

# CREATIVE PATHWAYS FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE:

## AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT EVIDENCE AND LITERATURE

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THIS REPORT IS PREPARED FOR  
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### **ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM**

The research team bring to this project expertise in community music, music education, social work, justice and criminology, as well as diverse gender, musical, migrant and First Nations' cultural heritages. Collectively, they have worked on a number of large-scale projects across remote, regional and metropolitan Australia and internationally, including juvenile and adult justice settings.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian youth justice systems are in urgent need of innovative programs to reduce the demand on custodial supervision and enhance community safety.

Entrenched inequity, high rates of reoffending, and acute concerns for children's wellbeing highlight the imperative for a pro-active approach that prioritises diversion and primary prevention to keep young people out of detention centres and support them through adolescence to become fulfilled, healthy, and socially-engaged citizens.

Music has long been recognised as an important resource for youth identity construction, emotional immersion and regulation, and social connection. Recent studies identify 562 wellbeing benefits of participating in music,<sup>1</sup> adding to a mounting evidence base of the social, emotional, physiological, cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits.<sup>2</sup> Music has been seen to be particularly powerful in communities marked by systemic inequity<sup>3</sup> engendering a strengths-based experience of creative fulfilment, cultural connection, and wellbeing in those who participate.<sup>4</sup>

Research has identified that the creative process of participating in music can lead to numerous benefits for justice-involved youth, including a reduction in aggression, self-harm, and violence, and the support of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and promotion of pro-social coping skills, self-regulation, and empathy.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, as a distinct form of self-expression that fosters a sense of belonging, music programs are particularly effective in strengthening cultural identity<sup>9</sup> and supporting positive identity-development amongst marginalised social and cultural groups.<sup>10</sup>

For more than ten years, Big hART has harnessed these potentials of music in their work with young people in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, where the challenges of youth justice are particularly explicit. Fostering youth wellbeing, supporting the creation of positive relationships, connecting to culture and community, music has empowered these youth to lead a creative change in society.

This report analyses evidence from 66 major studies to explain Big hART's impact with young people and their community in Ieramugadu (Roebourne), Western Australia. Together with six Big hART evaluations, young participants' own voices, and key community stakeholder's perspectives (including Elders and the WA Police Force), we outline a solid evidence-base of the potentials for music as a primary prevention strategy and support for youth desistance, in order to inform decision-making on youth justice policy and practice.



# A SNAPSHOT OF THE EVIDENCE ON **MUSIC IN** YOUTH JUSTICE SETTINGS

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH HAS IDENTIFIED NUMEROUS BENEFITS OF MUSIC FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH, INCLUDING



→ **A reduction in:**

- aggression
- self-harm
- violence

EVIDENCE SHOWS MUSIC'S IMMENSE POTENTIAL IN YOUTH JUSTICE SETTINGS FOR:

1. Primary prevention
2. Supporting the desistance journeys of incarcerated youth



→ **The support of:**

- self-expression
- self-esteem
- self-confidence
- self-efficacy
- promoting pro-social coping skills
- self-regulation
- empathy
- a sense of belonging
- identity-development
- a sense of cultural identity

→ **Shaping and supporting educational pathways for youth with:**

- negative experiences of authority
- histories of trauma, abuse or neglect
- difficult relationships with education

# PARTICIPANT'S STORY

Living in a small town can be frustrating but Roebourne is a good place.

A lot of kids seem to find fun in stealing and running amok. It's just fun and games. But then these kids get themselves locked up and they're crying for help. A second chance is really important for them, especially for young ones. The world is a big place, and you learn from your mistakes as you mature too.

I try to keep away from trouble. Ever since I've been going to Big hART I've been telling my own friends and cousins that they should come down for something else to do, rather than smoking drugs or doing the wrong thing. Big hART is like a calming place where I can go and put my mind off things. They make me feel safe.

Songs for Freedom is like a family that looks after you and supports you to look after yourself. The first time I left Western Australia was with Songs for Freedom, on the trip to Tasmania. The environment and weather and just everything was new and different.

Songs for Freedom and these trips have built my confidence a lot. When I'm up on stage, I'm scared. I worry how many people are watching me and I'll freeze. But I'm learning how to speak up more, doing talking and exercises when we sing. I saw a video that someone made of me making a speech in Tasmania. It wasn't too bad, so it made me start thinking that I could do this – achieve the dreams and visions in my head.

I just need to remember to be calm, peaceful, safe and beautiful.

