) are in leadership positions in community
- **88 %** Young people (15-24 years) surveyed had access to a pre-paid mobile phone and accessed the internet exclusively through the phone
- **4** Strategies in Council's Corporate Plan 2025-30 to develop future leaders' programs

> *I talk to the boys, tell them to have a chat in the gym. Maybe not first time but one day when they start coming, we can show them what [Rangers] do. I would love to see my younger brothers doing something better.*
> **Kowanyama youth - M 22**
>
> *There are kids my age who are not registered [to vote]. They should make sure our mob are registered. If we not registered we don't have a voice.*
> **Kowanyama youth - F23**

Places and Spaces

What we heard

Adolescents and young adults in Kowanyama reported a lack of dedicated, age-appropriate spaces to spend time and connect with peers. Existing facilities are largely seen as catering to younger children, with limited structured options for older youth. As a result, young people often gather in informal spaces such as swimming spots (e.g. Car Crossing), the store, people's backyards, and walking along main streets. Some also feel excluded from organised community events, including music performances held in adult-only venues.

Young people expressed a need for dedicated youth spaces and structured opportunities, including sport, arts, culture, and music, as well as programs such as Junior Rangers and cadets. They also identified interest in youth events like camps, movie nights, football nights, and live music. A youth centre was also highlighted as important, providing support with employment, training, and access to services.

What this means

- The lack of age-appropriate, safe spaces reduces opportunities for positive social connection.
- Reliance on informal gathering places increases risk and disengagement.
- Lack of youth-focused infrastructure limits youth participation and opportunities for service providers to engage directly with young people.
- Exclusion from events reduces a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Opportunities for action

- Develop dedicated youth spaces and improve access to facilities.
- Invest in structured, well-organised youth programs and activities.
- Upgrade existing infrastructure and adapt it for youth use.
- Establish a youth hub for support services and practical assistance .

DATA POINTS

- **70%** Young people (15-24 years) think organised recreational activities are a key need
- **4** Community venues were identified by young people (10-17 years) as places where they can spend time – MPC, Skatepark , Pool and Football Oval
- **161** People in Kowanyama have approved blue cards

> *We need things to do at night to keep people my age occupied.*
> **Kowanyama youth - F22**
>
> *The Junior ranger program, taking kids out and teach them how to do reports and things. Good to show them they can be that in the future.*
> **Kowanyama youth - M22**
>
> *We need a youth space – a place where young people can sort out their applications and stuff. People who can help them.*
> **Kowanyama youth - F18-24**

3.6 Having a strong sense of culture and identity

Social competence and responsibility require a secure sense of personal identity and cultural belonging that develops through respectful relationships in childhood, and are most profoundly expressed as a competent parent, wise elder and respected ancestor. When this goes well, kids have positive experiences of social and cultural belonging.

Key message

Being strong in culture and identity in Kowanyama requires access to culture and country now and in the future, and requires that the right to a legal identity is fully realised for all children.

Legal Identity: navigating government systems

Access to legal identity documents is a major barrier for children and young people in Kowanyama, limiting access to services, education, and employment. Approximately 20% of children have unregistered births, creating long-term exclusion from government systems.

What we heard

Families and young people described difficulties obtaining documents such as birth certificates, licences, tax file numbers, and Centrelink numbers. Online-only systems, costs, and overcrowded or unstable housing make it harder to apply for and store documents safely. Service providers also report challenges enrolling young people in education, training, and employment due to missing documentation.

Young people described a "domino effect", where lacking one document prevents access to others – for example, a lack of a tax file number can cancel Abstudy payments and thus secondary school pathways; no birth certificate can prevent a young person from applying for a driver's license and having access to employment. This also affects community planning, with incomplete data not reflecting local needs.

What this means

- Lack of documentations limits access to education, employment, banking, and government support.
- Unregistered births create long-term exclusion from services.
- Online-only systems increase barriers in remote contexts.
- Incomplete documentation reduces accurate community planning.

Opportunities for action

- Provide consistent, trusted, face-to-face support to obtain and manage identity documents.
- Establish long-term case management and advocacy for young people and families.
- Improve coordination between services to support registration and documentation processes.
- Strengthen culturally safe pathways to ensure all young people are properly documented and supported.

DATA POINTS

- **1 in 3** Young people (15-24 years) do not have a copy of their birth certificate
- **56%** Young adults (18-24 years) do not have a driver's licence or photo ID
- **1 in 2** Young people surveyed (15-24 years) need assistance in getting their own Health Care and/or Medicare Card

"Our young people with IDs… there is mob who have lost parents. They don't have birth certificates. You need the right ID to get the next one. It's complicated. "

Kowanyama youth

One missing document stops everything. If you don't have papers, you don't have a future plan.
Community member

That's why I need my birth certificate, to get my license.
Kowanyama youth -M 21

Cultural Identity: Future-Proofing Connection to Country

Connection to Country is a major strength for young people in Kowanyama and is central to identity, wellbeing, and future opportunity. Families take pride in Kowanyama's successful fights for native title rights and its history as the first Ranger Program in Queensland to manage land and sea through the DOGIT. Ranger programs and family ties to land continue to support cultural identity and potential employment pathways.

What we heard

Young people want more opportunities to work on Country, including Ranger roles and training in Land Care, boating and 4WD skills. They also identified transport that enables organised trips to Country as important for wellbeing.

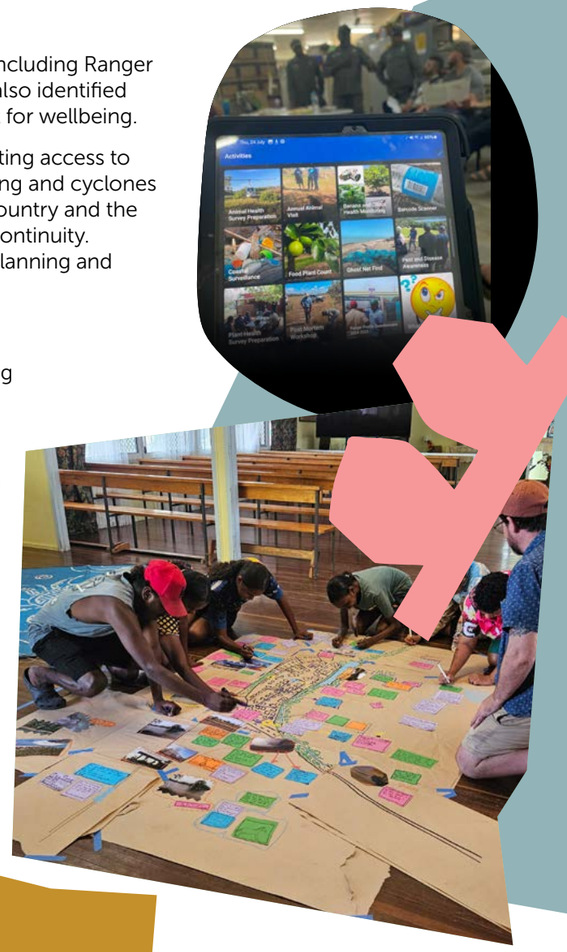
Climate impacts and frequent disasters are increasingly disrupting access to Country and cultural practices. In 2024–25, wet season flooding and cyclones delayed funerals by up to 12 weeks and restricted access to Country and the community cemetery, raising concerns about future cultural continuity. Young people expressed interest in being involved in disaster planning and response roles.

What this means

- Strong cultural connection supports identity and wellbeing but is at risk from limited access and climate disruption.
- Reduced access to Country limits cultural practice, learning, and employment pathways.
- Climate events increasingly disrupt cultural continuity and community responsibilities.
- Young people have limited formal pathways to apply cultural knowledge in future planning and response.

Opportunities for action

- Expand youth employment and training in Ranger and land management roles.
- Improve access to Country through transport and organised cultural programs.
- Involve young people in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery planning.
- Invest in future-proofing cultural sites and strengthening climate resilience of key places.



I want a bush life.
Kowanyama youth -M 17

Being on Country… that's what kept me strong.
Young person

Country is where healing starts.
Kowanyama local -M 22

There are people in Kowanyama who do that for kids today – help to learn about culture and identity by DOING TOGETHER.
Kowanyama local -M 25+

DATA POINTS

- **40 of 52 weeks** in 2025 were spent in Sorry Business
- **44%** of households have no vehicle (means to access Country)
- **100%** Kowanyama State School students can participate in culture and language classes

Part 4:

Conclusion

4.1 Summary

The Kowanyama Youth Profile is part of the process initiated by the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council which will result in the development of the Kowanyama Youth Strategy. It is a resource that brings together statistics and stories (of what people have experienced or seen), with tools to help make sense of those findings – a Model (The Nest) and a Mindset (Brain Health). As the process continues the Profile will assist the Council in developing the priorities and mechanisms to make change through the Strategy (the Map), and data tools to guide and monitor progress over time (the Metric).

Bringing together the statistics and stories in the Profile provides detail to pictures of growing up in Kowanyama, which capture very different experiences for young people and those that care for (and about) them. That detail is not consistent – there are significant gaps where there is no good data and where stories are hard to tell. From a distance the picture that emerges from the data is alarming – for almost every outcome measure (be it health, education or social) the children and youth of Kowanyama (as a group) are not doing as well as their age-mates in Queensland. That disadvantage is seen across every Nest Domain and age group.

