



STORIES OF CHANGE

STORY #7
DECEMBER 2020



ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT CASE STUDY ABORIGINAL MALES HEALING CENTRE (AMHC)

WHO IS PART OF THIS STORY?

ABORIGINAL MALES HEALING CENTRE

The Aboriginal Males Healing Centre Strong Spirit Strong Families Strong Culture Inc. (AMHC) is a not-for-profit, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, based in Newman in the Pilbara region of Western Australia (WA). AMHC offers an alternative to incarceration for men that use violence against women and children. The Centre aims to heal these men and break the cycle of violence.

COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT

Community First Development is a First Nations community development and research organisation.

They are a registered not for profit organisation and have been working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for over 20 years. In 2020, they changed their name from Indigenous Community Volunteers to Community First Development to better reflect what they do.

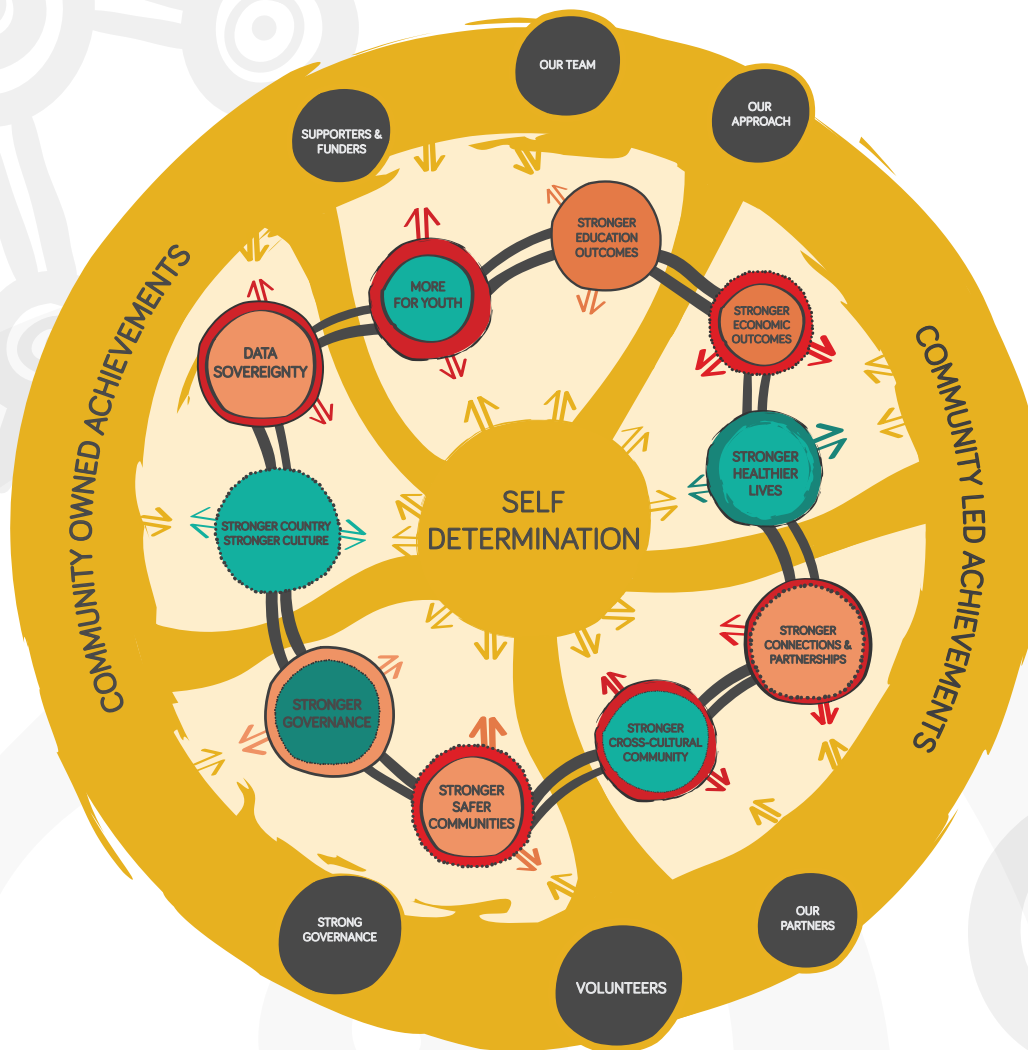
Community First Development's vision is a world beyond the gap where First Nations people and their communities are thriving – with opportunities to use skills, talents, capabilities and cultural strength to achieve recognition, growth and security.

Everything they do is in partnership; it is only through collaboration and working together, that genuine change can be achieved.

Uncle Colin Peterson, AMHC Council Elder; Devon Cuimara, AMHC CEO; and Djeran Cuimara, Devon's son. To Devon, the focus of this photo is the generational process. Devon's own personal healing journey brought him to the space in the photo and where he is today. Djeran represents the next generation and what Devon wants to change. Devon doesn't want intergenerational violence to pass on to his son.



WHAT IS AMHC'S LONG-TERM DREAM?



WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

Community First Development's Story of Change concept aims to communicate how they work and the outcomes they contribute to achieving through their community development work. Similar to an ecosystem, this concept has a core (self-determination), organisms (the 'outcomes'), and elements that contribute to the ecosystem flourishing (Community First Development's people, approach and governance).

Community First Development works with each community to define their 'dream' (or 'long-term goal') and associated dream indicators, and link these to Story of Change outcomes. Developing dream indicators can be iterative and may be undertaken after several projects.

AMHC has chosen a journey focused on achieving stronger safer communities, followed by stronger

country, stronger culture. AMHC's vision or dream is for all Aboriginal women and children to live safe and healthy lives free of family violence. They are seeking to address high levels of family violence in the community and consider how they can find a solution to address this issue at a local level.

There are three key components to achieving AMHC's vision:

1. Secure funding – without funding and investment of pro bono support from key stakeholders throughout different phases of the vision, nothing can happen. These are part of the critical pathway that can inhibit AMHC's ability to achieve their dream.
2. Build a residential Healing Centre.
3. Implement an outreach program on early intervention and prevention.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO THEM?

“ The whole thing is simply about preventing the ongoing intergenerational trauma around violence. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

AMHC wants to build an Aboriginal Community Controlled Healing Centre that can serve as an alternative to incarceration for Aboriginal men who engage in family violence. They also want to reduce homelessness for First Nations women and children and “assist in arresting” the trajectory of family violence in First Nations communities.

Taking a holistic approach, the Centre draws on Western clinical care and rehabilitation methods (the Duluth model), underpinned by Aboriginal culture and Lore as the key healing element. An outreach program geared towards early intervention and prevention will sit alongside the Healing Centre.

“ So it’s a two tiered approach really with the Aboriginal Males Healing Centre family. Here, particularly in the Pilbara region, [the aim] was to preserve as much as possible Aboriginal men and their cultural ways as a gateway, as well as to maintain their culture and their practices and incorporate them into a cultural healing process. And incorporating that in collaboration with mainstream therapeutic healing paradigms. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

HOW IS AMHC GOVERNED?

Newman has two traditional owner groups, who have a connection with each other and to the land. Years ago a Niyaparli senior Lore man and a Martu senior Lore man reached an agreement where Niyaparli people are traditional owners of the land and Martu are the caretakers or custodians of the land. Both groups share the same Lore, culture and dreaming. As part of this agreement a Martu person can be given authority to speak over Niyaparli land. This agreement has been carried on through oral tradition over the years. The communities have layers of traditional, contemporary and historical connection to Newman and these layers are all interconnected.

AMHC is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. Their governance reflects the fact they exist in two worlds:


“ The fact remains that we live in two worlds and that’s our First Nations community and then the Western community. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Cultural relevance is the key. For AMHC ‘culture lies at the heart of governance. It informs a group’s rules and values about what is the ‘right way’ of exercising power and governing—and what is the ‘wrong way’.¹

The AMHC will operate under and comply with three levels of governance, each equally as important, including First Nations Governance

¹ The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute. (n.d.). Indigenous Governance Toolkit. Retrieved from <http://toolkit.aigi.com.au/toolkit/2-0-culture-and-governance>



(to ensure cultural security, relevance and effectiveness), clinical governance (in accordance with Section 17 of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act and in consideration of the Australian Indigenous Psychologist Association AIPA4), and corporate governance (as outlined in the Associations Act and ATO law and legislations).

AMHC is the key governing body of the Healing Centre, responsible primarily for First Nations Governance. The clinical psychologist will be responsible for clinical governance practices, and the Finance Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC) will be responsible for corporate governance.

The AMHC Board has people with mixed skills that deal with the legal aspect of AMHC's legal entity and operations, however through cultural authority, the Council of Elders holds the authority to ensure everything is done the 'right way' or 'proper way'. The National Disability Insurance Agency defines the 'proper way' as "a colloquial phrase used to describe a way of doing business in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a manner which is compatible with the community's values and customs."²

To ensure everything is done 'right way' or 'proper way' the Council of Elders is made up of 75 per cent males who belong to the Nyiyaparli or Martu Aboriginal language group or family kinship group.

“ We have structured in our constitution a Council of Elders in keeping with First Nations peoples' governance structures, where the Elders are our governance. We follow. Younger generations, younger people follow the old people. We always seek their permission, seek their approval to carry out business. That's what we do within the Aboriginal Males

Healing Centre. As our governance structure we have the Council of Elders, then we have the board that sits under that council of elders, which is elected. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Underpinning the Board and Council of Elders are working groups which drives the technical aspect of the AMHC Vision. The working group is divided into five sub-groups of which AMHC CEO Devon Cuimara is the delegated authority to act on behalf of AMHC. Devon is accountable to the Board and the Council of Elders.