**BIG hART PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**  
STORY PROVIDED FOR THIS REPORT, 2023





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# THE POTENTIALS OF MUSIC FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

## THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

On any given day, an average of 4,536 children and young people are under the supervision of State and Territory justice systems across Australia.<sup>8</sup>

In Western Australia, the rate of proceedings against young people is higher than the national average and increasing, with youth offending rates also being significantly higher than in the general population<sup>9</sup>. Youth in contact with the justice system often represent some of the most disadvantaged, under-resourced, and vulnerable members of society.<sup>10</sup>

Over a third of justice-involved youth come from areas of extreme poverty, with histories of substance use, parental incarceration, disrupted education, adverse childhood events, and social disadvantage. Over half of justice-involved youth in Australia have long histories of interaction with Child Protective Services, which increases to 60% for youth in custodial detention<sup>11</sup> and 64% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island youth. Such complex needs and traumas often manifest as a multitude of mental health issues, low levels of physical health and wellbeing, conduct disorders, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorders.<sup>12</sup>

While the needs of these young people are clear, Australian youth justice systems have tended to exacerbate rather than address the problems of youth crime through exposure to abuse, humiliation, and physical and psychological harm.<sup>13</sup>





When coupled with concerns voiced by the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the significant number of unsentenced youth (72%)<sup>14</sup> currently residing in detention centres, the gross overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth at every stage of the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing process,<sup>15</sup> the rising costs of detention,<sup>16</sup> and recidivism rates that see 80% of justice-involved youth re-offending within 10 years,<sup>17</sup> there is a clear need for change. As almost every youth justice jurisdiction in Australia is undergoing significant reviews and reforms, the time for innovative programs to reduce youth crime that put young people's wellbeing at the centre is now.

**The time for innovative programs that put young people's wellbeing at the centre of effective strategies to reduce youth crime is now.**

## PREVENTING PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY OCCUR

The concept of primary prevention within youth justice policy is best framed within a public health model; preventing problems in communities before they occur.<sup>18</sup> Through this paradigm, a strengths-based approach can equip youth with practical, social, and vocational skills, strengthening the protective factors against offending, and addressing risk factors with aims to promote healthy development, resilience, and social connection.<sup>19</sup>

Successful primary prevention programs are those tailored to individual communities, providing meaningful opportunities to participate in programs that are relevant to young peoples' own lives, supported by community, building strong partnerships and self-efficacy.<sup>20</sup>

These programs aim to build competence, confidence, connections, character, identity, and provide young people with the skills and motivation they need to experience healthy relationships with institutions such as education, employment, and services within the community.<sup>21</sup>

**Successful primary prevention programs aim to build competence, confidence, connections, character, identity, and provide young people with the skills and motivation they need to experience healthy relationships with institutions and services within the community.**

## FROM SOMETHING "DONE TO YOUNG PEOPLE" TO SOMETHING "DONE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE"<sup>22</sup>

For youth who are engaged with youth justice authorities, it is increasingly recognised that traditional approaches to youth justice do not afford them with the necessary resources to exercise agency in decision-making regarding their own lives nor establish positive social relationships. Accordingly, criminological frameworks have shifted from rehabilitative approaches that focus on changing young people to desistance frameworks:

[Desistance is a] dynamic process of human development – one that is situated in and profoundly affected by its social contexts – in which persons move away from offending and towards social reintegration.<sup>23</sup>



As the focus then shifts from an outcome to a process, the cessation of criminal activity is also accompanied by a shift in identity and a shift in one's sense of community belonging – shifts that can only be youth-led.

In supporting youth to lead their own desistance journeys, justice reinvestment has been seen as a particularly powerful approach as it focuses on addressing the social issues underlying criminal behaviours. Justice reinvestment initiatives aim to provide economic opportunities for people living in disadvantaged communities, increasing access to mental health service, improving school attendance levels among young people, supporting victims/survivors of trauma, strengthening family networks within communities, and develop diversionary processes so those charged with minor offenses do not enter prison or juvenile justice unnecessarily.<sup>24</sup> This is done by providing job training, education programmes, and other relevant services – including music programs.<sup>25</sup>

**Criminological frameworks have shifted from rehabilitative approaches that focus on changing young people to desistance frameworks where the focus shifts from an outcome to a process. The cessation of criminal activity is accompanied by a shift in identity and a shift in one's sense of community belonging – shifts that can only be youth-led.**

## THE BENEFITS OF MUSIC PROGRAMS FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

A variety of music programs, including music lessons, group improvisation, music therapy, music technology, song writing workshops and listening have been shown to be particularly powerful in youth justice settings, as both a primary prevention approach and as a justice reinvestment strategy to support the desistance journeys of incarcerated youth.

Internationally, such programs have included composition workshops, choirs, rap and hip hop workshops, musical theatre productions, and Javanese gamelan ensembles and have been provided by government departments, large organising bodies such as non-governmental organisations, community organisations, higher music education institutions, and individual volunteers.<sup>26</sup>

More broadly, researchers in musical creativity and cognitive psychology have identified music has enormous capacity to be engaging, emotional, physical, synchronous, personal, social, and persuasive.<sup>27</sup> A growing evidence-based shows that these capacities lead to a range of musical mechanisms such as



neuroplasticity, rhythmical entrainment, musical expectancy, emotional arousal, autobiographical memory, and aesthetic judgement.<sup>28</sup> These mechanisms have been shown to lead to a number of benefits in domains, including the: psychosocial (e.g. nurturing relationships with others, fostering of empathy), cognitive (e.g. self-esteem, memory, concentration), emotional (e.g. mood regulation, stress release, happiness), behavioural (e.g. increase in communication and bonding), physical (e.g. motor coordination, muscle tone), identity (e.g. place in community, connections to the past, celebration of culture), and spiritual (e.g. sense of meaning, feeling of transcendence).<sup>29</sup> As such, music has also been noted to be a viable means to shape the learning pathways of incarcerated youth with negative experiences of authority, histories of abuse or neglect, and difficult relationships with formal education.<sup>30 31</sup>