However, up close the picture is much more complex. The stories clarify how critical the context of growing up is. The children and youth of Kowanyama as a whole do not have the same functional access to the dedicated resources that are available for most young people in Queensland. They confront particular barriers to participation and progress that are unique to remote Indigenous communities. And as their relative disadvantage increases as they grow into young adulthood, their work and economic opportunities are narrowed even further.

Despite those barriers there are stories of families that make good with what they have, that use country and culture to build strong identity, and of young people who persevere and prevail against the odds. And all young people have aspirations and goals, opinions and ideas – and want to be heard and be part of solutions.

4.2 Next steps - Using the Kowanyama Youth Profile

The Kowanyama Youth Profile is intended to be a practical leadership tool. It brings together facts, local stories and community knowledge to assist Kowanyama Council clearly communicate the needs, strengths and aspirations of children and young people.

It is designed to:

- Support strong advocacy for services, programs and resources, and
- Guide priorities and actions in the Kowanyama Youth Strategy.

These priorities align directly with the existing Council Focus Areas identified in the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025–30: The future of our community is our kids: 1) Advocacy, 2) Community, culture & environment, 3) Partnerships, 4) Local jobs and training, and, 5) Services and infrastructure.

Planning

The Profile uses the Model (the six Domains of The Nest) to assist planners to think broadly across the Domains – the building blocks for healthy youth and a vibrant community. Planning should be evidence-driven, so the Mindset (Brain Health – NPP) is used to understand how policies, programs and everyday decisions affect brain development and prepare children to be responsible adults. But sometimes evidence is not complete, is unreliable or not available, and decisions need to be guided by community values. That requires broad discussion about what core values are and how they should be applied.

Implementation

Planning is critical but not enough – making it happen requires a framework, and the final stages of the Strategy's development will use the Profile to shape a clear and realistic implementation plan – the Map. This plan needs to fit with the Council Focus Areas and be doable with the levers (ways to bring about change) available to Council.

These include:

1. Policy – Council is able to make and implement policies specifically focused on children and youth. But Council may also require that ALL policies consider (and document) the implications for young people (and how they fit with the Youth Strategy)

2. Practice & Programs – Youth outcomes are influenced not only by youthspecific services but by how all Council operations work. This could include supporting staff to engage effectively with vulnerable or disengaged teenagers, for example.

3. Partnerships – Council can set clear expectations of government services and partners, including cultural orientation (such as the Kowie Card), shared planning, and agreed information sharing arrangements.

4. Providers – Many non-government agencies and contractors operate in and are paid by Kowanyama. Council might require stronger consideration of child and youth issues in relation to contracting, recruitment, reporting and in-community service delivery.

5. Participation – Involving young people in local governance strengthens decisions today and builds leadership for tomorrow. A Youth Council may serve as a powerful incubator of youth leadership.

Guiding Principles

The Profile is part of an ongoing process. As leaders move from planning to action, it will be important to agree on principles that guide all decisions affecting children and youth.

These principles may include:

- Children and Youth are a priority for Council decision-making (as already stated in the Corporate Plan).
- All policy should consider and advantage children.
- Decisions should be based on evidence, with ongoing investment in local data and learning.
- Agreement should be sought about how policy incorporates key community values.

Community and Cultural Values

Discussing values would be a useful community engagement process, and, in addition to cultural values as a priority, could consider whether all policy should:

- be in the best interest of children and youth
- be demonstrated not to harm or disadvantage children and youth
- support the development of children and youth to become young adults able to make independent decisions in the interest of themselves, their family and community, and
- ensure fairness – so that ALL children have opportunities to access the means to reach their potential, regardless of abilities or circumstances – leave no child behind.

Part 5:

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5.1 References

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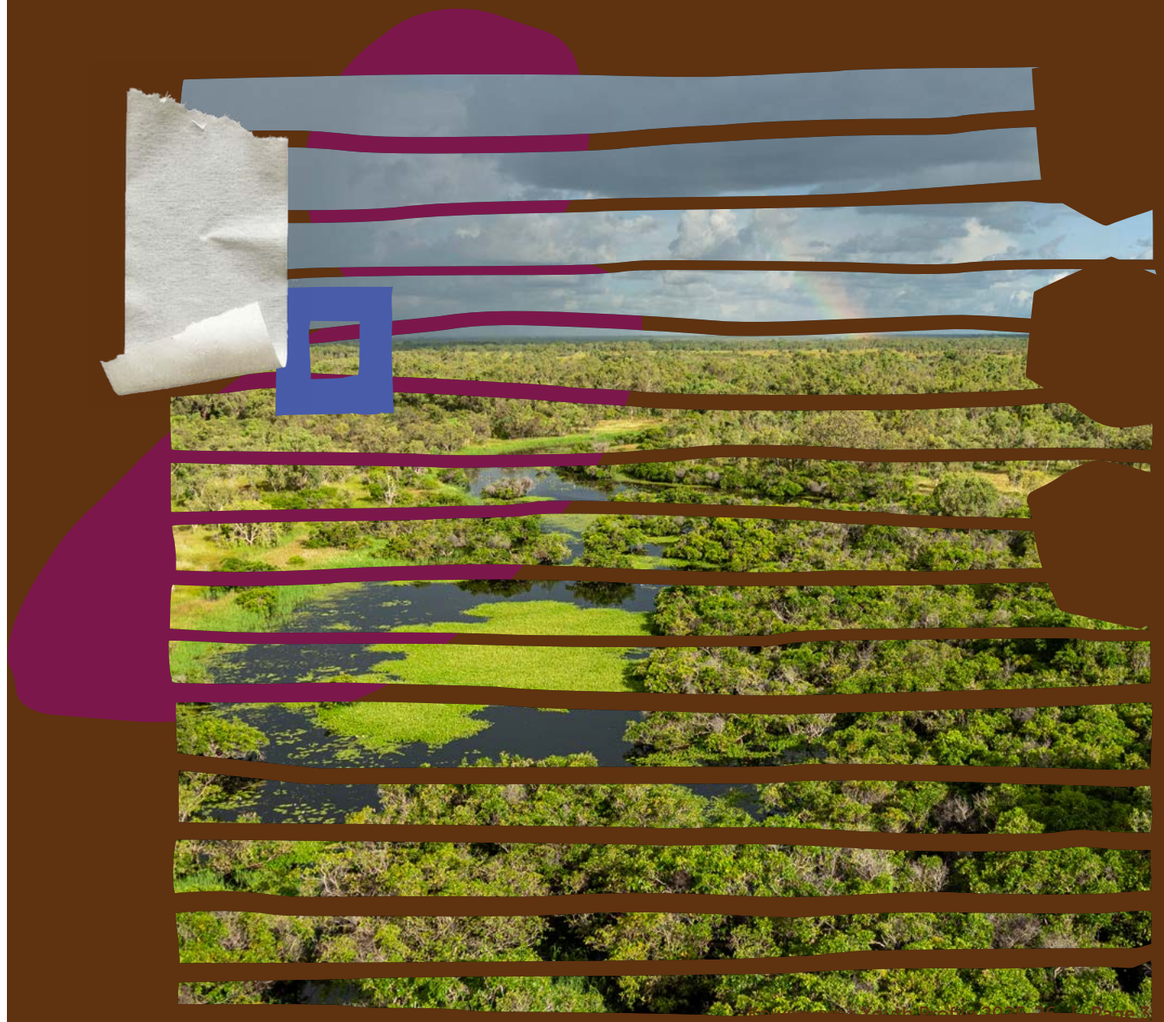
5.2 Guiding Documents

1. Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030
2. Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP) – *Resources Archive - Queensland Kids Partnership*
3. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY) – library of resources
4. Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas
5. Closing the Gap Report 2024
6. Priority Reforms – National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2024.

the Kowanyama YOUTH PROFILE

Appendices



Appendix 1:

Kowanyama Youth Strategy – Approach and Methodology

Background and Objectives

The Kowanyama Youth Strategy (KYS) will be a working document. Initiated by the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council (KASC), it will address the future needs of children and youth from pregnancy to age 24. Its methodology and findings are informed by the circumstances of the community, the opinions of residents and its objective:

The Kowanyama Youth Strategy will provide the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council with the means (through policy, programs, partnerships and participation) to ensure that Kowanyama Community is an enabling environment for all children and youth to realise their optimal potential as young adults with responsibilities to themselves, their family, their community, their culture – and future generations.

With the priorities, constraints and operational opportunities available to the KASC in mind, the KYS is an instrument enabling focus, coherence and appraisal in advancing a youth agenda as part of Council's core responsibilities. That may be paraphrased as four key questions: ***What are the policy-relevant areas for action*** (where are the best opportunities for gain and the policy-relevant levers to bring it about)? ***What is the rationale for action*** (why and on what evidence)? – and – ***Where are the waypoints*** (how do we judge status and progress)?

Together, these three elements frame the KYS and provide the basis for considering: ***What are the priorities for action and the mechanisms available to Council to bring about change?*** These four questions form the key pillars of the KYS:

- **Model** – a policy-friendly framework encompassing the range of influences on child and youth development. The KYS uses the six Domains identified in The Nest, developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (Appendix I).
- **Mindset** – an orientation that explains how those external influences impact child development and provides both rationale and evidence for interventions. Using brain health as a proxy for youth wellbeing and optimising developmental potential, the KYS adopts neuro-informed policy and practice (NIPP, Appendix II) to clarify the mediators between environmental forces and neurodevelopmental outcomes (and opportunities for intervention).
- **Metrics** – concisely presented information relevant to the implementation of the KYS (from collections and informants) to inform focus and progress. In terms of quantitative data, the KYS utilises child and youth targets within the Closing the Gap (CTG) strategic framework, clustered across the ARACY Domains – the Kowanyama Youth Metric.
- **Map** – a framework for action arrived at by Council and community leaders in the last stage of developing the KYS, based on presentation of preliminary findings (KYP).