Like many First Nations organisations, AMHC operates in the space where First Nations Governance and Western Governance intersect. These organisations have developed 'Two-Way' Governance practices defined by the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute as:

“ This balancing act is called two-way governance. It refers to the efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in negotiating a pathway forward by developing governance arrangements that seek to achieve a workable balance between maintaining cultural integrity and maximising their self-determination. It also involves ensuring that their models of governance accord with the requirements (such as financial and legal accountability) of the wider society in which they live. ”³

² The National Disability Insurance Agency. (2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy. Retrieved from <https://www.ndis.gov.au/medias/documents/hcb/h31/8800389759006/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Strategy-3MB-PDF-.pdf>

³ The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute. (2012). Indigenous Governance Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://toolkit.aigi.com.au/toolkit/2-2-two-way-governance>

The community voice is incorporated into decision making; the Board ran an initial session to co design the Healing Centre with the community who have been involved since the very beginning. This process ensured that the community's values and customs were embedded into the design of the Healing Centre and proposed delivery of the program.

“ They're our governance structure really, the community. We are governed by what their needs and their wants [are], and their instructions direct us in that process. ”

DEVON CUIVARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

WHAT DOES THIS STORY FOCUS ON?

AMHC first invited Community First Development to work with them in 2016. The story of this partnership is a good example of how Community First Development's collaborative approach and diverse range of skilled volunteers can provide a holistic support system (as required) for a strong community with a bold dream.

AMHC has been very strategic in bringing on board key stakeholders to support the many steps required to establish the Healing Centre. Community First Development forms part of a collaborative pro-bono team led by the community that now also includes

COLAB, Arup Engineering, Avlon Surveyors, PM + D architects, Paul McDonald and Associates, Allied Projects, Infinity Actuaries, Empowering-Communities, Indigenous Psychological Services and many others.

To date, Community First Development volunteers have worked with AMHC to complete seven projects critical to the community's long-term dream and are currently working with them on three. This Story of Change provides an overview of four of the completed projects.

Community First Development's CDOs are highly skilled community development practitioners who work with communities to navigate a pathway towards achieving their goals. This Story of Change is just one example of the way CDOs work with communities. Each CDO has their own unique style, and their approach will depend on a range of factors including their relationship with the community, and the nature of the support requested by each community.

AMHC initial technical construction working group focused on obtaining funding to build the infrastructure.



WHAT DID WE DO?

When AMHC first contacted Community First Development in 2016, they had been working consistently over the previous five years to develop a model to address family violence. They wanted assistance to identify potential funding sources and to complete and submit grant submissions. Given the ambitious nature of AMHC's dream, there were also several other identified activities that needed to be completed to support achieving their dream.

Doyen Radcliffe, Community First Development's Regional Manager-Western Region, became the point of contact for AMHC due to his working knowledge of the Pilbara and family connections to the region. Doyen is a Yamatji Naaguja Wajarri man from the Midwest Region, WA, who has worked at Community First Development for over 12 years. He oversees community development activities in WA and is working towards delivering global best practice community development and monitoring evaluation work with First Nations communities.

Doyen is also an Australian Evaluation Society Director who works with the Board to strengthen and build First Nations and non-First Nations capacity in culturally safe theory, practice and use. He has also worked with his own community, Naaguja Warangkarri Aboriginal Corporation, to secure land, and was recently appointed to the Interim Nomination Committee for Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation.

Funding to design the 'Strong Spirit Strong Families Strong Culture' program

After yarning with AMHC, Doyen realised that as a first step, AMHC needed to develop a clear and concise rationale for the Healing Centre. AMHC subsequently chose to work with Kayla, a Community First Development volunteer experienced in submission writing, to develop a submission and successfully acquired a \$273,000 WA Royalties for Region grant for program design.

These funds enabled AMHC to finalise the development of a quality-assured, holistic healing program that is consistent with clinical and cultural best practice, specifically designed for Aboriginal

perpetrators of family violence in the Pilbara region. The funds ensured the program could be operationalised (as part of AMHC service delivery) on 7 July 2018, including delivering the procedures, research and program design to achieve the service delivery outputs.

From Doyen's perspective, securing this funding was a "keystone moment" for AMHC:

“ **securing this amount of money gave AMHC and key stakeholders hope that securing funding to build the Healing Centre was possible in the near future.** ”

During this project, Doyen also worked with AMHC to further scope and co-design projects required to achieve AMHC's dream. Each task is dependent on each other and integrated with project partners' tasks. If each task is not completed, then AMHC's dream is at risk. Each task forms a critical path to achieving the end goal.

Land survey results in land acquisition

AMHC required a land survey of the proposed Healing Centre site to allow accurate architectural drawings of the Centre to be developed. The site had only been partially surveyed and the Shire of East Pilbara required the land survey to be completed before vesting the land to the community.

While Doyen looked for other potential partners who could assist AMHC such as corporates and not for profits, timing was a major issue. As a result, Community First Development volunteer Gary, an experienced surveyor, worked with AMHC to finalise the survey.

AMHC and Gary spent three weeks surveying the land together. Devon held the surveyor's staff while Gary took the survey readings. They cleared scrub, stepped out distances and hammered in star-pickets as survey markers. As a community driven activity, AMHC also provided the vehicle and all the materials required.

AMHC provided cultural awareness training to Gary and representatives were available on site to ensure cultural sensitivities were maintained as there is a burial site, former rationing station, stockyards and Dreaming sites on or near the proposed Healing Centre site.