## TABLE 1: RESEARCH-IDENTIFIED BENEFITS OF MUSIC FOR JUSTICE INVOLVED YOUTH

(table constructed from a detailed analysis of ten international, outcomes-focused studies)

AUTHOR/YEAR	LOCATION	BENEFITS
Kallio, in press	Juvenile Justice Centre NSW, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Agency and achievement</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Caulfield et al. 2022	Youth Justice Facility, UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Musical development</li> <li>• Attitudes and positive behaviours</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Chong & Yun 2020	Youth Justice Facility, South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Experiences of agency and achievement</li> <li>• Perseverance and resilience</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Hickey 2018	Youth Detention Centre, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Agency and achievement</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Belonging</li> </ul>
Wolf & Holochwost 2016	Youth Detention Centre, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> </ul>
Wood et al 2013	Juvenile Justice Centre, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Faulkner et al. 2012	Juvenile Justice Centre, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> <li>• Belonging</li> </ul>
Barrett & Baker 2012	Juvenile Justice Centre, NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Agency and achievement</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Marcum 2014	Youth Justice Facility, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Agency and achievement</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Trusting and respectful relationships</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>
Anderson & Overy 2010	Youth Justice Facility, Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Motivation and engagement</li> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Wellbeing and stress coping strategies</li> </ul>

# CASE STUDY: **BIG hART**

Big hART's unique arts-based response to significant social injustices and traumas focuses on the creation and communication of stories.

For over 30 years, Big hART has worked with over 9,500 participants and 55 communities, winning 45 local, state, national, and international awards for their services (<https://www.bighart.org/>). Their creative solutions to tackling deep and complex societal issues exemplify the ideals of primary prevention and desistance approaches to youth offending outlined in this report, through a holistic approach that supports individuals, communities, and society at large.

Striving to reduce incarceration rates and improve the safety and wellbeing of children and communities, Big hART has focused on engagement with the arts to divert people away from offending towards individual empowerment and strengthening communities. As part of their sustained work in the Pilbara, they are currently working with, and supporting, state attorney generals to generate awareness of urgent community and national issues, highlighting injustices and the inability of existing policies and practices to address these issues effectively and ethically.



“

“Police observe a real service gap in Roebourne for meaningful engagement with the youth of this community to build their skills, confidence and positive decision making. Often crime is a symptom of boredom, peer pressure and lack of connectedness experienced by some youth in Roebourne.

As such, we support opportunities for young people to engage in workshop programs, on country trips and similar activities that focus on skill development and leadership. I envisage that positive, task-based activities involving the youth will create an enriched sense of belonging, positive connection to each other and their culture, whilst also empowering them to connect to schooling and other positive opportunities as they mature.

Over the years, Big hART have demonstrated their ability to engage and work strongly with young people and across different levels of community with strong outcomes a result. They are invested in improving the lives and well-being of Roebourne youth and I commend them for driving a focus on skills development and leadership”

**JODIE SHUTTLEWORTH**  
ACTING SENIOR SERGEANT, 11134, OIC,  
ROEBOURNE POLICE STATION.  
TESTIMONIAL, 2020



## OUTCOMES OF BIG hART'S WORK

Of particular relevance to this report, evaluations of Big hART's programs have demonstrated that participants experience a wide range of positive impacts that are key for desistance, including an increase in confidence, self-esteem, self-image, hope for the future, and motivation. Participants report experiencing feelings of happiness, achievement, enjoyment, excitement, enthusiasm, belonging, acceptance, and empowerment. These intrinsic individual outcomes can assist in fostering greater intergenerational engagement and connection, quality relationships, a sense of belonging and connectedness, and improve peer and family relationships. These programs also improve collaboration between community members and stakeholders, raise awareness of community assets and resources, and increase civic engagement.<sup>32</sup>



“SINGING IS GOOD FOR HEALING. I SEE THAT THE YOUNG ONES THAT GET INVOLVED IN MUSIC WORKSHOPS STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.”

NYANGUMARTA ELDER, PARTICIPANT IN SONGS FOR PEACE AND SONGS FOR FREEDOM. STATEMENT PROVIDED FOR THIS REPORT, 2023



# IMPACT

## A Whole-Person Approach: The Social-Ecological Model

The design and approach of Big hART's programs and how they relate to primary prevention and crime reduction can be viewed through a social-ecological lens.<sup>33</sup> Within every domain, individual, relationships, community, and societal, Big hART programs generate important and unique impacts. Reported outcomes from prior evaluations are reflected in Figure 1.