Approach and methodology

This work draws on mixed methods research approaches in the social sciences in which quantitative and qualitative information is combined to facilitate understanding in areas of social complexity. This is particularly relevant given the limitations of quantitative data in remote Indigenous settings (on the basis of collection/reporting, public access, population size and characteristics ...). It also ensures more nuanced consideration of particular issues, and that opinions and attitudes of identified groups whose voices may not otherwise be heard are included. All contributions must be ***acceptable*** (in collection and use). All data (qualitative and quantitative) must be ***relevant***. In terms of the purposes of the KYS for the KASC, it will be required to perform one or more of these three functions:

1. profile (contributing to a comprehensive understanding of needs and opportunities);
2. practice (the implementation activities of the KASC); and,
3. performance (monitoring and evaluation).

Quantitative approach: Publicly available data for Kowanyama

There is a substantial body of published data that is relevant to Kowanyama's children and young adults. The nature of these data is such that nearly all are indicators of risk (such as relate to Justice and Child Safety reporting). To the extent that these are relevant to particular ARACY Domains it is by negative association (rather than causation). That may suggest a deficit focus, particularly with Domains such as Participation, and Identity and Culture. However, the associations – for instance between unstable family and community environments and challenges to the development of positive self-identity as a community member and cultural representative – are real.

Key takeaways from these data include that across all Domains the results that are presented for Kowanyama are worse than for Queensland. However, there are obvious problems. For some measures, such as disability, the results presented are known to be unreliable. Using the commonly available sources, the indicators available are across different time points/periods) and some reflect the known limitations of Census data. All have been compiled from regular collections across multiple communities with assumptions made regarding consistency and accuracy. Those data are then collated in Brisbane (by a separate Department) before release. As community-specific reports there is an appearance of being context-informed – which is not, in fact, the case. Finally, while these data are available, they are not necessarily on the radar of those with local responsibilities – and – for those who are aware, the burden of statistical information is likely overwhelming.

Rather than adding another collation of existing data with the limitations and constraints noted above, one approach undertaken in this project is to reduce and refine – reduce the burden and refine that collected for reliability and utility. The result of this process – the Kowanyama Youth Metric.

Qualitative approach: Opinions and stories from Kowanyama

Engagement with informants enabled three sets of qualitative information to be gathered. First, semi-structured interviews (largely with service providers and local key informants in the initial phase of the project) were conducted using an interview guide loosely framed by five questions to uncover both issues and opportunities, and to try to understand existing and potential barriers. The inquiry was guided by an overarching question: ***'What are the key issues challenging healthy youth development in Kowanyama and what are the actionable ways forward?'***

Having a consistent set of interviewers familiar with the Kowanyama context (EH, HT, DW) enabled a second source of data – informed observations and interpretations by the interviewers that would otherwise elude digital capture. This information was integrated as an interviewer summary and reflection notes. Audio files, where available, were transcribed using OtterAI software and all data sources were redacted to remove names and other sensitive re-identifiable information. Transcripts and notes were imported into NVivo V.15 and coded according to recording method (hand-written or verbatim transcription), participant type (service provider, local or non-local resident, Indigenous status), trip number, age group, sex, and the youth age-group most relevant to the participant's work.

The third source of qualitative data was collected through a simple participant survey at the conclusion of each interview (by which time participants were familiar with the Domains concepts) a simple opinion survey was administered. Against a description and plain-language statement for each ARACY Nest Domain, informants were asked to rate the sufficiency with which that ideal is met in Kowanyama on a six-point Likert scale.

Integration: from data and stories to decisions and strategy

The final stages of the KYS development project will engage Council and community members in developing the Map for change – an implementation strategy. That will require being clear about evidence and values influencing decisions, the means available to Council to bring about change, and mechanisms for monitoring and refining the Strategy to meet the changing needs of Kowanyama's children and young people.

Appendix 2:

Qualitative Data Stories

Community data was collected from March 2025 to April 2026 using focus groups, surveys and in-depth interviews. This content is to demonstrate the diversity of participants included in the qualitative analysis and provide a sense of how data was organised and interpreted. The excerpts and direct quotes selected are not exhaustive, and do not necessarily include excerpts eventually selected to represent the domains in the Kowanyama Youth Profile.

Voices of young people

In-depth interviews were scanned for Strengths and Protective Factors, Difficulties and Challenges and Needs.

No. interviews	Male	Female	All
Aged 15-17	2	1	3
Aged 18-24	3	7	10
Totals	5	8	13

SUMMARY

Theme	What young people said (in their own words)	What this means	Where to focus effort
1. Strong people around you (family, mentors, elders)	» She was kind-hearted and talked nice. » My grandfather used to say go to school... keep learning. » They need love – someone to love them.	Young people do better when they have steady, caring adults who guide them, set expectations, and stay with them.	Support parents, elders, and mentors to be consistently present. Build mentoring systems, including older youth supporting younger ones.
2. Connection to Country, culture and family	» Families going out hunting – family times. » Being on country... that's what kept me strong. » Country where healing starts.	Being on Country is not just an activity—it is healing, identity, and strength. It changes behaviour and brings respect.	Invest in on-Country programs, support families to go out together, and strengthen Ranger and cultural programs.
3. Structure, discipline and meaningful activity	» It was fun... we had activities every week. » Stockcamp... strict... get up early. » Sport... all parents would go... it made us feel good.	Young people thrive in structured environments with clear expectations and things to do.	Rebuild youth programs, sport, and activities. Ensure they are well-run, consistent, and structured.
4. Seeing the world beyond community (with support)	» Getting to visit city helped a lot... I learned how to manage. » Football trips... opening eyes. » It was very different.	Experiences outside community build confidence and vision—but only if young people are supported before and after.	Support boarding, trips, and travel, with preparation and follow-up so young people stay on track.
5. Real pathways: school, training, jobs, and roles	» I want to go to TAFE but I don't know how. » Job would help to stay strong and proud. » Would like to go to university... but no support."	Young people want to succeed but need clear, supported pathways into training and work.	Provide simple, supported pathways (TAFE, jobs, Ranger programs). Help with applications, licences, IDs, and transitions.
6. Barriers that stop young people (systems and environment)	» Waiting three months... nobody told me. » Forms... complicated. » Alcohol... kids copy.	Young people get stuck when systems are too hard, slow, or unfair, and when surrounded by drinking and drugs.	Reduce red tape, give clear information and quick feedback, and invest in safe environments and alternatives to drinking.

DIRECT QUOTES FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH 13 YOUNG LOCAL KOWANYAMA PEOPLE

Strengths discussed by young interview participants

Strength	Direct quotes
Culture & Country	» Culture wise here you learn a lot about respecting your elders. Mum and dad would bring us up so that we would not lose that connection. *F 18-24* » I was thinking about being out there all day. Coming back from boarding school and going out camping was about connecting. *F 18-24* » Grew up getting out to own country – out on country don't have other kids swearing at you, it's more respect – they respect the other adults around. Kids act different there *M 22* » Country – taking them to country where healing starts. Doing things like making spear, things like that where healing start. My grandfather tell me go and connect to country and healing will start. I got my fathers computer with all his early thinking about country. *M 22* » Going fishing and getting bush tucker. Even now going fishing you could be talking with your aunty – she say, come on, this weekend we go. Whole family go – go out bsh. Being around family – it's a whole connection – it's more than fishing. *F 18-24*
Mentors and examples	» I went bull catching. I was being influenced by older cousins and uncles to drink and all that, doing violence at the time. I wanted to be someone better. I went my separate way. Decided to go bull catching. My uncle gave me the opportunity. That work was important – getting distracted, physically moving, learning new experience – it was interesting for me. Meet up with new mates. Senior stockman was strict, got to get up early and go out early. More strict than boarding school. *M 22* » The Junior ranger program, taking kids out and teach them how to do reports and things. Good to show them they can be that in the future. *M 22*
Sense of community and family connections	» Family, next door neighbour, you know that person. *M 22*

Difficulties & challenges discussed by young interview participants

Difficulties and challenges	Direct quotes
No jobs	» No jobs, I asked around the place, at the hospital other places... » Tiring, at bar and takeaway side, difficult when there are big events and lots of people. There are people who get angry and had too much – tell them to go. If they angry you got to show calm... *F 18-24*
Influence of unhealth behaviour and poor mental health	» I've been going through it myself, I've seen tradies dying from mental health, I've seen a lot of people going to the gym taking workouts and stuff. And some recovered from that stuff. I try to tell my mates, get jobs and stuff, but they just want to be doing things like drinking and some of them in jail now. It was easier when I was away, space to reflect on stuff. I didn't want to keep going down the path. *M <18*
Nowhere to hang out	» No holiday programs – they used to be programs but not now
Lost culture	» We lost our culture, my siblings and myself we did not feel connected to our culture. » Respect – now you see other kids who don't respect people and property – like they swear at other families and teachers and staff. *F 18-24*
Alcohol, Yarndi & Smokes	» Some families party on all day all night – sometimes you see not too much kids not going to school because of it. Now that cycle is repeating in communities. Now the mob who were in my age are doing that. Young mums when they don't look after themselves, smoke that yarndi in town they on that dope hard. In school we all been taught about sexual health and about drugs...I growl some of them – a cousin sister – I told her to stop it. She wanted to have a few cans. I told her if something come wrong with your baby, when schooltime come you too shame to tell what's wrong with your baby – alcohol syndrome—they shame and they don't say that. » It's like they think [alcohol and drugs] is good to them, fun to them
Government processes (bureaucracy)	» Our young people with IDs – there is mob who have lost their parents, they don't have birth certificate, or it lost. You need the right IDs to get the birth certificate...its complicated.