As a result of the project the Shire vested, in principle, 18 hectares of land to AMHC. This was another “keystone moment”, allowing the architects to start designing the residence. The location of the residence was selected for its cultural significance, and Aboriginal Elders are working in close collaboration with architects and engineers to design a residential centre and healing environment that enables the men to develop a connectedness with the land.

“ The contribution from both Gary and ICV [Community First Development] is extremely significant. This contribution now puts the AMHC in an advantageous position regarding our funding opportunities. To have access to the specialist the ICV [Community First Development] has provided to AMHC, is the most humbling experience, one can have. To work with people that are generous in nature is an experience we shall never forget. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

First day of a two-day workshop:
AMHC input into the design of
the Healing Centre.



A strategic approach to communications

AMHC determined that another key step towards achieving their dream was to develop a website to improve communication to those it provides a service to, but importantly, to existing and future partners, supporters and funders.

“The importance for AMHC to have a website, is so that we know where our consumers are. We need consumers to know our business and what we can offer, to do this they need to reach us. Our website and social media accounts are accessible 24/7/365.”

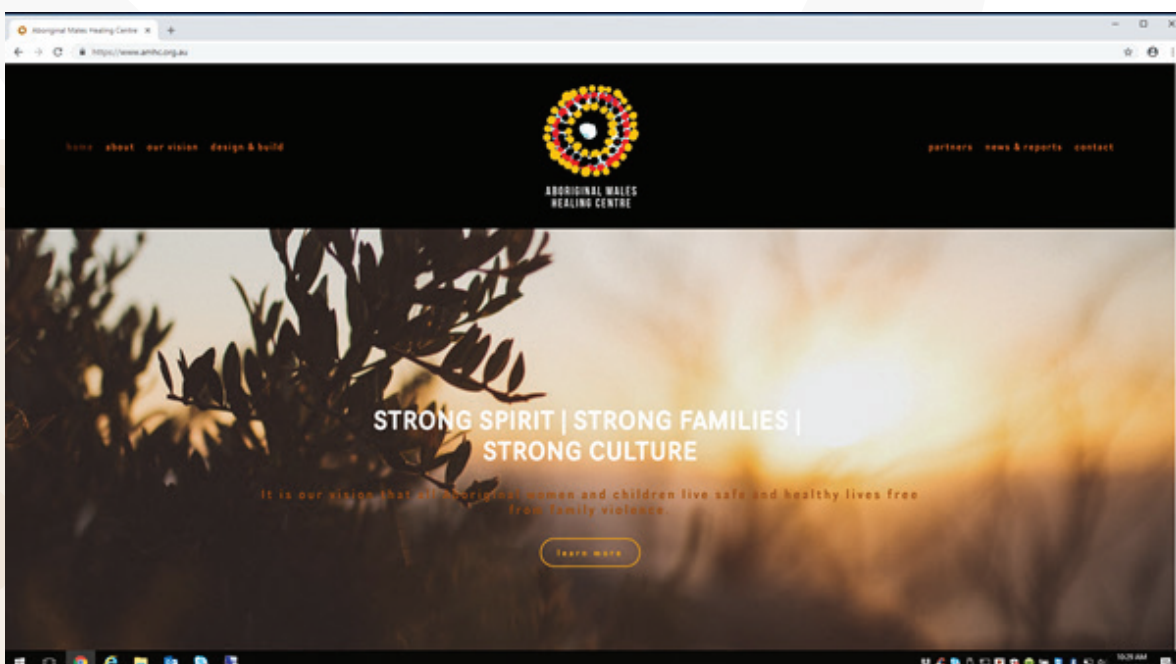
DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

AMHC chose Community First Development volunteer Pete, an IT specialist, to work with them on this project. Pete worked closely with Devon to select a website domain and design the website, ensuring AMHC’s vision and purpose were clearly communicated. Pete also provided a step-by-step guide to support AMHC to edit the website, although AMHC’s capacity at that stage to do this was quite limited. The completed website was a

first step towards enhancing AMHC’s capacity to engage and communicate with existing and future partners, supporters and funders.

Around the same time, AMHC finalised the drawings, costings, zoning and tendering documents for the proposed Healing Centre and made a submission for Building Better Regions funding. While this submission was not successful, the process saw AMHC adopt a more strategic approach to pursuing funding. They determined that they needed to develop a prospectus or Vision Document to enhance their ability to advocate for funding to build the Healing Centre. A prospectus working group was set up consisting of Devon and seven key AMHC stakeholders to design and develop the document. They invited Deb, a Community First Development volunteer with experience in marketing, graphic design and website development, to work with them on this project.

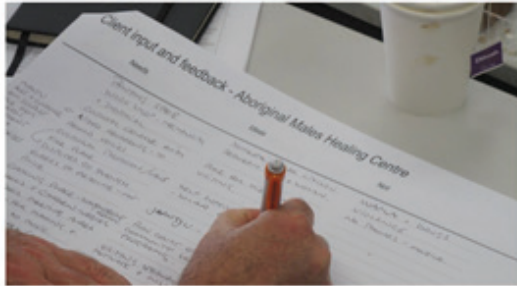
Deb spent approximately 20 hours working on the layout and design of the Vision Document, consulting extensively with key stakeholders and being guided by Devon. Artwork for the document was contributed by Uncle Colin Peterson, a senior Martu Lore man and cultural advisor for AMHC. Deb ensured the document design and colour pallet aligned with the painting.



design process

Serendipitously, the AMHC site is located on a significant dreaming path – Kangaroo Dreaming.

