



# RAINBOW KNOWLEDGE

Broome & Kununurra



Kurongkurl  
Katitjin



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

*Our research took place in Rubibi (Broome) and Goonoonoorrang (Kununurra).*

*We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of these lands, the Yawuru and Djugun (Rubibi) and Miriwoong (Goonoonoorrang) peoples.*

*We extend those respects to the participants and their Elders, past and present.*

*This report was written on Whadjuk Noongar Country.*

# CONTENTS

<b>About this publication .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Suggested reference .....	4
About the artist .....	4
Contact .....	4
Abbreviations .....	4
Project team .....	5
Ethics and funding .....	7
Acknowledgements .....	7
Content warning .....	7
<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Influences on wellbeing .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Identity .....	17
Acceptance from relationships: friends, family, partners .....	18
Managing community responses .....	19
Social, cultural, historical and political determinants at play .....	20
<b>Themes .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Influence of religion and culture on LGBTQA+ expressions of identity .....	23
Navigating dual identities .....	24
Building resilience and enacting independence to overcome adversity .....	25
Wanting safe, inclusive and accessible services .....	26
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Further research .....	29
Community .....	29
Services .....	29
Resources and further reading .....	29
References .....	30
Links .....	31
Artwork stories .....	31

# ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

## Suggested reference

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## About the artist

### MANMIYA (@manmiya)

I am an out and proud bisexual Bunuba wiyi (woman). I was lucky enough to grow up on country in the beautifully quiet township of Fitzroy Crossing.

One of the many reasons I love being Aboriginal is my amazing, and huge family. I'm a part of a community, and there's no greater feeling than that.

But something I didn't see when I was younger, was queer people in my community. It is a very personal choice for a queer person to come out or not. And I respect that choice.

I have made the choice to be out and visible. For my younger siblings (cousins), and for my younger self. To know that there is nothing wrong with you, and it is ok to be yourself.



## Contact

The Walkern Katatdjin team can be contacted at:

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## Terminology

### LGBTQA+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Asexual including other sexuality and gender diverse identities

## Project team



### NGAIRE PIGRAM (they/them)

Ngaire Pigram, a queer Wajarri and Yawuru person from Broome, was the Aboriginal Research Assistant for Rainbow Knowledge: Broome & Kununurra. Ngaire has worked in film, television, and media for over fifteen years and is passionate about supporting and raising the voices of First Nations LGBTQA+ young people. They spent three years at the National Drug Research Institute working as a Research Assistant on the YAWG project.



### LILY HAYWARD (she/they/he)

Lily Hayward is a genderfluid, queer Noongar Yorga with ancestral connections all over Noongar Boodjar. They are a Research Assistant in the Youth Mental Health Team at The Kids Research Institute Australia. He is studying a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Linguistics, at the University of Western Australia. She hopes to integrate their studies of language with the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



### BEP UINK (she/her)

Bep Uink (Master of Applied Psychology(Clinical), PhD) is a Noongar woman from Perth, WA. She is the Director of Australian Indigenous Healthinfonet, Edith Cowan University, and continues her work as a researcher. Her research focuses on understanding how socially determined disadvantage impacts the social emotional wellbeing of young people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and how social systems such as higher education can support young peoples' wellbeing. Her work spans investigations into adolescent emotion regulation, the barriers and enablers of Indigenous student success in higher education, gendered barriers to higher education, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ youth mental health.



### SHAKARA LIDDELOW-HUNT (they/them)

Shakara Liddel-Hunt is a Wajarri who grew up on Noongar country. They are a Research Assistant in the Youth Mental Health Team at The Kids Research Institute Australia and PhD student at the University of Western Australia School of Population and Global Health, focused on the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people.



**ASHLEIGH LIN (she/her)**

Professor Ashleigh Lin is a Senior Principal Research Fellow at The School of Population and Global Health at the University of Western Australia. She holds a NHMRC Investigator Grant. Ashleigh’s research is focused on early detection and intervention for mental health problems in adolescents and young adults. She is particularly interested in the mental health of Aboriginal and LGBTQIA+ youth.



**YAEL PERRY (she/her)**

Associate Professor Yael Perry leads the Youth Mental Health team at The Kids Research Institute Australia. She is a wadjela (non-Aboriginal person) who grew up on Gadigal country and moved to Boorloo in 2017. Yael’s research focuses on the prevention of mental health difficulties in young people, with particular emphasis on LGBTQA+ youth and their families.



