

Evaluation of Marram–Ngala Ganbu

Summary of findings

A Koori Family Hearing Day at the
Children's Court of Victoria in Broadmeadows
November 2019

What happened?

- Marram-Ngala Ganbu (M-NG) is a hearing day in the Family Division of the Children's Court at Broadmeadows Victoria, developed through a Koori-led process. It's been operating since August 2016 and has supported close to 400 Koori families since that time.
- The Children's Court of Victoria commissioned an independent evaluation to help it understand how well M-NG was working and inform the potential expansion of the program to other communities.
- The evaluation was led by Professor Kerry Arabena, a proud Meriam woman, together with Social Ventures Australia and Professor Wendy Bunston.
- Over 30 Koori adults and young people were interviewed to understand the impact of the program, as well as 30 people from other organisations involved in the program. Court data was also analysed.

What did we learn?

- Through the evaluation, we have seen how the court has been transformed through Aboriginal leadership, successfully encouraging Aboriginal people to feel welcome, heard and empowered.

- Through consultation with families, many simple and common sense changes were made to the court process – including adapting the court setting to allow families and young people to sit around the table and speak at the same level as magistrates, and offering support before, during and after court from Koori staff who built relationships with families and into the community.

"Any worries and concerns with the stress leading up to Court I could get in contact with the support workers and it makes a whole lot of difference. I was excited going to [Marram-Ngala Ganbu] because of the fairness"

M-NG participant (Koori parent)

"I was able to be heard and was able to speak. My voice was heard, and my children's voice was heard. Other courts people are speaking for you and it's frustrating"

M-NG participant (Koori parent)

- The evaluation found M-NG is providing a more effective, culturally appropriate and just response for Koori families through a more culturally appropriate court process, that enables greater participation by family members and more culturally-informed decision-making.
- Koori families are more likely to attend court at M-NG, and more likely to follow court orders due to the support of the magistrates and Koori staff. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is more accountable to magistrates and the court process in M-NG. There is greater compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. There are also early indicators that more families are staying together and having their children returned.

What next?

- The evaluation recommended how M-NG could be improved, and how it might be expanded to other courts. The evaluation will be publicly launched in the new year and will inform government and the Aboriginal community's decision about how to expand the program.

If you have any questions about the evaluation or Marram-Ngala Ganbu, please contact Ashley Morris, the Koori Services Coordinator, at ashley.morris@courts.vic.gov.au.