Needs discussed by young interview participants

Needs	Direct quotes
Spaces and places to grow	» We need a youth space – a place where there are activities but also the essentials where young people can sort out their applications and stuff. People who can help them. *F 18-24* » Need to have a guidance counsellor there to talk to people, a game room area for younger kids, a movie area with bean bags and consoles, a snack room, some health promotion, and things good for mental health, like boxing – learn discipline. Could also have classes, getting discipline." *M <18* » Having fun, giving kids space where they can go and play – when I grew up there were places with different things happening at the MPC. Now they don't do much, just let them go in and just put on two sports. I'd put a roster board off, different sport each day, put it on a schedule *M 21* » Cherbourg [has] a little gated community there – kids who are disengaged or from Child Safety can go there. They choose to stay there. They give them money to do chores – gives them independence. *F 18-24*
Engaging & safe activities	» Afternoon activities for kids – younger and older, like they used to do in the past. Have competitions for younger kids, things like that. For older kids have sports – change activities from day to day. *F 18-24* » Have some activities which separate by sex – boys 'nights and girls' nights. *F 18-24* » Resilience Centre – "good to have a place for yarning – groups" – [like the] Youth Group at the Church – activity based groups. *F 18-24* » "Take kids out on country, teach them how to make spear, corroboree skirts... More equipment for MPC – dodge ball, volley ball. We still got the shirts in our office" » Would be good to have a place with different activities for kids and resources to take kids out to country. *F 22* » Footy club – like for young kids and older kids – all ages. TEAM ACTIVITIES Rodeo clinic – only if people come. Some place where you could have access to art resources. – Modern and traditional cultural activities. *M 21* » Coaching kids in different sports, getting them to do something good rather than being outside doing bad stuff." Would like to add "arts and crafts sessions, have girls' and boys' groups – yarning circles (different to therapeutic groups) - help them talk about coming together, learning about culture and respect. Learn respect for elders and the people around you." *F* » Younger ones, take them out on country. I would find something they love doing – like fishing – I'd say do you want to come fishing and then start talking – have a good yarn.. *M 22* » Need more activities – like basketball and touch competitions – when they had that before the kids who were running wild would be good. *M 22*
Natural mentors	» Half of this town love to be a stockman. There are some older men near Selfo who would be good at taking a lead/mentoring role with kids. If you want to get their attention, get people who have the ability to set it up, need to set it up so that young people can concentrate on what you need to do – like no phones in the workplace – it distraction and not safe. *M <18* » Getting out bush – with someone like .... *M 21*
Health promotion	» Posters and stuff to get people to go to the clinic and have health check and stuff. Could be work experience for kids at the clinic. *F 18-24* » more input for mums and bubs, for instance baby swimming at the pool *F 22*
Support for young parents	» Maybe if there was a mums and bubs centre where mums and bubs to stay over it would be good" [not for protection – as something that might prevent escalation to where protection is necessary]. *F 22* » It would be good to have a place that young mums could go to relax and chill out – away from noise and chaos. *F 20*
S&EWB & Mental Health	» Special support place or therapy place for people in the community – one on one –maybe with someone like .... Place where there are trusted people *F 22* [DIFFERENT TO YARNING SPACE – THIS IS FOR MORE INTENSE ENGAGEMENT] » For the families that are all caught up – need to keep checking on them – how you going, simple questions like that". *M <18* » Yarning spaces with barbecues and activities *M - 21* » Most kids in Kowanyama they love fishing – I talk to the boys, tell them to have a chat in the gym. Maybe not first time but and one day they start coming, then we can show them what we do. I would love to see my younger brothers doing something better. *M 22*
Learning support to engage	» Probably go to do study in TAFE – of further south. You won't get it all up here, it take too long. Would rather Do it out of Kowanyama. Would need to have help with accommodation to do that. *F 18* » They need opportunities to get what they need to get out and do other things – have a white card – can go and get job, like main roads etc. *M 22*
School & Learning support	» Up here you related to everyone, one thing for me was I had to get used to different English. One of the things in boarding school was my talk, when I'm nervous I talk fast and repeat myself. The teachers up here they were straight out of Uni and it hard knowing what they saying. I could figure it out but other kids had problems. » It was great in dorms if you make a connection with an older senior. After a couple of weeks into the first term, making connections to the non-Indigenous seniors – joining in. *M*
Political voice	» One thing I wish government would do is send up information about what each person we voting to – what their intention are. There are kids my age who are not registered. They should make sure our mob are registered. If we not registered we don't have a voice. Also when our Council votes I think it gives them more insight and knowledge. When our people go for seat in Council. They give out the information about what they want to do. They should do that with the Government election – that's when our people can vote and say what we want.

Summary of participants, themes and direct quotes from speaking with 83 community members and service providers aged 25 years+

Sex	Local Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Unknown	Total*
Male	17	3	10	0	30
Female	14	2	22	4	42
Unknown		-	-	24	24
All	31	5	32	28	96

**Not included in in this summary: one focus group of participants, most of whom were interviewed separately and represented the council.*

Kowanyama context was described with respect to youth development. Themes A 'Issues & Challenges' and & B 'Assets & Strengths' with C 'Ways Forward'.

THEME A: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN KOWANYAMA

Challenges of growing up: common to the challenges facing children and youth growing up in a remote, disadvantaged Indigenous community is that they are interactive in ways that significantly compromise continuity, that is, stability in the developmental environment for the child that is important for the development of a sense of trust, personal stability and optimism for one's future. For example, children are more likely to have multiple caretakers, to be in care, to leave community to complete education, to be confronted with difficult choices if one wants to pursue a career elsewhere – etc.

Related observations

Disability: Almost without exception, those interviews in which children with disabilities was a focus noted that they are: more common than expected elsewhere; inadequately recognised and, consequently under-reported; further disadvantaged by inadequate and inappropriate assessment opportunities and are not provided the resources and services commensurate with their needs.

Rhythms and processes: Certain service providers commented on the lack of harmony between the rhythms of community life and service availability. For instance, the dearth of services from Thursday to Monday when health and social demands arising from excessive alcohol consumption are greatest. Or – the ill-fit between the urban-oriented school year and the seasonal cycles of tropical life. Or – the occupation and activity needs of older children and youth and the time constraints of employed supervisors... This also extends to how services respond to culturally demanding events such as funerals where there needs to be a balance between responsible cultural sensitivity and rationalising inaction as 'sensitivity'.

Expectations and agency: perceptions of many service providers (and several of community members) suggested that there is a conflict of expectations between service providers and families that ultimately may undermine initiative and agency on both sides. For instance, that certain fundamental carer responsibilities are perceived by certain families to be the responsibility of service providers (health, education...) rather than themselves. Conversely, that some providers have expectations of what families are able to do that are not consistent with local circumstances (for instance because of funding) or perceptions that local families are insufficiently caring or capable.

Services and providers: Among the many matters touched on in relation to service provision in Kowanyama informants repeatedly raised a number including the sufficiency and preparation of agency employees, and the turnover of staff that has long compromised the development of effective, trusting relationships. These factors and the additional demands that follow on for those workers who commit to the community also result in demands on them that not only compound their work burden but are at times out of scope of their designated practice resulting in both occupational and personal conflict.

Communication and collaboration: Across several sectors challenges to effective child-centred care were raised as a result of barriers to communication and collaboration that related both to institutional constraints, and personality. While not universal, the impacts appeared most challenging in relation to children whose needs are multiple and greatest, or acute. Issues raised include communicating activities and sharing information.

Risk tolerance: Particularly for high needs children and youth, urban-oriented, mainstream models of practice have significant limitations. Being attuned to local circumstances and practice requires flexibility that often challenges the risk-averse, liability-avoidant default positions of service