**BRADEN HILL (he/him)**

Professor Braden Hill is a Nyungar (Wardandi) man from the south-west of Western Australia and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Indigenous) at Edith Cowan University. He has significant experience in Aboriginal education, as well as leading a range of equity initiatives including Sage Athena SWAN, Respect Now Always, Reconciliation Action Plan and Disabilities and Access Inclusion Plan within the tertiary sector. His current portfolio responsibilities include leading ECU’s commitment to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement, Equity and Diversity initiatives and working across the University to provide an environment that welcomes, and facilitates the success of, students and staff from a range of diverse backgrounds. Professor Hill’s research interests include Indigenous education, identity politics, queer identities in education and transformative learning. He is also chief investigator on a project exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous LGBTQI people to better inform community health organisations in their working with queer-identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



**TONY LEE (he/him)**

Tony is an out and proud Queer Gay Yawuru wamba of mixed Asian heritage and lives in Broome. He is actively involved with many community-led organisations nationally, in WA and the Kimberley as a volunteer and board director. He has 50 years of extensive professional experience working in Indigenous affairs in private business and senior management of Aboriginal community organisations and the WA Public Service. He was a volunteer on the Sydney WorldPride 2023 First Nations Advisory Committee. He continues to be actively involved in our Sistagirl, Brothaboy LGBTQIA+ Rainbow organisation as the Founder of Kimberley Blak Pride Ltd and a member of the WA Government’s Inclusion Strategy Reference Group. Tony also brings intersectionality to the mental health, suicide prevention, social and emotional wellbeing lived and living experience spaces, with involvement as a board director and member of a number of WA and national lived experience organisations.

**Ethics and funding**

This project is funded by a grant from Healthway.

This project has been approved by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (#HREC910).



**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the Project Advisory Group for their input and guidance on this project.



We would like to thank Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum and Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service for their support.



**Content warning**

This contains information about mental ill health, suicide, and bad experiences young people have had in their life. It’s important to seek help if you’re feeling distressed. For immediate assistance please call 000 or go to your closest Emergency Department. To talk to someone now over the phone or chat online, please contact:

<b>13YARN*</b>	13 92 76	13yarn.org.au
<b>Kids Helpline</b>	1800 55 1800	kidshelpline.com.au
<b>Lifeline</b>	13 11 14	lifeline.org.au
<b>Qlife</b>	1800 184 527	qlife.org.au