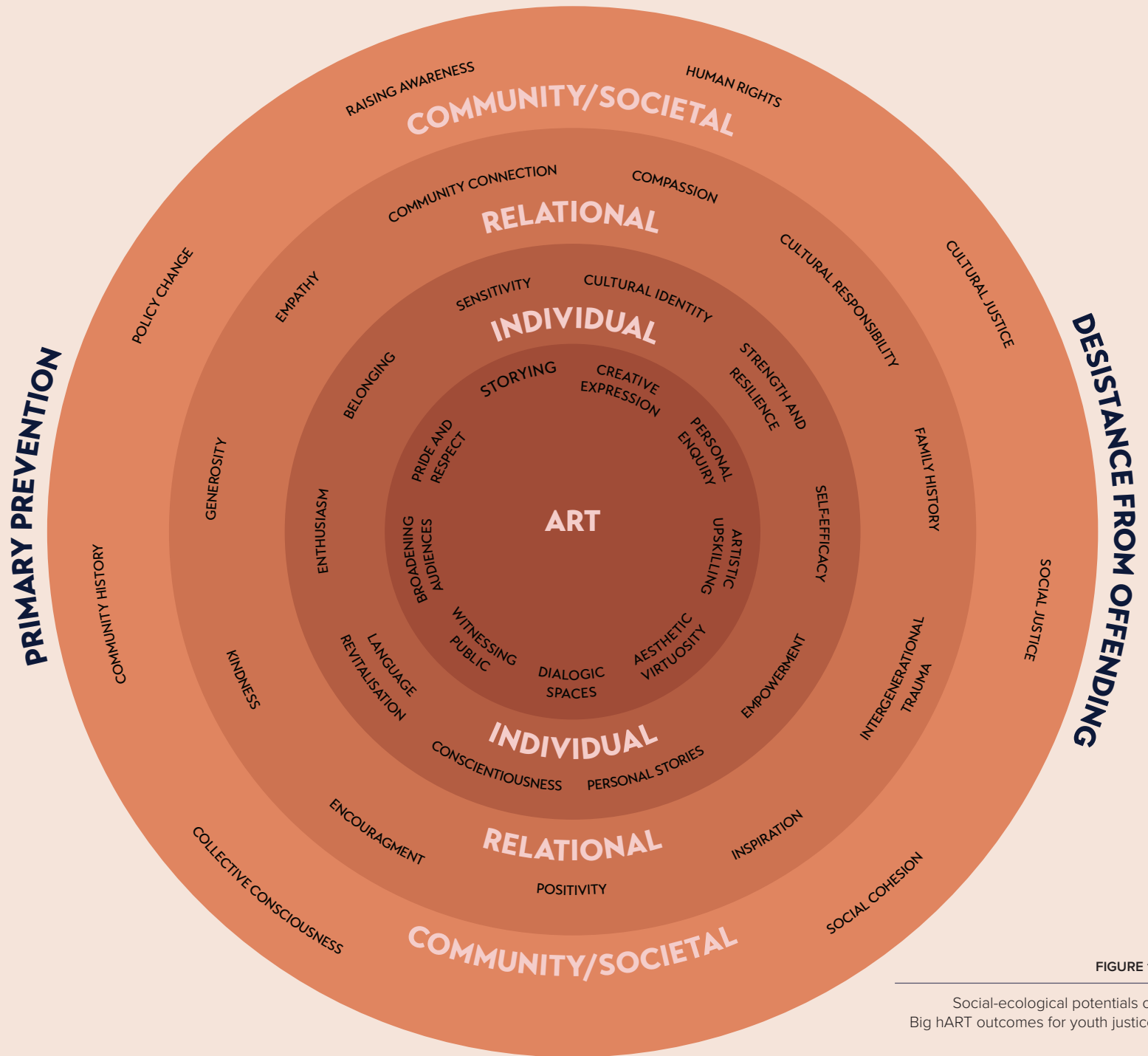


FIGURE 1:

Social-ecological potentials of Big hART outcomes for youth justice





**“I FEEL REALLY PROUD TO GO SOMEWHERE NEW AND PERFORM FOR THE FIRST TIME. SOMEWHERE THAT I’M NOT USED TO, WITH A BIG CROWD. THAT PUSHES ME OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE.”**

**BIG hART PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**  
STATEMENT PROVIDED FOR  
THIS REPORT, 2023



## INDIVIDUAL

Big hART's programs have had profound impacts in the lives of their participants.

With its strengths-based approach, Big hART builds self-esteem, confidence, responsibility, encourages pro-social attitudes and behaviours, and develops positive skills that individuals can carry onto other domains and areas in their life. Importantly, their programs help instil culture, identity, with hope and purpose for the future. The ability of Big hART's programs to increase self-confidence and self-esteem through building responsibility and empowering people is also evident.<sup>34</sup>

Participants have articulated Big hART's role in desistance away from anti-social patterns of behaviour, the development of pro-social ways of thinking, connecting with pro-social peer groups, and establishing developmental turning points and altering trajectories. Participants routinely expressed their desistance from problematic behaviours through their time with Big hART. This is often attached to their journey through programs giving them a sense of purpose, accomplishment, empowerment, and building their self-confidence and identity.<sup>35</sup>



“Being involved in these projects changed my life for the better. The people at Big hART supported me, they got down on my level, they respected me, they never judged me, and they made me confront my life and my choices. These things started to affect me. I started to feel happy about myself and lucky to have children. I started to feel important. I questioned my comfort zone, like the kinds of friends I kept. BIG hART gave me a new circle of friends who were on the straight and narrow – I could disconnect from those other friends of mine. And this meant that slowly, step-by-step, I stopped doing the drugs. I'd say that these BIG hART projects got me started in changing my life for the better. I would never have thought we could do something like this on our own but after a while these projects made us realise that we could go it alone. And I know these projects have affected other people in a similar way. People who are or used to be involved are on the right track now – they have got jobs, they've got married and they've bought houses. Even I've bought a house now. I've learnt that anything's what you make it.”