This path is recognised as a male ceremonial pathway. This was raised as an important cultural connection to respect, recognise and integrate in the design of the centre and the centre's program. This informed discussions around the use of art work, motifs and cultural materials, and influenced the location and layout of the buildings, the form and design of the buildings and the finishes and landscape.



Screenshots from the AMHC website

To support the Vision Document, Deb also worked with AMHC to develop a suite of complementary marketing materials including a logo, letterhead and business cards. She also spent a significant amount of time updating the website to ensure the content and design matched the Vision Document.

AMHC launched the Vision Document in October 2018 at an event involving a panel discussion between Hon. Peter Quinlan, Chief Justice of the WA Supreme Court, Devon Cuimara, CEO AMHC and Hon. Ken Wyatt, the then Federal Minister for Indigenous Health and Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care.

With a Vision Document and an updated website, AMHC are now in a stronger position to apply for funding to build the Healing Centre. For Devon, a highlight of this project is now having "a vision document and website of such high professional calibre to show stakeholders and potential investors".

Devon Cuimara, AMHC CEO, speaking at the launch of the Vision Document.



Uncle Ben Cuimara Taylor, Wadjak Elder; Hon. Ken Wyatt, former Minister for Indigenous Health and Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care; Hon. Peter Quinlan, the Chief Justice of WA; and Devon Cuimara, CEO AMHC at the launch of the Vision Document.



Tracking change together

Throughout these projects, Doyen worked closely with AMHC to track both the projects' progress and AMHC's progress towards achieving their longer-term vision or dream. Given the ambitious nature of AMHC's dream and the complexity involved, this has been an iterative process that has required continuous reflection and adaptation. With his evaluation expertise and extensive community development experience, Doyen has worked with AMHC to create a monitoring and evaluation plan that aims to capture the complexity of the task

ahead in a way that makes tracking change as simple as possible.

Doyen has broken down all Community First Development-supported projects into four discrete phases: Operations, Funding & Communications, Clinical and Design & Build. These phases were developed by the AMHC working group at a planning session in April 2018. Doyen is using these phases to make it easier to track where activities fit; to assist with identifying which stakeholders are involved and how; and to get a clearer understanding of Community First Development's contribution to AMHC's dream and vision. There is some overlap between phases that highlights their integrated nature.

To track progress towards AMHC's dream, Doyen and AMHC have designed short-term, medium-term and long-term dream indicators. While Community First Development has been supporting AMHC to achieve the short-term and medium-term dream indicators, there is a possibility that they won't be involved in supporting achievement of AMHC's longer-term dream indicators as AMHC may no longer require their assistance.



Margot Mathews,
COLAB, working with
AMHC to plan phases.

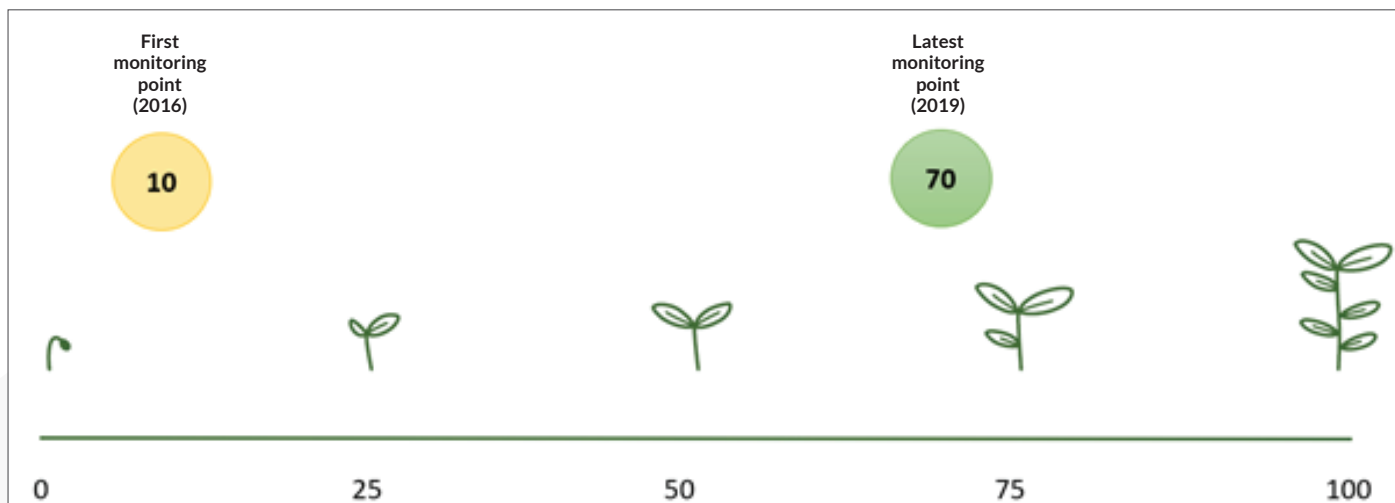
WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

With Community First Development's support and the pro bono support provided by AMHC's key stakeholders, AMHC has taken several key steps towards achieving their dream:

- secured funding to design and trial the Strong Spirit Strong Families Strong Culture program;
- acquired land, in principle, from the Shire of East Pilbara to build the Healing Centre;
- created a Vision Document, a website and a suite of collateral that have enhanced their ability to apply for funding;
- applied for funding to build the Healing Centre; and
- secured Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status.