\*NOTE: LGBTQIA+ inclusivity cannot be assured through this service

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

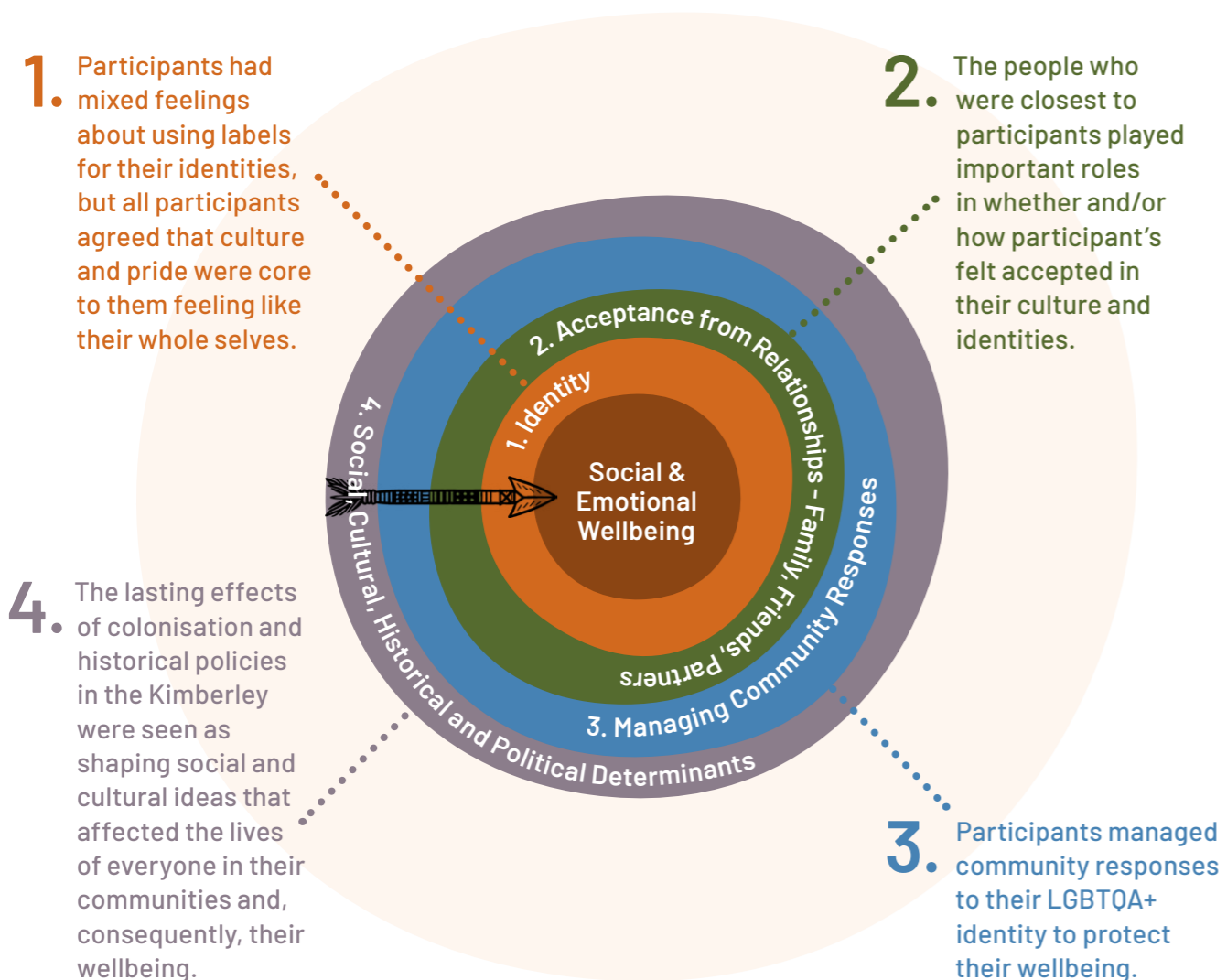
*Rainbow Knowledge: Broome & Kununurra* aimed to explore what elements are significant to the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ youth (15-30 years) in Rubibi (Broome) and Goonoonoorang (Kununurra), and understand what services need to know to better support this population.

For young LGBTQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, asexual or other non-cisgender or non-heterosexual identities) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it can be challenging to navigate the intersection of LGBTQA+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities within a colonised nation. This is especially true in the Kimberley region, where improved suicide prevention for young people is urgently needed.

We interviewed 5 Aboriginal LGBTQA+ young people (aged 18-29) from Broome & Kununurra. 1-on-1 interviews were conducted by project Aboriginal Research Assistant Ngaire Pigram, a queer Yawuru and Wajarri person from Broome.

We also identified 4 themes:

Based on the interviews, we identified 4 spheres of influence for participants' social and emotional wellbeing:



## Influence of Religion and Culture on LGBTQA+ Expressions of Identity

The Christian influence in the Kimberley region as a result of colonisation affected how participants' families viewed their own Cultures and demonised LGBTQA+ experiences. This prevented representation of LGBTQA+ people and reduced participants' motivation to express themselves and seek help.

## Navigating Dual Identities

Most participants had a dynamic relationship with their intersecting identities which either allowed them to embrace these aspects separately or protect themselves from discrimination. For some participants, this was a way of being respectful in cultural spaces.

## Building Resilience and Enacting Independence to Overcome Adversity

Participants showed resilience and independence to overcome internal and external challenges, such as navigating identity and acceptance, loss, unstable housing, depression and homophobia. Participants recognised when they needed support and actively found ways to help themselves stay strong.

## Wanting Safe, Inclusive and Accessible Services

Most (but not all) participants wanted the services they already used to have better skills and increased LGBTQA+ representation, rather than wanting services specifically for Aboriginal LGBTQA+ people.

Overall, participants did not see many services in Broome or Kununurra as safe or accessible. Problems included financial barriers, long waitlists, inadequate care, and a lack of Aboriginal-specific trauma-informed cultural safety.