PARTICIPANT QUOTE IN WRIGHT, ET AL., 2016, P. 94



## RELATIONAL

Music programs in general, and Big hART's programs specifically, have been shown to build strong pro-social relationships with peers, families, teachers, facilitators, and other people of influence in the lives of young people.

This can contribute to strengthening protective factors that support desistance journeys and aid in crime reduction.

Big hART's skills-based creative approach effectively empowers young people by providing them opportunities to experience growth and development. This is often linked to the participants' experiences of change and desistance from anti-social attitudes and behaviours. Improving communication skills, pro-social teamwork and problem-solving skills have been referenced in the literature as one of the evidence-based outcomes of using music programs with young people.<sup>36</sup>



“It’s built my confidence. I can interact with people, on multiple levels. A 180- degree change to what I used to be. Before BIG hART and the GOLD project, I was not a people person. But in going to the GOLD show and engaging with people regularly in a wide range of activities and projects, you just learn skills to engage with people, work together, and collaborate creatively. To be a better person personally. I mean, to have a conversation like this and not feel like it’s a waste of time. I’m getting something out of talking, but before BIG hART I wouldn’t have had that. BIG hART allows me to think from a different perspective, and allow[s] me to control my actions. Over time I have become a pacifist rather than getting angry and violent. It’s about learning and growing into my true potential.”

PARTICIPANT QUOTE IN WRIGHT, ET AL., 2016, P. 126

## COMMUNITY

Big hART actively involves the community in a number of ways, tailoring their approach to meet local community needs.

This is particularly evident in their programs focusing on the revitalisation of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and crime reduction strategies for specific communities, including their Smashed program aimed to reduce the harms of alcohol use among young people. These types of youth justice programs build a strong sense of community, strength, self-efficacy, and connect with local histories and identities.

There is a special exchange that happens by bringing shows and productions to audiences, in how the audience experiences the unique stories told. The power of the program extends beyond the participants to change public perceptions and understandings among those who attend performances, plays, and festivals.<sup>37</sup>



“

**“THROUGH SONGS FOR FREEDOM** I LEARNED A BIT MORE OF MY LANGUAGE. I LEARNED A BIT MORE A BIT OF MY CULTURE. I LEARNED THAT I HAVE RESPONSIBILITY. I LEARNED HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF AND TO BE THERE FOR OTHERS. AND TO BE A BETTER PERFORMER.”

**BIG hART PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**  
STATEMENT PROVIDED FOR  
THIS REPORT, 2023

## SOCIETAL

Big hART's collaborations with governments, justice administrations, and academic institutions has contributed towards bringing awareness of cultural justice to the forefront of the national conversation, highlighting a potential to effect change on a societal level.

Big hART's mission, "It's harder to hurt someone when you know their story" is an approach conducive to policy change in jurisdictions throughout Australia as communities are empowered to speak to policy issues relevant to them. Big hART's impact is far reaching, and operates within the substantial evidence-base of arts in youth-justice settings, representing an innovative and successful model for primary prevention, reducing offending, and supporting youth desistance in society.

“

“Songs For Peace was a drug and alcohol free music event held on 29 September 2018, along with multiple community events in the preceding 2 weeks, involving children and adults around music and social harmony.

In spite of the AFL Grand Final also being held on 29 September the event achieved excellent attendance and was a peaceful event in line with the themes promoted by Big hART and the community throughout September.

The Songs For Peace event was a collaboration with funders, community members, visiting musicians and Pilbara agencies providing support to Roebourne youth, including Yaandina, and PCYC and the organizers consulted with Roebourne Police prior to the main concert.

Activities promoting social harmony leading up to the performance at the end of September included audio podcasts presented by Roebourne youth, community music and song writing for children and adults, fireside meals, music and tea making at the Peace Place, dance workshops and digital documentation of all events and workshops by Roebourne children.

Roebourne Police commend the event organizers and their efforts in successfully engaging Roebourne youth during the school holidays. Offending by young people was reduced in the community generally during the month of September. Roebourne Police believe that Big hART programs provide the young people here with positive opportunities and outcomes which result in a sense of achievement and a way to socialise and develop.”

**STEVE TAYLOR**  
ACTING SENIOR SERGEANT 10865, OFFICER IN CHARGE,  
ROEBOURNE POLICE STATION. TESTIMONIAL, 2018



# POLICY IMPLICATIONS

At the forefront of effective youth justice policy is the need for proactive approaches to addressing offending that place the child first and cease Australia's overreliance on the ineffective and expensive detention of young people.<sup>38</sup>

Within the Western Australian context, evidence highlights the urgent need for a recognition and understanding of the history of trauma that young offenders have experienced, and the need to address them in culturally relevant and sensitive ways.<sup>39</sup> Evidence shows that addressing young peoples' health, cultural, educational, and psychosocial needs is far more effective than incarceration – which often makes the problem of youth crime worse.<sup>40</sup> Western Australia's policy to reduce youth offending through programs specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is commendable in its aim to reduce overrepresentation in the justice system. This will be most successful by prioritising the

safety and needs of young people before they come to the attention of authorities, putting their best interests at the core of diverting youth away from the justice system and engaging them in healthy communities.<sup>41</sup>