Sub-theme title	Example quotes
A.1 Threats to child development. ***Caregivers need modelling and supported practice in early bonding, nutrition, and consistent, authoritative limits. Concerns were raised about late identification of developmental and psychosocial needs, with downstream effects into middle childhood and adolescence.***	» I think, lack of parental guidance, because they don't have that family life that the parents worry where they are, even know where they are, because they're either drinking, gambling or whatever, but they're not taking that role as parents. So, these kids are just like I said, growing up, they're not being brought up and like, not learning what it means to be a good parent. They don't learn the emotional thing about, you know, how it feels to have someone there that actually cares about you, attachment, attachment *(Local Person Focus Group 20)* » Unless we can deal with attachment issues and parenting these young people are never going to be able to move into jobs no matter how many we create *(Service provider 20)*
A.2 Limited safe, health-promoting environments for children and young teens. ***Families reported few structured places for supervised play, sport, arts, cultural and spiritual activities, particularly in the wet season or when alcohol is circulating. Existing venues (e.g., MPS, canteen) were viewed as not youth-friendly and, at times, indirectly harmful (e.g., "canteen nights" associated with neglect the following day).***	» [At the MPC] The little kids, mucking around with big kids. I mean, and that's an important thing too, there's one space for four-year-olds to 24-year-olds using it. Yeah, and like you can't watch. Maybe that's going to save your life for a while. Yeah, because the kids will hit the little kids. Yeah, or the little kids will drive the big kids crazy *(Service Provider 10)* » The main distraction is this [phones] and getting them back on country... you start conversation with them... But it has to be away from technology *(Local 28)* » Although there are facilities at MPC for youth there is not sufficient supervision providing direction and safety for the kids there.... Like, they don't even wear a uniform to say, they were at work, they're just in with the gang. And then when something explodes, and you've got all sorts of ages there from young kids that should be supervised to teenagers, there's just no, there's lots of places to sneak off down there, and the safety's always on my mind. - You've got a resource there, *(Service Provider 10)* » Well if you're an nondrinker a lot of social activities it's only four days but a lot of social activities are organized around the grog *(Local 9)*
A.3 Gaps in health-promoting social environments for older teens/ emerging adults. ***Peer pressure, ready access to substances, and "easy pathways" into early parenthood and non-participation were common. These dynamics directly jeopardised safety in town and indirectly undermined engagement with school and culture; successful boarders also described difficulty "coming home" without social penalty.***	» Like, you've got a certain age group that's a lot older now [young adults]. Getting the younger kids, and you know, like, oh come on, you're going to do this. We'll get your girl to get you drunk and get them hooked on cigarettes and drugs and whatever you're saying. ...I've seen one kid, really good kid, went to school, finished school, now he's just on that pathway to incarceration. *(Service Provider local 10)* » They're just too comfortable back in the community last time. And that's the reason, like growing up here, I've seen it like the constant cycle. And so that's something that I actually I don't wanna go, you know, I'll fall back into a cycle. I don't wanna be another statistic, you know? Like drinking, smoking drugs, have chronic disease, you know, having children at a young age, wasting my life, you know, I want to do something out, you know, do something out to pay for sure *(Service Provider and Local 9)* » ...the biggest thing is the drug and marijuana. Marijuana, young people like it. They get on it. They want to smoke it. But when they smoke that, drinks alcohol, they want to kill each other. They want to fight with each other. Yeah, marijuana seems to keep them home, and, you know, yeah, they stay connected with each other *(Local 27)* » Seeing your family or your friends do not do the things that they are doing, so you want to copy. You're being, you know, inquisitive, so you want to try things. And like, the amount of time that I've been peer -pressured by families and friends to drink, smoke, you know, smoke, cigarette smoke, drugs *(Service Provider and Local 9)*
A.4 Secondary schooling and transition to work/training are unsupported. ***A "Year-10 cliff" leaves mid-adolescents too young to work and insufficiently served by formal schooling. Reintegration from detention or boarding lacks coordinated supports. Job/training providers were seen as misaligned to local needs and incentives; opportunities are scarce and pathways constrained.***	» Especially those kids, I think, like, we're all thinking like, you know, the ones that have just finished year 10, they were like, 16 and 17 and kind of, they can't go to school, but they're kind of walking around, yeah *(Local 28)* » If these young people are disappearing at 15, they're reappearing at 23, 24 25 and things are happening in their life in between that period, whether they're having young families, whether they're getting caught up in the youth justice system and then the adult justice system, you're all of a sudden ending up with this cohort of young people that reappear at 24 may be unemployable *(Local 19)* » [Due to my own traumatic experiences] I'm going to be afraid of you know reaching out for support when I need it *(Service Provider and Local 9).* » So, road maintenance, on the road truck, just going out towards Normanton, fixing up the park hall. So, they're excluded from those drugs. But other than that, working in the shop, which limited as well, the canteen, which is a bit of a, we're kind of like, yeah, it's just great you got a job, but is that the best job you've ever had?
A.5 Poor service efficiency and sufficiency. ***Services were often siloed, clinic-bound, and poorly coordinated, with limited data sharing and continuity. High turnover and shifting departmental responsibilities onto local people eroded reach and effectiveness; outreach into community settings was rare.***	**Centrelink** » Learning and development wise, they need to be more tightness with Centrelink *(Service Provider 17)* » The income that people should have here from Centrelink, etc, they just can't access because it's such a bureaucratic hassle to be able to maintain your Centrelink pain. Maybe four people out of 10 are able to maintain their Centrelink. So, families were in poverty anyway, but poverty is just it's because of the system *(Local 19)* **Blue Cards** » Exactly, blue cards. You can't have certain people or a mum or a dad together to go and move a child somewhere because the dad doesn't have a blue card or mum doesn't have a blue card *(Service Provider 8)* » We have children in the care of a maternal grandmother, they've got no blue card, they're on a provisional placement, they haven't had their UPAC finalised, so there's actually nothing, ... So what we're finding is UPACs have not been done for seven months and these children have been on provisional placements which is totally against the law and they're being reviewed every three months under a risk management plan *(Service Provider 1)* » Notes - Need some way of streamlining the blue card process *(Service Provider 2)* » I wish there was some way that we could get them a blue card after a certain amount of time *(Service Provider 1)* **Service coordination, data sharing and outreach** » I was at the practitioner, a practitioner, to do like, you know, health checks and all that stuff. Why aren't there any young person's checks and stuff like that? But in general, no one quite knows what anyone else is doing. Yeah, that's always been like that. Like, you talk, but like, you don't see progress, I guess... I don't work for them, so I don't know what they put in their data. I only know what we put in ours *(Service Provider 10)* » ...there's hardly any programs running... so we don't have a permanent doctor. So, the other opinion of people, such as Aurukun, a member of my Mossman Gorge, get all the TLC and Kowanyama just gets nothing *(Service Provider and Local 9)* » They don't have that nobody's talking to them about, just like we don't have any diabetes educator, yeah, they're not talking to us about our diabetes. They don't, and they don't put a... they don't put up any promotions... they don't even do that *(Local)*

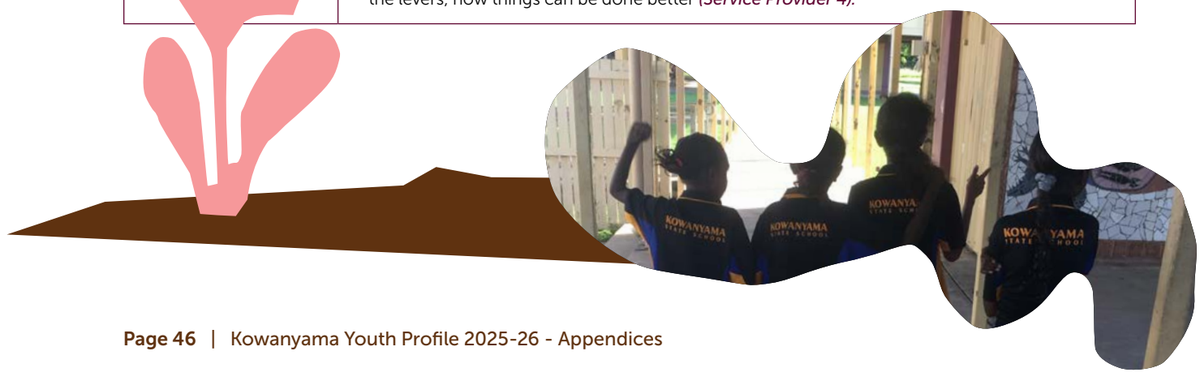
THEME B: KOWANYAMA HAS ASSETS AND STRENGTHS TO SUPPORT YOUTH

Theme B highlights the strong assets within the community across cultural, relational, and institutional domains. Family networks, Elders, and connection to Country underpin identity, care, and resilience. Existing services, facilities, and committed workers provide a foundation for support, while informal leadership and positive role models demonstrate local capacity for change. There is clear motivation within the community to take greater ownership of solutions when opportunities are available. These strengths are often under-recognised or insufficiently supported, indicating that effective responses should build on existing capabilities rather than introducing entirely new structures.

Related observations

'Natural helpers': Particular Kowanyama locals were repeatedly identified for their positive contribution in the care of vulnerable young people. Frequently this was followed by comments that pointed to these roles being demanding, difficult, unremunerated and with a personal cost. Informants repeatedly commented on the need to support these 'natural helpers'. One of the most commonly voiced general barriers to service improvement with relevance for natural helpers is the requirement for a Blue Card.