The visibility and representation of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ people in the Kimberley has improved since the beginning of this project, but more work is needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people are strong and well.

# BACKGROUND

## Why did we need this research?

In Australia, colonisation is an ongoing process affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, reshaping cultural identities to match Western sexuality and gender norms. This has been through the use of policies that controlled Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, limiting their access to country and culture. Food and resources were provided through missions or reserves, influencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up Christian religions or adapt to Western norms in exchange. Decades of colonial practices and policies led to the deliberate erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, including pre-colonisation gender and sexuality practices. Throughout Australian history governments also introduced laws and policies such as the criminalisation of homosexuality and restriction of access to gender-affirming care, that affected both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as non-Indigenous Australians (Hill et al., 2021; O’Sullivan, 2021; Dunn/Holland et al., 1994; Hodge et al., 2015).

Christianity in the Kimberley region is the most common religion, with around 48% of the population identifying as Christian (ABS, 2022). This high number likely points to the early colonial history of this region, and the relationship between the missions established here and the state government. In Western Australia, there was a “symbiotic relationship” between the Catholic missionaries and the Aborigines Affairs Department. In fact, it was Beagle Bay missionaries who pressured authorities to remove “part Aboriginal” children from their families (Choo, 1997). This relationship was then solidified by the Western Australian 1897 Aborigines Act and the Australian federal 1905 Aborigines Act which gave states the power and control that led to the Stolen Generations. The recognition of this history is necessary to understand the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in this region.

The Kimberley region is one of the most remote areas of Australia with a high population of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Reviews of health records from the last 20 years have shown the high risk for suicide among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in this region (Campbell et al, 2016; McPhee et al, 2022). From 2014–2018, an audit found that 81% of presentations to Kimberley Emergency Departments for self-harm were from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. In the same period, they found that those at highest risk were young people aged 15–19 years old, followed by young people aged 20–24 years old (McPhee et al., 2022). There is clear need for change to support the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly young people, in this region.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people, these challenges are increased by the complexities of navigating the intersection of LGBTQA+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities. Research from the Walkern Katatdjin project found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ (experience high rates of psychological distress. In the recent *Walkern Katatdjin* survey 45% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ youth participants reported having attempted suicide in their lifetime and 90% reported high or very high levels of psychological distress (Liddelow-Hunt, 2023).

*Rainbow Knowledge: Broome & Kununurra* was first developed from preliminary findings from the Walkern Katatdjin project ([rainbowknowledge.org/phase-1-results](http://rainbowknowledge.org/phase-1-results)). During Walkern Katatdjin, community members highlighted a need for research specifically in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. *Rainbow Knowledge: Broome & Kununurra* aimed to explore what elements are significant to the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ youth (14–30 years) in Broome and Kununurra, as well as understanding what services need to know to better support this population. services need to know to better support this population.



# METHODOLOGY

## What were we trying to figure out?

- ☀️ What is significant to the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ young people in Broome and Kununurra?
- ☀️ What do services need to know to better support Aboriginal LGBTQA+ young people in Broome and Kununurra?

## Who did we talk to?

- ☀️ 5 participants
  - 3 from Broome
  - 2 from Kununurra
- ☀️ Aged 18-29 years.
- ☀️ Participants included men, women and non-binary people, with some participants identifying with multiple labels or none.
- ☀️ No participant identified as being transgender.
- ☀️ Participants were gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer or didn't use a label.
- ☀️ Participants came from cultural groups across the Kimberley.

## What did we do?

We recruited participants via word-of-mouth, service networks, posters in shops and cafes, health services, youth services and LGBTQA+ services (e.g. Headspace, BRAMS, etc.). We aimed to recruit participants aged 15-30 years old.

5 one-on-one interviews were conducted by Aboriginal Research Assistant Ngaire Pigram, a queer Wajarri and Yawuru person from Broome.

Interviews were conducted at the Kids Research Australia's (formerly Telethon Kids Institute) office in Broome, at the Headspace office in Kununurra, or another space as preferred by the participant.

Participants were asked a set of semi-structured questions, meaning that the interview was flexible and went with the direction the participant took it. It was run in a yarning style rather than sticking strictly to the interview prompts.

Interviews each lasted approximately 90 minutes and were held over a 1-year period, with the first 3 held in the first 6 months, and the final two in the last 6 months.