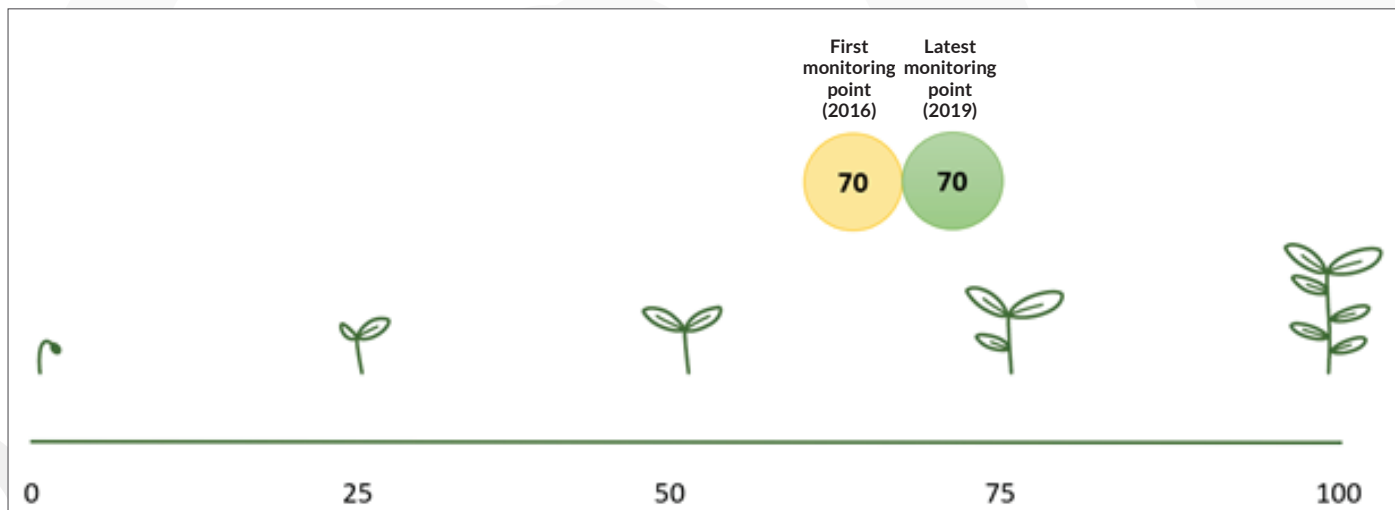
As a result, AMHC has made progress towards achieving several short and medium-term dream indicators they have chosen to monitor. For two of these indicators, progress achieved to date is represented by the Seed to Tree scales below. Doyen determined the baseline and most recent monitoring point readings through his yarning sessions with Devon and observations of the projects.

Dream Indicator: Land successfully secured for Healing Centre site



As the Seed to Tree scale demonstrates, AMHC are very close to securing the land. The final aspect is to complete the Native Title process, including undertaking a Cultural Heritage Survey (current project with Community First Development).

Dream Indicator: Successfully secure the support of key stakeholders required to achieve different phases of the dream or vision.



As the Seed to Tree scale demonstrates, AMHC already had several key stakeholders working with them when they first contacted Community First Development. Since then, AMHC have continued to secure the support of stakeholders to progress their vision for the Healing Centre. To date, AMHC estimates the value of pro bono contribution of stakeholders is close to \$2 million and growing. The monitoring point is unlikely to change until AMHC secures funding for the Healing Centre, as a strong group of established supporters is now in place.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The need for Justice Reinvestment

“ Justice Reinvestment has to be the way that our Centre operates. ”

DEVON CUIMARA, AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Reflecting on the many family violence incidences he has unfortunately witnessed and heard about, Devon strongly believes that the current approach to addressing family violence in First Nations communities is not working. Devon believes a Justice Reinvestment model is required to address the trajectory of family violence in First Nations communities. He also believes that Western Australia is far behind eastern states in exploring Justice Reinvestment as a model.