Subtheme title -	Example quotes
B.1 Physical assets and infrastructure (institutional). ***The community holds usable spaces and facilities that could host youth development activities. Assets include Canteen; MPC ; Church; Rodeo ground; Out-stations; Ag resources horses & cattle.***	» So, the physical layouts of the building worked well, having the central open air and then the over here at the school. Has just been opened and I think we've got four or six rooms. Two or three either side. So, talking to the dentist it was fantastic. All of the kids they wanted to see and that were turned up, got seen, and it was the process was enjoyable for everyone *(Service Provider 6).* » It's got meeting rooms for services to come to. It's got outdoor spaces. It's got gardens. The Multi-Purpose Centre could have been that could still be. It is shocking, those massive, big kitchens, which are probably hundreds of 1000s, completely trash, dirty, broken, you can't move, walk into those rooms for broken equipment. *(Service Provider 20).* » Community Hall used for spear making, weaving, fish trap activities. *(Service Provider and Local 9 1)* » On-country site near Topsy with fresh water, Wi-Fi, power, camping shed. (*Service Provider and Local 9 1)* » And this is what I sometimes worry about in the infrastructure is in [Kowanyama] has a lot of it is we don't take the time sometimes to repurpose infrastructure that's already here *(Service Provider 4).*
B.2 "Soft" institutional assets. ***Local businesses, organisations and programs offer platforms for traineeships and employment.***	» KASC; Rangers; Canteen; Community Store. Work experience with major infrastructure projects/ tenders Cattle company and agricultural infrastructure. S&R RISE » Decided to take that program out to Scrubby Bore… Finally funding from YJ – undertook program on country – Council supported by cleaning up site and get infrastructure working (close to Topsy – has internet and power). 4-day program, late 2024). 3 18-year-old boys, around 30 children and youth with some parents camping and some attending during the day. Four or five activity spaces working with small groups of children. *(Local 27).* » Horses. The cattle are already out there that all three old men we mentioned name, they have a lease on that land to run cattle. They have everything on brand picked number the cattle theirs. When they put them at the sale yard, the family gets the money *(Local)* » Young kids, they're working when they're coming back [at the store]. *(Mixed local & services)* » [Ranger program from Youth Justice] They bought boots. Okay, they bought PPEs for them, apps, yeah, they even bought some painting stuff. We still have the boys do paintings in our own country, yes. So, they supported us a lot…You know, you got exciting stuff that that they didn't do before the young fellas, you know, and running them through the program, from some of the stuff, what we know as a ranger with the technologies and in the boat, we took them out, they done some boat safety stuff, boat survey. Teach them how to be safe on the boat, you know, how to get the boat ready and all that *(Local 28).* » So, what I get a lot from this community is people don't just sit in a position of helplessness and not know what the next step is or what the right way is or how things can be done to do better. People are very solution and um uh good at identifying where things need to change, who holds the levers, how things can be done better *(Service Provider 4).*
B.3 Family and cultural strengths. ***Strong family networks, cultural respect, and natural helpers provide a foundation for protective relationships and identity development.***	» Yeah, we took it down there for cultural so me and [other person] was involved with a lot of cultural work and activities, and then we pulled that together to try and get this little all our program us going. So, we call it our learning our way *(Local 27).* » We go to any family funeral, and respect and do cultural work like boy. They do the dance in the funeral, you're sad, you're crying, you don't know what you don't know what you're thinking anymore…come along as a cultural leader, and start to dance and ceremony. The eldest woman starts singing and dancing *(Local 27),* » When kids see someone struggling, they seem to reach out *(Service Provider 26).* » We give them free time out on country where they go and check a lot and do fishing and collecting and stuff. And it was more you could see mom more happy that they connecting with their own children and talk about it more, because we want parents to be there, because parents the one gonna teach the kids their identity and talk about where they're from. And so, you could say, you know, if you're thinking about those positives, one is kids aren't getting into trouble. Second is, and this is important. It's not just about kids. It's kids and parents. So, there's connection with parents *(Local 27).* » Because we know better, because we the community people, yes, we have to identify these things and start moving forward. Because there's, there's many ways to start doing these things. We can't just go into the one way, you know, we're going to start doing other things to change the mindset of these young fellows, yes, start moving forward *(Local & Service Provider 1).*
B.4 Natural and environmental resources. ***Country itself is a therapeutic and educational setting that re-engages disengaged youth and anchors cultural learning.***	» Kowanyama [positive] just a country, and they've got such a beautiful country to be on. And, you know, live in such an area. » It is a very nice area *(Service Provider 11).* » When we had the COVID… we had all of our kids on country with our family… this place was like a ghost town. Everyone was out. But it was a really nice time. » What you do when you go on country, you collect spears, you collect you do stuff to connect back to country. But you're also teaching yourself that respect about doing your own speeds and about learning. And so, when you said, like, with spear making and doing activities, and you guys all said, like, you learn, if your connection originally from your elder *(Local 28),* » So, we try and encourage TOS to come out of country with us, and then get them away from in town. Because, as you all know, a lot of distractions, mental health issues, everything's all in town. But once you set foot back on your country, everything will just, you just release everything now *(Local 28)* » I think one of the positives is that our other kids go on country that whenever I talk to kids that's there, that's something that they're really proud of, that they identify with as part of their culture, and, and the younger ones do too, you know, Because you like to get to know them around what do you do at the weekends, kind of thing? *(Service Provider 34)*



THEME C: WAYS FORWARD

Theme C identifies practical, locally grounded strategies to improve outcomes. Priorities include creating safe, structured environments for children and young people, strengthening outreach services, and improving coordination and communication across agencies. Supporting transitions into education, training, and employment is critical, particularly for adolescents. Participants emphasised the importance of early, preventative approaches rather than crisis-driven responses. Strengthening youth voice and enabling community leadership were also key. Overall, the findings point to the need for integrated, culturally responsive approaches that build on existing strengths and support sustained engagement across developmental stages.

Related observations

Gaps: Predictably, almost every informant identified deficits in the service continuum that related to their area of activity – often relating to the responsibilities of other agencies and services. However, there is a generally consistent agreement that in terms of the age range there are two periods in which there is a perception of unmet need and opportunity. These are the first years of life (conception through toddlerhood) and the challenging years of adolescence and early adult life. Between these years (ideally) children are at school and more likely to be on the radar of other monitoring agencies (Health, Child Safety …). Participants who work with before-school-age children noted the lack of support, prevention and early intervention activities pre-empting mandated interventions. For those leaving school – often early – the gaps raised included pro-social and culturally-relevant activities, and preparation for the bureaucratic and institutional demands of becoming an adult (such as the identification requirements of engaging with government systems). These gaps are compounded by insufficiency of services targeting the social and mental health needs of youth falling between child and adult services.

Subtheme title -	Example quotes
C.1 Spaces for healthy development. ***Establish or adapt venues that safely bring children, teens and parents together—especially for holidays and wet season—to enable supervised, health-promoting socialisation where "kids can just be kids."***	**The ECE Centre** » Well, I think the school itself, the infrastructure that we've got here, particularly with the Early Years hub, and the whole new early years precinct, I think that is a very, very strong asset to the community, not just the actual infrastructure, because it looks great. It's a fantastic space, but then also what it can provide, but, you know, the opportunity to then provide what I was talking about, before all that lead up stuff, so it's human resource and actual physical resources, and the capacity we want that space can allow us to start to deliver *(Service Provider 23)* » So I guess when you look at looking at holistic to the child, you've got to start supporting families way back. So, I guess I see that's where that that early years hubs will be crucial in getting those forming those relationships with your family, being able to be basically that conduit between the family, allied health, any other community partnerships that need to come in. It's going to be a nice safe space for parents and families to have access *(Service Provider 23)* **MPC** » So, when we when we associate alcohol with that kind of thing, then you're kind of putting a very interesting narrative around alcohol and enjoyment and fun. We›re asking our kids to grow up quicker, but I think if we looked at some of the infrastructure and experiences that we›ve got here and say to the kids, blue sky, what if we actually got the council to do a redesign of the multipurpose and create a film room and put couches in there and every Friday night? » You're all in there watching a movie or, you know, a disco. Or a camp, you know, like but the other thing I sorry, I'll finish up here, but the other thing that I get annoyed with is like it was great that he said, hey, we've got an Easter program running *(Service Provider 4)* **Modify the Canteen** » That's actually pretty good, absolutely. So safe space for them, and they know that that they can get in the door at morning tea. Well, a lot of them come in at morning tea and lunch because it's just hard. You know, sometimes it's hard out there *(Service Provider 34)* » The canteen's got a good facility, I reckon I could do active things there *(Service Provider 2)* » How do we create a social environment that competes with spaces like the canteen. Should there be family activities in the canteen (Service Provider 4) » So, inviting the kids into the canteen on a Friday night into an area where they can sit and watch a movie and have a meal, but not be locked outside the gates to one of the places that offers entertainment and a little bit of something different *(Service Provider 4)* » One of the things I think we've been hearing from everyone we've interviewed is that they have been thinking about the canteen that could expand to be a place with family activities - Yeah, I think that's in the cards here. I think ... that›s in the cards. So I›ve said to them...., I would like an environment like you go to Cazaleys. - Yeah. - You have responsible alcohol service on that side. You have a cafeteria, or you have a food van there. And then you can have families come in with their kids. - Is there a down side to that? - No, 'cause it could be barricaded because this be a good environment. Oh, but not exposing the kids to the alcohol... put them on the other side. - Yeah, can I ask, when it comes to things like carriage limits, hours of operation, et cetera, that has to come up to council? - Yeah. - Okay, so council. *(Local 8)*
C.2 Developmental outreach. ***Deliver structured, choice-rich activities (including on-country) that build psychosocial skills, resilience and positive identity, leveraging technology as a creative attractor.***	» Now, we're saying that there's nothing for the dads, like this is Mum and Bub's stuff, but we want to do it with dads. You know, praise up the fathers and all that. 'Cause we don't do much for the dads that have got kids in care, or, you know, change their stories *(Service Provider 10)* » And I think as a community, I think we're going to be pretty good with the early years now. We've got such an amazing facility. We've got people involved. We've got everyone on board. We've got a daycare centre happening for the first time. It's got its own, yeah, momentum now *(Service Provider 23)* » Every Monday night, we have that youth program at the church. We started off with three and about three weeks later, we ended up with 26 kids coming. We needed more food, so we didn't have the money for cater for them. Numbers. So what happened? The police donated clothes. They got clothes from outside of can somewhere, bought this three full boxes of clothes to the church doctors there. So what we did is they already cleaned them up, washed them. It's ready to be sold, or whatever he's gonna do. So what we did is took it out of the chair and said, $5 bag of clothes. Everybody came, filled up a bag for $5 and the money goes back for the youth group, for the feed food and the day trip, wherever we're gonna go. We didn't do any trips, but everyone was coming. We did a Christmas concert. *(Local 27)* » So, a lot of my role around the employment space is basically taken a bit of that cradle to grave approach. And I'm now being asked by older relationships and networks to reinvest back into their children and grandchildren in the same way that I supported them when they were 13 or 14 or a 15-year-old *(Service Provider 4)*