Example questions from interview prompt guide:

- ☀️ How would you describe your cultural identity as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person?
- ☀️ Can you tell us about your mental health thinking about how that might be related to you being an LGBTQA+ Blackfulla?
- ☀️ Can you tell us any experiences you have had accessing health services (mental health services?)
- ☀️ If you were the boss of the Aboriginal Medical Service and mental health services, what would you do work with LGBTQA+ Mob?

## How did we come up with the themes?

Analysis was led by Aboriginal queer project investigators. Thematic analysis involved:

- ☀️ Coding (reading the transcripts and marking out what we saw) by project Research Assistant Lily Hayward using NVivo software.
- ☀️ Theming (turning coding into bigger themes) by Lily Hayward, Bep Uink, and Shakara Liddelow-Hunt
- ☀️ Sharing and receiving feedback on Preliminary Themes with Ngaire Pigram, the Project Advisory Group members, and Tony Lee
- ☀️ Further reflexive analysis by refining themes based on group discussion and feedback.
- ☀️ Presentation of preliminary findings to community members at the Kimberley Blak Pride 2024 "Out and Proud" Symposium. Feedback received was supportive of the themes.

## Limitations

- ☀️ Small sample size, meaning that findings do not necessarily represent the full experience of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ young people in Broome and Kununurra. However, findings provide an in-depth exploration of 5 young people's stories of growing up LGBTQA+ in these areas.
- ☀️ We restricted recruitment to Broome and Kununurra, due to the limited access of mental health services in smaller communities, which would have been important due to the topics we were discussing .
- ☀️ Fears about confidentiality were a likely barrier to participant recruitment.
- ☀️ Participants did not necessarily live in their identified town their whole lives, having moved for access to education, work or other reasons, meaning that their life experiences discussed sometimes occurred outside of Broome or Kununurra.
- ☀️ We were unable to recruit young people under the age of 18 years despite advertising for this age, likely due to confidentiality concerns.
- ☀️ More people registered interest in the project but due to many reasons were not able to participate.

A methodological limitation of the project was that we did not adequately budget for the amount of staff time nor the length that this project required which impacted the extent to which the findings of the project can be used to represent Aboriginal queer young people in Broome and Kununurra. The Kimberley, whether part or all regions, is a vast and complicated intersection of culture, lore, queerness and social boundaries (to name a few) that affect our young people; in retrospect, a longer project with full time staff members was necessary to tap into this vast network.

A related limitation was that the majority of the research team, including the project lead, was not located in the Kimberley and had minimal connections to the countries across the region. This is a common tension for Aboriginal researchers doing work off-Country – balancing the desire to respond to community requests for research with the limitations of not being place-based.

The Aboriginal Research Assistant who was based in Broome was unable to be fully supported to engage in the long-term nature of the project which was required. Due to this time limited and truncated nature of the project, it was difficult for the research team to recruit and engage participants.

On reflecting on the project, we would recommend that there is a Kimberley-led and based project comprised of team members living in the region. This will capture experiences of what it is like living in the region as young, blak, queer people. As Aboriginal Research Assistant, Ngaire, noted: “Here in the Kimberley, time and effort are respected, we are over-served, over-represented and ‘over-informed’ with little change and little respect given to our way of life and mob are sick of being rushed into trusting people to share their stories of trauma – I needed more time!”. In the future, longer and more appropriate funding structures need to support this line of research to ensure for culturally safe practices like respect, time (including allowing for sorry time, lore and mental health) relationship building and research that does not adhere to the colonial concept of ‘research’.

## Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is “the right of Indigenous peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data” (Maiam nayri Wingara, 2018).

This project has been carried out in accordance with the *Walkern Katatdjin Data Governance Statement* and *Rainbow Knowledge: Broome & Kununurra Data Governance Statement* [Available on our website: <https://www.rainbowknowledge.org/data-governance>].