These goals align with Australia-wide calls to keep children out of detention, with community-based alternatives leading to safer communities. Evidence suggests this is not only more effective in primary prevention and desistance, but is also a more cost-effective approach.<sup>42</sup> Appropriate programs for justice-involved youth should target skills, healing, identity, values, relationships and knowledge, with a focus on wellbeing.<sup>43</sup> Community-engaged and designed approaches are needed to protect, support, encourage, and nurture culture while meeting the needs of individuals and sociocultural groups.<sup>44</sup> As this report has shown, by working across artistic, individual, relational, community and social domains, music programs have immense potential for providing such approaches to primary prevention and supporting the desistance journeys of incarcerated youth.



## PARTICIPANT STORY

Family is really important for me, my mum, and my grandmother. And my hometown, Roebourne. Being on country with family, going fishing, swimming, hanging out with the girls, taking care of my family.

Big hART is also like a family, I've been going there my whole life almost. I'd like to go there every day, making videos, dance workshops, taking photos, cooking up a big family feed – it's really amazing. We all love each other and have got a big heart – I know I'm not alone there.

Songs For Freedom has been a big thing for me and my mum and my grandmother. This year, I'm going to be singing a song my mum wrote. It's a tribute, a song about our family and the struggles that me and my mum been through. It's really important for my mum and my grandmother. It's a big thing for me too, that I make them proud, and can feel happy for myself too.

The people making decisions about my life think I'm a bad person, but I'm really not. I've been going to court since I was 14, on and off. I'm still in the system, I don't totally understand why. Everywhere I go, the cops will say I'm not allowed there. They lock me up and take me to a cell, and they leave me in custody there for one or two nights, or longer than that. But everyone that I work with, they know I've got a good heart. I share with everybody. I am generous. I'm just like my mum.

This world can be hard to find help in. When I was only five years old, I had to take care of my baby brother all on my own. Sometimes I feel like I just want to give up, but all those little kids need to be kept safe and helped to be good and go to school and get more educated. I just want what's best for the little ones back at home. But it's been hard.

At Big hART it feels like we can do anything. Everyone loved me, and I loved them, and that helped to get my head off things when I was stressing. To see different kinds of worlds and sing in different places. To learn all the songs. I feel excited about myself. I feel very proud of myself to feel so happy that I'm getting myself somewhere in life.

**BIG hART PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**  
STORY PROVIDED FOR THIS REPORT, 2023



# OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

**The insights outlined in this report were generated through a scoping review of recent research focusing on music programs targeting justice-involved youth.**

This review aimed to answer the question: How can community-centred music making provide strengths-based approaches to primary prevention for young offending and diversion away from the juvenile justice system?

This review included research literature, reports of existing arts and music programs, and relevant youth justice data and policies, and included both carceral settings as well as school and community contexts. The research team examined studies, programs, and relevant data regarding the youth justice system in Australia, in addition to local Western Australia data and policies. A variety of settings were included, from primary prevention in schools and communities to ordered interventions through the justice system either in youth

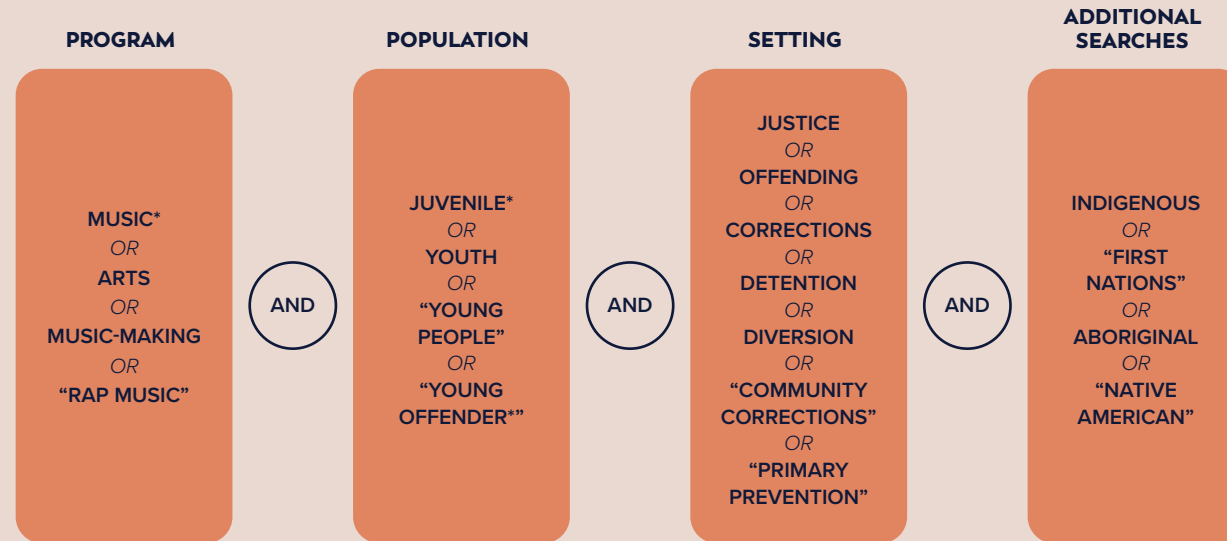
detention centres or community corrections. The initial scan of the literature yielded 692 results, which were then screened to 66 articles which have informed this report.