Just Reinvest NSW defines Justice Reinvestment as:

“ A way of working that is led by the community, informed by data and builds strategies to address issues at a local level. The aim is to redirect funding away from prisons and into communities that have high rates of contact with the criminal justice system, through both community-led initiatives and state-wide policy and legislative reform.⁴ ”

There are many organisations calling for a Justice Reinvestment approach in WA. Social Reinvestment WA is an Aboriginal and sector led coalition of not-for-profits working for an effective connected approach to justice in WA. Their recent Discussion Paper⁵ makes a case for why a new approach to

justice in WA is required, one centred on Justice Reinvestment. Taking an evidence-based approach, they argue that:

- *WA's justice system is expensive and growing... the ever-increasing cost of prison growth is unsustainable.*
- *Failure to rehabilitate offenders and prevent recidivism results in less safe communities.*
- *Given the significant portion of Aboriginal people incarcerated in Western Australia in 2018-19 [WA Department of Justice, Annual Report 2018-19], there should be a far larger proportion of programs and services within the justice system that are specifically designed by and for Aboriginal people.⁶*

Like Devon, they believe that there would be multiple economic and social benefits for WA families and communities if WA adopts a Justice Reinvestment approach.

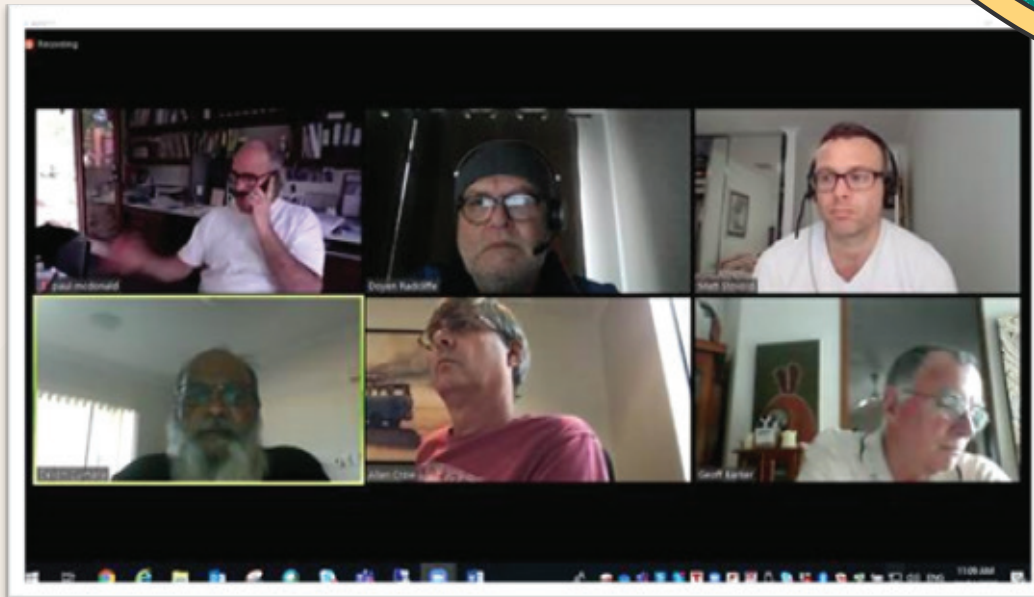
Importance of stakeholder support

As highlighted, Devon is taking a holistic approach to establishing the Healing Centre. As part of this, Community First Development has observed how he has strategically secured pro bono support from a range of stakeholders including architects, engineers, clinicians, and lawyers. AMHC has also secured WA's top legal minds as patrons, the Hon. Peter Quinlan, the Chief Justice of WA, and the Hon. Wayne Martin, the former Chief Justice of WA. The stakeholder support has enabled AMHC to be more agile and move at a faster pace towards their ambitious goals.

⁴ Justice Reinvest NSW. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved from <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/about-us/>

⁵ Social Reinvestment WA. (2020). Discussion Paper: The Case for Smart Justice Alternatives: Responding to justice issues in WA through a Justice Reinvestment approach. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59c61e6dbefafb0293c04a54/t/5ef5632af-22174273c5d18d5/1593140018902/SRWA+Discussion+Paper+on+Justice+Reinvestment+in+WA+March2020+%281%29.pdf>

⁶ Social Reinvestment WA. (2020). Discussion Paper: The Case for Smart Justice Alternatives: Responding to justice issues in WA through a Justice Reinvestment approach. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59c61e6dbefafb0293c04a54/t/5ef5632af-22174273c5d18d5/1593140018902/SRWA+Discussion+Paper+on+Justice+Reinvestment+in+WA+March2020+%281%29.pdf> pp4-6



The AMHC technical construction team meeting via Zoom to discuss the design and and construction phases of the project.

Cultural complexities within a white patriarchal structure.

AMHC's journey towards building a Healing Centre is occurring within a complex cultural context that cannot be adequately captured in writing. Colonisation has significantly contributed to the complexity, forcing AMHC to work in and navigate two-worlds: First Nations Governance and Western Governance. This has resulted in some challenges and highlighted differences in understanding around 'evidence', specifically First Nations people's oral traditions verse Western Governance's preference for written evidence. While Devon has an agreement to build the Healing Centre on the identified land based on an oral traditional aspect, this agreement is not recognised by the Native Title representative body.

Concept of accountability

Through working with AMHC over the last few years, Community First Development has observed that their concept of accountability differs from the Western Governance concept. Both governments and First Nations people want community organisations to deliver reasonable levels of services, and to provide sound financial management and accountability. The key areas of difference relate to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationships and 'ways of doing' that sit at the heart of many organisations, and which emphasise internal accountability and communication; and governments' emphasis on

'upwards' accountability, risk avoidance, financial management, and compliance reporting.