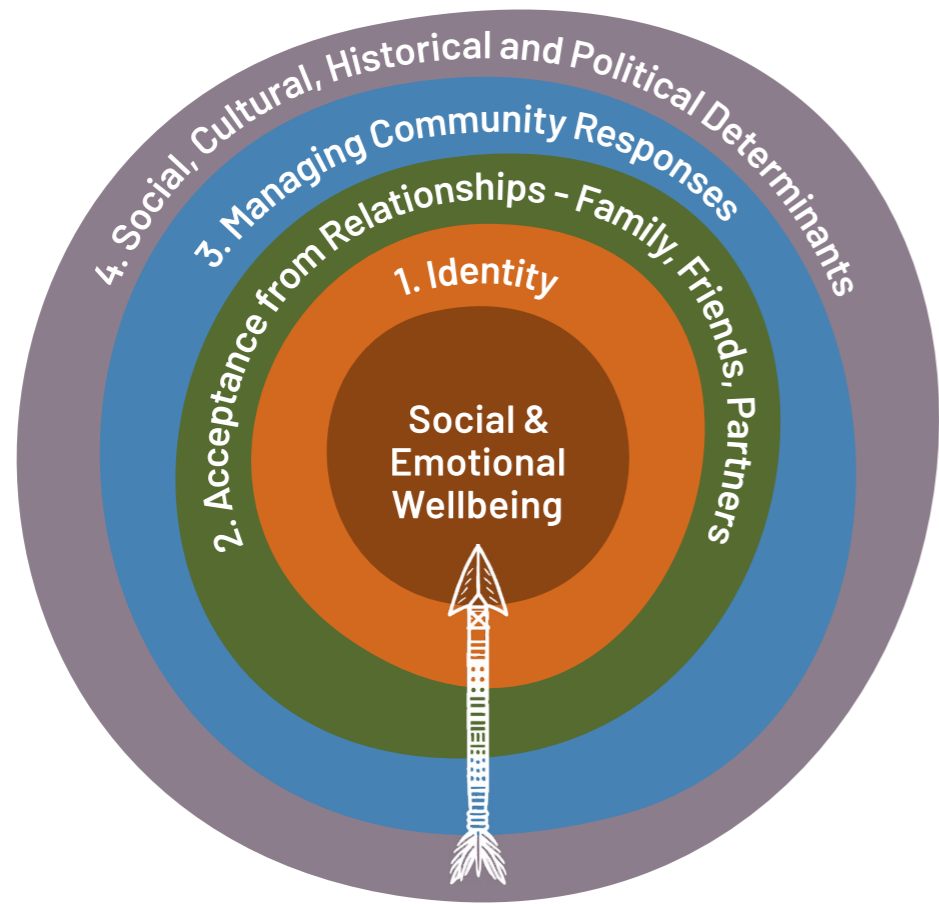
# FINDINGS



Sourced from <https://timhwb.org.au/fact-sheets/>

To understand the social and emotional mental health of the participants, we used Gee et. al.'s social and emotional wellbeing framework. This framework is a holistic understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and how it is shaped by culture, history, politics and society.

# INFLUENCES ON WELLBEING



These ideas show the common threads of influence that were used to develop the themes. As shown by the arrow, each section from the outer ring towards the centre influences one another. All these influences then impact the social and emotional wellbeing of the participants.

These influences provide a deeper understanding of how the themes weave and interact with each other.

## 1.

### Identity

Participants were asked about their experiences of being Aboriginal and LGBTQA+. This Influence on Wellbeing shows how different participants explored their LGBTQA+ identity and how that influenced how they represented themselves.

They discussed the relevance, benefits or the restrictions of identity labels. The LGBTQA+ experience of 'coming out' was linked with the need to label one's sexuality and/or gender. This conflicted with some participants' desire for fluidity and need to be seen as a whole person. This was in contrast with other participants' need to represent their identities proudly.

*"I don't know. I just don't really put a label on it. It doesn't matter to me. I'm just a person. I don't care. But if you had to put a label on it, I guess pan and bi. I don't identify myself that way."*

—PARTICIPANT

*"I had a lot of spare time to kind of think about things like my identity and all that sort of stuff. And I kind of found I was more comfortable being referred to as a person, rather than, you know, this idea of what a man or male is supposed to be."*

—PARTICIPANT

*"I'm just not afraid to say that I'm pansexual or gender fluid, and I'm really loud and proud about it."*

—PARTICIPANT

*"I actually spoke to my Aunties, who their time of being gay was so different to mine, they were criticised, they were bullied badly, they did not get my same experience... I thought like, who am I to just ruin this identity or not care about it or just be like 'whatever, it's not a big thing', when they fought so hard for it to not be a big thing."*

—PARTICIPANT

## 2.

### Acceptance from relationships – family, friends, partners

The people who were closest to participants played important roles on how participant's felt acceptance – culturally, and/or regarding their LGBTQA+ or Aboriginal identities.