	» We took them out on country. We just done the Ranger Program, looking after the beach, cleaning up the beach, giving these youths tablets and all that to get familiar with the with the programs we doing, and how can we collect data, but also supporting and helping the land and helping our more, keeping our country healthy and clean. Yeah. And after that, these boys were coming, constantly coming. ... And then we said to him, Look, it's not about we here teaching you that you want to be a ranger or whatever. It's your choice. All we're doing is trying to open a pathway for you...to start moving forward in your life. Ever since the seven boys went through that program with us, not even one of them came back after that...What you do when you go on country, you collect spears, you do stuff to connect back to country. But you're also teaching yourself that respect about doing your own spears and about learning. *(Local & Service Provider 1)*
C.3 Health outreach. ***Shift elements of primary health care and health promotion into community settings (including parenting and psychosocial programs), rather than relying on clinic-based delivery.***	» Baby One Program. What's that? That's a bit, providing mothers with education, safe techniques and they, the health workers lead that and they just basically encourage them to attend any natal schedule visits and then they get their $40 fruit and veggie vouchers. So, there's the expected models? Yeah, yeah. They'll be pregnant to be on the program. Yeah. And is that like a... That's zero to two years and ten months. Okay. Can they get nutrition to get nutrition for batches? Yeah, freaking veggie batches, value $40 for every visit that they come to *(Service Provider 10)* » HA [Hearing Australia] has been involved with Kowanyama for many years, HAPPY has been here for three years. The focus is seeing kids before formal education and to provide hearing education in the community. Prior to HAPPY the focus was on rehabilitation (that is, once kids were referred with obvious problems). From children to 26 year of age *(Service Provider 31).*
C.4 Transition to work. ***Create "learning-and-earning" pathways, alternative education options, and tangible skill programs (e.g., horses/ country work) with appropriate remuneration and clear progression.***	» There's still going to be big challenges around opportunity, post schooling for young people, and how as a community, you know, we're thinking in that space and starting To get things in place, I suppose, for them, like, like traineeships, like apprenticeships, so that there's meaningful employment opportunities or meaningful training opportunities post school. Because, as it sort of stands right now, like I don't like P to 10. I'll openly say P to 10 is horrendous, or in my opinion, anyway, because At 15, I still don't think they're ready to go to work full time, and it means they disengage, in essence, from 15 unless they've gone to boarding school. I think it should be p to 12 *(Local 19)* » So right now you find that the youth have got no way to go, but then come down the track, some of them might have their licenses, they might have their learners so they can go in on country. The young boys get the horses, they take pride in that, the rodeo comes up. So when council does have public events and they get the kids volunteering like that's awesome if they want to be I don't know people at the gate giving out the handbags or something like that instead of just mischief all the time *(Service Provider 10)* » More apprentice... make them feel interested...[Council-led transition for returning boarders] Start getting them engaging with work programs... paid work experience... responsibility... get up to get paid. *(Local)* » Opportunity, like a lack of opportunity here. A lot of the boys would talk about, you know, really struggling with time for work. And then of course programs where you have them here well considered setting someone up. And then you've got to turn up the Google. Yes. Until we hear a lot is Access to work, not having, not being able to get work, access to programs, like you do it when you're in there. Yes, yep *(Service Provider 2).* » So, what I look for is if there's painting as a scope and there's, you know, 15 external walls, I want the contractor to go and speak to the NDIS provider and see where someone who's got some capacity to paint is given at least 50 hours of painting two walls on the hospital or the housing. *(Service Provider 4)* .
C.5 Youth representation. ***Embed youth voice in council and cultural opportunities with a contemporary focus.***	» The interest in the community in seeing kids creating and performing – that seeing their children and representations of themselves and families are major strengths. Kids are absolutely keen to be involved in the creative process *(Service Provider 26).*
C.6 Service coordination & processes. ***Build practical mechanisms for inter-service data sharing, joint planning and outreach, including explicit inclusion of disability; align funding and accountability to locally defined outcomes.***	» We're also running at a deficit in the communities because when we look at the mainstream solution and all of the easier access points that a person in crisis or vulnerable person can reach out to, we don't have them here *(Service Provider 4)* » Sometimes if it's a quick or we need to get a new ID So the process of starting a blue card, they can help remotely on hand, so there's certain clientele who are eligible for Crest support, if they've been released from Custody within 12 months, if they score a certain number *(Service Provider 2)* » So straight away, all these families don't have services. I mean, internet families could come in, coffee machine, Centrelink worker there, helping people, you know, so it doesn't just it's not just where the kids go to school, it's where the parents come as well. You could run TAFE classes out of *(Service Provider 20)*

Appendix 3:

Quantitative Data Sources

Section 1: Closing the Gap Socio Economic Targets

Socio-Economic Indicator		Target	Kowanyama		QLD (a)		Index
1	**Long and healthy lives**						
	Life expectancy of people	0 gap	55 years	(b)	80 years	(b)	3.3
2	**Born healthy and strong**						
	Babies born a healthy birthweight (2500-4499g)	91%	86%	(c)	89%	(d)	2.2
3	**Early childhood education**						
	Children enrolled in YBFTS (Kindy)	95%	100%	(e)	95%	(d)	2.3
4	**Children thriving**						
	Children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of AEDC	55%	10%	(f)	34%	(d)	
5	**Student learning potential**						
	20–24-year olds having attained Year 12 or equivalent (Cert 3)	96%	26%	(b)	75%	(d)	
6	**Further education pathways**						
	25-34 year olds having completed a tertiary qual (Cert 3 and above)	70%	13%	(g)	47%	(d)	
7	**Youth engagement**						
	Young people (15-24 years) fully engaged in employment, education or training	67%	22%	(h)	58%	(d)	1.4
8	**Economic participation**						
	25-64 year olds employed	62%	22%	(i)	57%	(d)	
9a	**Housing**						
	People living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing	88%	44%	(h)	81%	(d)	3.2
9b	**Housing**						
	People receive essential services that meet or exceed relevant jurisdictional standards	N/A	N/A		N/A		
10	**Criminal justice**						
	Reduction in rate of incarcerated adults	15% reduction	N/A		2047/100000	(d)	
11	**Youth Justice**						
	Reduction of young people (10-17 years) in youth detention	30% reduction	61.7/1000	(j) (k)	2.8 / 1000	(k)	
12	**Child protection**						
	Reduction of children (0-17 years) in out-of-home care	45% reduction	30.3/1000	(l) (k)	2.2 / 1000	(k)	
13	**Family safety**						
	Reduction of family violence and abuse experienced by women and children	50% reduction	229.3/1000	(m) (k)	12 / 1000	(k)	2.7
14	**Social and emotional wellbeing**						
	Significant and sustained reduction in suicide	Significant reduction	N/A		28.1/100000	(d)	
15	**Land and sea**						
	Land/sea subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights/interests	15% increase	2724km2 land	(n)	33% land; 20.3% sea	(d)	
16	**Culture and languages**						
	Sustained increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages being spoken	Sustained increase	N/A	(o)	26 languages spoken	(d)	
17	**Access to information**						
	Equal levels of digital inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Equal levels	98% access to internet via mobile	(p)	76.1% accessed internet at home	(d)	1.4

Section 2: Kowanyama Youth Profile : All Data

Socio-Economic Indicator	Kowanyama		QLD (a)		Index
Valued, Loved and Safe					
Population: Kowanyama	1079	(b)			1.4
Population: 0-24 Years	43%	(b)	31%	(b)	1.4
Families in Kowanyama	245	(b)		(b)	1.4
Families with dependent children 0-24 years	56%	(q)	45%	(q)	1.4
Families with children under 15 years	53%	(q)	38%	(q)	1.4
Young people (15-18) attending boarding school or university	15 / 224	(e)			3.1
Young people (15-24) living outside of Kowanyama	53/224	(e)			3.1
Students with diagnosed/imputed disability (5-16) (NCCD)	39%	(f)	24%	(v)	3.1
Children (0-17) with a disability	N/A		N/A		2.3
NDIS Plans in Kowanyama (Dec 2025)	36	(w)		(w)	3.1
NDIS Plans held by young people (0-24 years)	50%	(e)	63%	(w)	3.1
NDIS Plan Utilisation	29%	(w)	74%	(w)	3.1
NDIS Providers based in Kowanyama	0	(e)			3.1
People receiving Disability Support Pension	50	(x)			3.1
People receiving Carer Allowance or Payments	20	(x)			3.1
Child safety - substantiated notifications of harm (0-17)	40.5/1000	(af)(k)(u)	5.3 /1000	(af)(k)(u)	2.3
Children on Child Protection Orders (2025)	32	(s)			3.1
Young people (10-17) subject to Youth Justice orders or referred to Restorative Justice (2025)	Less than 15	(t)			3.1
Youth people (10-17) on supervised and unsupervised orders	49.6/1000	(af)(k)(u)	3.1/1000	(af)(k)(u)	2.5
Offences against the person (2023-24)	257/1000	(r)	16/1000	(r)	2.7
Recorded breaches of DVO (2023-24)	197/1000	(af)(k)(u)	12 / 1000	(af)(k)(u)	CTG13, 2.6
Alcohol and Drug abuse	N/A		N/A		2.6
Material Basics					
Young people (15-24) unemployed	62%	(r)	11%	(r)	1.4, 2.7
Children (under 15) in jobless families	51%	(q)	11%	(q)	1.4