Doyen believes that First Nations people's concept of accountability is closely tied to cultural obligation. Like other First Nations organisations, AMHC's accountability is to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are guided by the interests of the community. AMHC was formed after Devon held several meetings with the broader community and key stakeholders to discuss family violence and potential solutions. He would not have proceeded with the Healing Centre plans without the support of Elders.

“ But it's at these meetings that the majority of the stakeholders are the target group, which in this case is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. And secondly, it's a tier structure that we take our approach, which is our target group always first. They're our governance structure really, the community. We are governed by their needs and their wants, and their instructions direct us in that process. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Pictured at the end of the two-day preliminary planning workshop are some of the AMHC Council of Elders, AMHC Board, Community First Development volunteer, Kayla, and Regional Manager, Doyen, and other AMHC key stakeholders.

Notions of leadership

Community First Development has also observed how AMHC’s notion of leadership differs from the individual-focused Western Governance concept. To Devon, ‘leadership’ of AMHC is influenced by the ‘two-worlds’ AMHC operates in. Although some see him as the ‘leader’ or ‘CEO’ of AMHC, Devon’s preference is to “lead from behind” and take a more collective and consultative approach to leading.

“ That starts with us, we, not I. That’s the leadership methodology that’s been introduced. As a leader, as one of those leaders, myself personally, my preference is to lead from behind.

So again, it’s a collective rather than an individual. And we try to steer away as much as possible from the individual and put the focus on a collective approach. ”

DEVON CUIMARA,
AMHC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

To Devon, the real power lies with the Elders who must be consulted regularly as part of the “permission” process. In addition to securing funding, this consultation process is one of the key contributors to the length of AMHC’s journey towards establishing the Healing Centre.

“ ... our governance Elders, Commission of Elders in our governance structure, they are the power base.

[In addition to securing funding] I suppose the biggest part is that consultation process. Because we got to get it right first on the ground and with the people. We’ve got to get it right with the owners. If we don’t get it right with the owners, they’re not going to own it. And that’s why the process takes a long time.

Doyen refers to Devon as having ‘delegated authority’ and sees this as being closely linked to cultural obligations and accountability. There are consequences if a delegated authority does not take things back to community.

“ Sometimes the Elders or people who have authority can delegate their authority to others to act on their behalf. It happens a lot as well. So even though you get delegated authority you have got to make sure you do the right thing otherwise, you know. You will get in trouble. ”

DOYEN RADCLIFFE, REGIONAL MANAGER-
WESTERN REGION, COMMUNITY FIRST
DEVELOPMENT

Adaptable nature of the Seed to Tree tool

As part of this Action Research Project, Community First Development developed a Seed to Tree tool. The tool combines research questions with a Seed to Tree scale into a visual tool to help to generate conversation and facilitate a participatory monitoring and evaluation approach. As AMHC is involved in this Action Research project, Doyen has been trialing the Seed to Tree tool with Devon as part of the project and AMHC community development projects more broadly. Doyen has found the tool to be useful, adaptable and suitable for multiple First Nations contexts. For example, Doyen used the Seed to Tree tool as part of a semi-structured interview conducted via video conference with Devon. He has also used it to capture both retrospective and current information at the same time, and to facilitate discussions in person with a single person or as part of focus groups or board meetings. He has observed how the tool has generated reflective conversations that have beneficial for all involved.

Devon Cuimara from the Aboriginal Males Healing Centre in Newman with Community First Development's Doyen Radcliffe in Perth undertaking a semi-structured interview on video conference using the Seed to Tree tool.



Community First Development's approach

To Devon, words such as 'partners' and 'ownership' come to mind when reflecting on Community First Development's approach to working with communities.

“ Well, one word that really signifies and enshrines what Community First Development is to the Aboriginal Males Healing Center is partners in community development. Ownership is another word that comes to mind. ”

He also sees Community First Development as a “bridge” to “specialists” AMHC would normally not have access to.

“ You are a bridge between us and a specialist that normally we would necessarily have to track down and then approach and invite. That's a long process to get a specialist to come on board to assist you. Whereas in essence, through Community First Development, we've been given access to the required specialist to bring us where we are today. Without that, look, I can only say one thing, we wouldn't be where we are today. ”

WHAT WILL WE DO NEXT?

AMHC has recently invited Community First Development to work with them on several new projects including the Cultural Heritage Survey that is required to secure the land; a social enterprise business case and two complex funding submissions to the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) and the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

Uncle Colin Peterson,
AMHC Council Elder

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Community First Development would like to thank Doyen Radcliffe, Community First Development Regional Manager-Western Region, and Devon Cuimara, AMHC CEO, for their contribution to this case study. We would also like to recognise and acknowledge the valuable support provided by Community First Development volunteers to AMHC. Lastly, we would like to thank AMHC for inviting Community First Development to join them on their journey, for sharing their stories with us, and for their important role in the action research project to strengthen First Nations-led community development and governance practices.



CONTACT US

T 1800 819 542

W communityfirstdevelopment.org.au

E info@communityfirstdevelopment.org.au