Being able to trust and rely on those around them enabled participants to manage external challenges.

*"Yeah, so [Dad]'s very supportive of me in my life and he's very much, you know, he's not going to tell me what decision to make. He's going to, like, give me advice or one of his stories and then leave it to me, and I actually really like having that – yeah, and I feel like he would be in support of anything I decided or anyone I dated."*

–PARTICIPANT

Intergenerational trauma, "coming out" and heteronormativity were seen as challenges or barriers to feelings of acceptance. The process to "come out" to friends and family was frequently perceived as heteronormative and unnecessary by participants.

*"I had called a lot of my friends, while I was at my dad's, and told them I was gay and that helped a lot."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"When I told my friends about it, they were like, "Are you coming out?" and I'm just like, "Well, no, I just am who I am" kind of thing. I didn't feel the need to have this whole, "Oh, I'm coming out. I'm pansexual."*

–PARTICIPANT

## 3.

### Managing community responses

Participants spoke about not being accepted and experiencing or witnessing discrimination. This included racism or homophobia. These experiences occurred in the general community, LGBTQA+ community or Aboriginal community.

Participants shared how they managed these experiences and their resilience to these negative community responses.

*"...if somebody was to be discriminatory towards me, it wouldn't make me feel bad 'cause I would just be like, "Okay. Well, I guess that sucks but it's not really my problem. That's their problem... I'm fine just the way I am and I think I'm perfect, and I'm just where I need to be and what I need to be."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"Not a lot of people but most people in that cultural setting do know about me but they're not ...They're not supportive, and they're not trying to bring you down too, the people that do know about me."*

–PARTICIPANT

One participant discussed how not feeling accepted in their communities could influence an Aboriginal person's wellbeing:

*"I think if there is any Aboriginal person that doesn't feel that support or disconnected, it would be like mental health. I mean, if you can't get accepted for who you are, then that is hard for us to accept who we are, just ourselves, being so scared of what other people think of us to have such a big identity, a part of you where you don't feel accepted."*

–PARTICIPANT

# 4.

## Social, cultural, historical and political determinants at play

Participants discussed social and cultural ideas that were interpreted as effects of colonisation and historical policies that were enacted in the region (i.e., the Christianisation of Aboriginal communities, heteronormativity, racism).

*“...they’re very religious and it’s because of those missionaries coming there, saying, “Your culture is wrong, stop practicing it,” and we did lose our culture because we stopped practicing it, because no one was able to carry it on. And then also, the Christian missionaries would brainwash our old people and say Christianity is the right religion; your Aboriginality, your spiritual religion is wrong, it’s a devil’s way, and that’s what my mum used to always say, our culture is the devil’s ways back, and I was like, “No.””*

—PARTICIPANT

*“So, we always grew up with, you know, knowing we’re Aboriginal, being proud that we’re Aboriginal. But as far as, I guess, the things that I’ve learnt up here, I think we still were kind of raised to be Aboriginal and be proud Aboriginal, but also, we’re raised in a white culture too.”*

—PARTICIPANT

# THEMES

These themes represent the most frequently discussed ideas identified by the participants.



The Influences on Wellbeing are interwoven throughout the themes, highlighting the interconnectivity of the participants' experiences:



## Influence of religion and culture on LGBTQA+ expressions of identity

The historical impact of colonisation, the 1905 Aborigines Act, dispossession of traditional countries, and Stolen Generations cannot be understated. The close relationship between the Western Australian state government and religious groups in the Kimberley region, show the impact of not only the State's actions, but actions of the Church, and those who worked for the Church in this region.

These past events and policies are the historical background of what the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples of this region were subjected to and, like in the Social and Emotional Wellbeing model, are significant factors that influence the social and wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as well as their experiences of sexuality, gender and gender expression.