In addition, the research team examined and analysed six published Big hART documents reporting on the outcomes of their work in light of the insights gleaned in the literature review. Lastly, to privilege the voices, lived experiences and wisdom of the youth involved in Big hART's program in the Pilbara, interviews were undertaken with youth participants. These were facilitated by local Big hART producers, and then transcribed, analysed and crafted into narratives by the research team with the input of the young people themselves. In order to protect their identities, their names have not been included in this report. Also included are insights from key local stakeholders (including Elders and the WA Police Force).





# SEARCH TERMS INCLUDED:



Searches run in ProQuest with results:

- noft("music\*" OR "music-making" OR "rap music") AND noft("Young offender\*" OR "youth justice" OR "Juvenile justice" OR "juvenile offenders") AND stype.exact("Scholarly Journals" OR "Trade Journals" OR "Dissertations & Theses" OR "Books" OR "Reports") AND pd(20130508-20230508) AND stype.exact("Scholarly Journals" OR "Trade Journals" OR "Dissertations & Theses" OR "Books" OR "Reports") 71 results
- (noft("music\*" OR "music-making" OR "rap music") AND noft(("young offender" OR "young offenders") OR "youth justice" OR "Juvenile justice" OR "juvenile offenders") AND Australia) AND (stype.exact("Scholarly Journals" OR "Trade Journals" OR

"Dissertations & Theses" OR "Books" OR "Reports") 13 results

- noft("music\*") AND noft("juvenile" OR "youth" OR "young people" OR "young offenders") AND noft("justice" OR "offending" OR "corrections" OR "detention" OR "diversion" OR "community corrections") AND noft("indigenous" OR "first nations" OR "aboriginal" OR "native american") AND stype.exact("Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites" OR "Scholarly Journals" OR "Other Sources" OR "Books" OR "Dissertations & Theses" OR "Magazines" OR "Trade Journals") AND pd(20130508-20230508)) 40 results
- (noft("music\*" OR "arts") AND noft("juvenile" OR "youth" OR "young people" OR "young offenders") AND noft("justice" OR "offending" OR "corrections" OR "detention" OR

"diversion" OR "community corrections") AND noft("indigenous" OR "first nations" OR "aboriginal" OR "native american")) AND stype.exact("Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites" OR "Scholarly Journals" OR "Other Sources" OR "Books" OR "Dissertations & Theses" OR "Magazines" OR "Trade Journals") 97 results

- noft("music\*") AND noft("juvenile" OR "youth" OR "young people" OR "young offenders") AND noft("justice" OR "offending" OR "corrections" OR "detention" OR "diversion" OR "community corrections" OR "primary prevention") AND stype.exact("Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites" OR "Scholarly Journals" OR "Other Sources" OR "Books" OR "Dissertations & Theses" OR "Magazines" OR "Trade Journals" OR "Reports") 471 results

# PHOTO CREDITS

## COVER:

Karella Walker with mother Rose Pat at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)  
Pilbara wildflowers in bloom (Photo: Big hART)  
Pilbara landscape from the air (Photo: Telen Rodwell)

## PAGE 2:

Patrick Churnside performs at Songs for Freedom Sydney, 2023 (Photo: Brett Boardman)  
Roebourne flora (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)

## PAGE 3:

“Boss Man” (Photo by young project participant, Tre Wally)  
Pilbara landscapes from the air (Photos: Telen Rodwell)

## PAGE 4:

Warren Foster performs onstage at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)  
Rock face at Goanna Leg Gorge (Photo: Big hART)  
Pilbara landscape (Photo: Lonara Walters)

## PAGE 5:

Jaymee Lee Walters MCs at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2019 (Photo: Marg Bertling)  
Michael and Daylen Hicks in the Roebourne Digital Lab (Photo: Big hART)

## PAGE 6:

Kutch Edwards with young project participants Penny Wally, Shiloh Mourinbine and RJ Parker at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)  
Pilbara landscape (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)  
The John Pat Peace Place at night (Photo: Joseph Penipe)

## PAGE 7:

Campfire (Photo: Joseph Penipe)  
Pilbara landscape from the air (Photo: Telen Rodwell)

## PAGE 8:

Teyah Makani, Allery Sandy and Kankawa Nagarra (Olive Knight) perform onstage at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)  
Pilbara landscape (Photo: Bella)

## PAGE 9:

Ashton Cheedy and young participant Benny take part in a music workshop in the Ngurin Cultural Center in 2016. (Photo: Frances Andrijich)

## PAGE 10:

Charlie Farmer with Project O participant, Xiao, and Jen Cloher (Photo: Fallon Te Paa)

## PAGE 12:

Students from Eden Marine High perform at Bulla Midhong Eden, 2023 (Photo: David Rogers)  
Desert detail (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)  
Campfire (Photo: Peta Roebuck)