Low income households	79%	(q)	40%	(q)	1.4
Young people (15-24)without income (working or benefits)	30%	(y)			3.2
Young people(15-24) with employment (any)	32%	(e)			3.2
Young people (15-24)with sufficient employment levels making Centrelink ineligible	4%	(y)			3.2
Young people (15-24) without own bank account	20%	(y)			3.2
Young people (16-21) relying on wages only for income	10%	(y)			
Young people (16-21) relying on wages and Youth Allowance for income	19%	(y)			
Young people (16-21) relying on Youth Allowance only for income	32%	(y)			
Young people (16-21) with no income (wages or Youth Allowance)	39%	(y)			
People in social housing	76%	(q)	3%	(q)	3.2
People in appropriately sized housing	44%	(h)	81%	(d)	CTG9A, 3.2
People living in overcrowded houses	54%	(q)	6%	(q)	1.4
Children included in waitlisted housing applications	1 in 8	(z)			3.2
Young people (16-24) with completed housing applications	less than 10	(e)			3.2
Houses requiring at least 1 extra bedroom	57%	(r)	5%	(r)	3.2
Houses requiring more than 4 extra bedrooms	10%	(r)	1%	(r)	3.2
New houses confirmed to be built 2025-30	20	(aa)			3.2
Healthy					
Pregnant women attending at least 5 antenatal visits	92%	(c)	91%	(k)	2.1, 3.3
Pregnant women smoking during pregnancy	65%	(c)	11%	(q)	2.1
Pregnant women using alcohol and/or other drugs	N/A		N/A		2.1
Women experiencing postnatal depression	N/A		N/A		2.2
New parents under 18 years (2025)	0%	(e)			3.3
Young people (15-24 years) who are known parents	13%	(e)			3.3
Average births per year	17	(c)			3.3
Babies born a healthy birthweight (2500-4499g)	86%	(c)	89%	(d)	CTG2
Babies born at a low birth weight (under 2500g)	14%	(q)	6%	(q)	2.2
Infants immunised by 12 months	96%	(c)	94%	(q)	2.2
Preventable episodes of care (hospitalisations) - (0-17 years)	28/1000	(af)(k)(u)	24/1000	(af)(k)(u)	2.4
Children (3-5) vulnerable in 2 or more AEDC domains	71%	(k)	14%	(k)	2.4
Young people (0-24) with up-to-date health checks	0.4%	(ab)			3.3
Hospital admissions per year (0-17 years)	36	(c)			
Primary reason for hospitalisation (0-17 years)	ENT	(c)			
Children experiencing mental health problems	N/A		N/A		2.4
Youth alcohol and drug use	N/A		N/A		2.5
Young people being tested for an STI (0-17) (rate among childhood population)	21%	(c)			
STI positivity in children aged ≤17 years (rate among those tested)	39%	(c)			
Effective sex education	N/A		N/A		2.7
Median age of death	55 years	(b)	80 years	(b)	3.3

Learning					
Children enrolled in early childhood education (Kindy)	100%	(f)	96%		2.3
Young people (15-17) enrolled in secondary school	22	(e)			3.4
Young people enrolled in Year 11 and 12 (2026)	8	(e)			3.4
Secondary school attendance (semester 1 2024)	35%	(k)	84%	(k)	2.5
Year 12 or equivalent completion (15-24 years that have left school)	18%	(b)	75%	(b)	1.4, 2.6, 3.4
Year 12 or equivalent completion (15-24 - no longer attending school)	18%	(b)	75%	(b)	3.4
Year 12 Graduates (15-24) currently engaged in employment, education and/or training	50%	(y)			3.4
Young people (15-24) who want to complete further study/training	50%	(y)			3.4
Young people (15-24) who want support to get work	1 in 4	(y)			3.4
Participating					
Young people (15-24) in community leadership positions	0	(e)			3.5
Strategies in Council Corporate Plan 2025-30 to support future leaders' programs	4	(ac)			3.5
Young people (15-24) with access to own mobile phone	88%	(y)			3.5
Young people (15-24) who access internet exclusively through phones	100%	(y)			3.5
People with pre-paid mobile phone (or access to)	98%	(p)			1.4, CTG17
People often/always cut back on food/ bills/ essentials to afford internet	35%	(p)			1.4
Young people (15-24) that believe organised recreational activities is a key need	70%	(y)			3.5
Structured recreational venues identified by young people (10-17)	4	(ad)			3.5
People with approved blue cards	161	(ae)			3.5
Young people (15-24) fully engaged in employment, education, training	22%	(h)	78%	(d)	1.4, CTG7
Young people (15-24) unemployed	62%	(r)	11%	(r)	1.4, 2.7
Strong in Identity and Culture					
People identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander	87%	(b)	5%	(b)	1.4
Students with access to culture and language classes	100%	(f)			3.6
Weeks in Sorry Business in 2025	40/52 weeks	(e)			3.6
Unregistered births	20%	(e)			3.6
Young people (15-24) don't have copy of birth certificate	1 in 3	(y)			3.6
Young adults (18-24) don't have driver's license or photo ID	56%	(y)			3.6
Young people (15-24) need assistance in getting own health/ medicare card	1 in 2	(y)			3.6
Households without a vehicle	44%	(b)			3.6

Section 3: Explanatory Notes (guide only)

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Ref.	Data Source/Note
(a)	Queensland data may refer to Queensland (whole population) or Queensland (Non-Indigenous population) - refer to data source for more detail
(b)	ABS Census (2021) Data by Region
(c)	Data provided by Qld Health TCHHS by special request (reported average 2021-2025)
(d)	QGOV CTG Report 2023
(e)	Data provided by community sources
(f)	Data provided by Dept of Education by special request
(g)	ABS Census (2021) Indigenous Peoples
(h)	ABS Census Data by region 2011-2025, by Local Government Areas (ASGS Edition 3 (2021 - 2026))
(i)	QGOV Queensland Regional Profile (First Nations Profile) Kowanyama (4/4/25)
(j)	Data used is young people (10-17 years) on supervised orders 2022-23
(k)	QGOV Statshot Kowanyama 26/5/25
(l)	Data used is young people (0-17 years) on finalised protection orders 2023-24
(m)	Data used in recorded breaches of DVO 2023-24
(n)	NativeTitle.org
(o)	AIASTIS National Indigenous Language Survey to be completed 2026
(p)	Data provided by Mapping the Digital Gap by special request
(q)	ABS Census 2021, reported in the Social Health Atlas of Australia (Public Health Information Development Unit, 2025)
(r)	QGOV Know Your Community Kowanyama (7/4/25)
(s)	Data provided by Department Child Safety by special request
(t)	Data provided by Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support by special request
(u)	QGOV Statshot Kowanyama 09/11/23
(v)	ACARA National Report of Schooling in Australia - available at acara.edu.au
(w)	NDIS Data available at https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data
(x)	Dept Social Services benefit and payment recipient demographics - quarterly data (Dec 2025) available https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/dss-payment-demographic-data
(y)	SUN Kowanyama Young Person (15-24 years) Employment and Education Needs Survey - March 2026, available on request
(z)	Data calculated using DSS Social Housing Register (30/12/25)
(aa)	Data provided by Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council by special request
(ab)	Qld Health TCHHS Resident Health Profile (30/6/25)
(ac)	Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030
(ad)	SUN Kowanyama Young Person (10-17 years) Places and Spaces Survey - August 2025 , available on request
(ae)	Data provided by Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation by special request
(af)	Data calculated using datasets in mentioned sources

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Co Authors

Ernest Hunter, Helen Travers, Danielle Williams, Veronica Graham, Linda Llewellyn

Youth Research Photographers

Sonara Bumble, Mitchell Gilbert-Aidan, Megan Inkerman, Akeila Murray, Taraya Lawrence, Viola Tommy

Design

Green Fox Studio | *www.greenfoxstudio.com.au*

Contact

Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council | *CEO@kowanyama.qld.gov.au* | *www.kowanyama.qld.gov.au*

YETI: SUN Project Manager | Helen Travers | *helen@yeti.net.au*

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the Kowanyama YOUTH PROFILE

Kowanyama Council aims to be a leader on Cape York by implementing a purpose-designed, evidence and values-based youth strategy that includes young people in decision making. This Profile represents a step in that process and will inform the development of the Kowanyama Youth Strategy 2026–30.

The Kowanyama Youth Strategy will provide the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council with the means (through policy, programs, partnerships and participation) to ensure that Kowanyama Community is an enabling environment for all children and youth to realise their optimal potential as young adults with responsibilities to themselves, their family, their community, their culture – and future generations.

> *"You know how I said I had to go outside to find the respect and education... Well, I'm going to be waiting for my kid to grow up, and I want him to say to me that 'Oh, I found education and the respect inside of Kowanyama, not outside'... I want my kid to say that it's coming from home, my community... and then I'll know that my place is getting stronger, my people's getting stronger."*
>
> **Aldan Raymond - Young father, Kowanyama**

KOWANYAMA ABORIGINAL SHIRE COUNCIL Place of many waters

KOWANYAMA STATE SCHOOL

Schools Up North Mental Health For Learning

Yeti