## PAGE 13:

Young project participants Nathaniel Edwins, Corbyn Munda and Trenton Lockyear perform and film NEOMAD Love Punks. (Photo: Film Still from “HOW DO WE GET TO SPACE? The Story of the Love Punks and Satellite Sisters”)

## PAGE 14:

Lonara Walters MCs Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2019 (Photo: Marg Bertling)  
Flora in the Millstream Chichester National Park (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)  
Firewood (Photo: Joseph Penipe)

## PAGE 15:

Teyah Makani, Wendy Darby and Vikki Thorn perform at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)

## PAGE 17:

Kiara Edwards from Shoalhaven High performs on stage at Songs for Freedom Sydney, 2023 with the Mudgingaal Yangamba choir (Photo: Brett Boardman)

## PAGE 18:

Young performer from Wallaga Lake prepares for Bulla Midhong Umbarra, 2023 (Photo: David Rogers)

**PAGE 19:** Songs for Freedom at Barangaroo Reserve, Sydney, 2023 (Photo: Brett Boardman)

## PAGE 20:

Students from Eden Marine High School perform the Whale Dance at Bulla Midhong Eden, 2023 (Photo: David Rogers)  
Pilbara landscape from the air (Photo: Telen Rodwell)

## PAGE 21:

Jay Jarome performs on stage at Songs for Peace Roebourne, 2022 (Photo: Joseph Penipe)

## PAGE 22:

Gadhungal Murring and Djirriba Waagura dancers perform at Bulla Midhong Nowra, 2023 (Photo: Hill to Air)  
Roebourne landscape (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)

## PAGE 23:

Hannah Phillips, Lonara Walters and Lorianne Walters perform Punkaliyarra at Perth Festival, 2022 (Photo: Nicky Akenhurst)  
Sunset over the Millstream Chichester National Park (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)  
Flora in the Millstream Chichester National Park (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)

## PAGE 24:

Emma Donovan performs at Songs for Freedom Sydney, 2023 (Photo: Brett Boardman)  
River flora in the Millstream Chichester National Park (Photo: Genevieve Dugard)

# ENDNOTES

1. Krause, et al., 2018.
2. Bartleet, 2023.
3. Bartleet & Higgins, 2018.
4. Higgins & Willingham 2017.
5. Cain & Cursley, 2017; Clennon, 2013; Digard et al., 2007; Faulkner et al., 2012; Kallio & Gorton, 2022; Marcum, 2014; Rio & Tenney, 2002; Smeijsters et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2013.
6. Heard et al. 2022.
7. Baker & Homan, 2007; Daykin et al., 2012; Kallio & Gorton, 2022.
8. ABS, 2023
9. 2,160 youth offences recorded per 100,000 vs 1,438 offences per 100,000 amongst both youth and adults.
10. AIHW, 2023; Butcher et al., 2020; Day et al., 2022; Smeijsters et al., 2011; Young et al., 2017.
11. AIHW, 2022
12. AIHW, 2023; Butcher et al., 2020; Day et al., 2022; Daykin et al., 2017; Gardstrom, 2012; Smeijsters et al., 2011; Wolf & Holochwost, 2016; Young et al., 2017.
13. Clancey et al., 2020; Cuneen, 2019.
14. AIHW 2022.
15. This is particularly striking in WA, with 70-80% of incarcerated youth representing First Nations backgrounds, AIHW, 2020; Blagg, 2015.
16. Government of Western Australia, 2022.
17. AIHW, 2023; Pisani, 2022.
18. Fagan et al., 2003.
19. Knox, 2001; Middleton, 2013.
20. Homel et al., 2015; Kivnick & Lymburner, 2008; Ruffolo et al., 2003.
21. Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Ruffolo et al., 2003.
22. Smithson & Jones 2021, p. 349
23. Graham & McNeill 2017, p. 435.
24. Allison & Cunneen, 2022; Brown et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2010; Willis & Kapira, 2018; Wood, 2014.
25. SRWA, 2023; Willis & Kapira, 2018.
26. Kallio, 2022.
27. Thompson, 2023.
28. Thompson, 2023.
29. Ansdell, 2014; Cook, 2023; Magsamen & Ross, 2023.
30. Barrett & Baker, 2012; Kallio, 2022; Maund, 2021.
31. Barrett & Baker, 2012.
32. Wright et al., 2016; Palmer, 2010.
33. Krug et al., 2002.
34. Wright, et al., 2016.
35. Wright, et al., 2016.
36. Cain & Cursley, 2017; Clennon, 2013; Digard et al., 2007; Faulkner et al., 2012; Kallio & Gorton, 2022; Marcum, 2014; Rio & Tenney, 2002; Smeijsters et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2013.
37. For more details of these programs, see Palmer, 2010; Wright, et al., 2016; <https://www.bighart.org/>
38. AIHW, 2023; Clancey et al., 2020; Western Australia, 2008.
39. AIHW, 2023.
40. Clancey et al., 2020; Cuneen, 2019.
41. AIHW, 2023.
42. Blagg, 2015; Clancey et al., 2020; LSIC, 2018; Flatau & Zaretsky, 2008.
43. Clancey et al., 2020; Young et al., 2017.
44. Butcher et al., 2020; Cuneen, 2019; Young et al., 2017.

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