*"I feel from my father's side, the (language group) mob, just speaking for my dad, he's very homophobic, but when you think about our Culture further back, it was definitely more accepting of queer people but then Christians takeover, they're demonised."*

—PARTICIPANT

*"But back then, mum was terrible, she used to say to me like, "I'm gonna send you to that [Catholic] lady school to learn how to be a lady," and I was like, "No." She's like, "You need to wear jeans. You're not gonna wear shorts to your school orientation in Perth..."*

—PARTICIPANT

This Christian influence, recognised by several participants, effected how their families viewed their own Cultures and, particularly, demonised LGBTQA+ experiences. This led to the lack of visibility and representation of LGBTQA+ identities in **families, communities and services**.

*"When they would see somebody that was more openly gay or lesbian, or whatever their sexuality, [family] would just say that it's so wrong, that is against God's will and stuff, and then they will burn in hell, really extreme stuff, and then all the younger members of my family would just follow in what my mum or my aunties and stuff would say, like gay marriage is wrong, men and men, woman and woman, is wrong."*

—PARTICIPANT

One participant expressed how these homophobic or racist beliefs could impact Aboriginal LGBTQA+ young people's motivation to **express identity or seek help** specific to their identity:

*"I guess just after dealing with being in a homophobic space and also racist space, you know, you can develop social anxiety, low self-esteem and you can actually start to be really hard on yourself the way - you know it's as if you start talking to yourself how those people were speaking."*

—PARTICIPANT



## Navigating dual identities

Participants described separating their **identities** around different people or in different places. This was a response to a fear of the reaction of their **families, friends, and communities**. Some participants hid their identities in cultural spaces out of respect.

Many participants hoped for a more accepting future, without the need to hide or separate their identities.

Most participants discussed an interchangeable relationship with their identities (cultural group/Aboriginal identity or LGBTQA+ identities) which would help them to embrace these parts of themselves separately or to help them protect themselves from discrimination.

*"I've never showed my colours through my culture... Like my sexuality and stuff, I like keeping that to myself when I'm in a cultural setting."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"If someone said – if any person in my workplace or anything said, "Do you have a boyfriend?" I'd be like, "Oh, no, I'm –, but I do have a girlfriend," but no, I was just like, "No." I know that's always going to be my answer. But, yeah, I don't know, I just – yeah, the most important thing right now is for me to just like be in this cultural journey..."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"I just wanna figure out ways to introduce it in a non-disrespectful way."*

–PARTICIPANT

Participants shared how switching between their identities across different settings impacted them and how that went against their desire to be seen as an individual or whole person.

*"I have done a lot of code-switching and people pleasing, stuff like that... I had a conversation with someone about code-switching and they said that they value it as a skill, and I thought, oh I can actually see that as well. Like, you can talk to multiple people but sometimes it can come from a place of necessity."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"But I think now it's just that bit of scaredness of I'm not going to push the boundaries. I don't want them to see me as that. I want them to see me as me, because I also think being gay is important and it's an important part of your identity, but it shouldn't be your identity."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"You know, it sometimes feels weird but it's definitely like, I'm trying to find the middle ground, between all of these different ways I was acting with, in different groups, and then making that me for all of them."*

–PARTICIPANT



## Building resilience and enacting independence to overcome adversity

Resilience and independence were important strengths used by participants to protect their wellbeing and mental health. Identity and acceptance, loss, unstable housing, depression and homophobia, were all difficult experiences participants had to navigate along their journeys.

*"I find I can keep myself strong in those situations... I don't know I guess I just don't take things personally all the time. I think that's a good – I know that's been a way for me to not have to deal with other people... I don't know, if someone says something that's kind of homophobic, whatever, you can educate them, I don't know, I kind of feel sorry for them ..."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"I didn't really have a space or someone to help me through a lot of the things I went through, so I was very self-sufficient. I was just relying on myself..."*

–PARTICIPANT

Participants recognised when they needed support and actively found ways to help themselves stay strong. Leaning on interpersonal support and internal skills such as mindfulness, high self-esteem, or professional and personal relationships.

These supports were important ways to help participants achieving or maintaining a sense of social and emotional wellbeing for participants. Sometimes, unhealthy supports were needed to help some participants survive or 'keep going'. These included using alcohol or drugs or self-harming.

When seeking help from health services, most participants needed to stand up for themselves within the system and between services. This was particularly true when using a service that was either culturally unsafe or had little understanding of the intersection of Aboriginal and LGBTQA+ identities.

*"And so, when I was 16 or 17, I took myself to the GP and they offered free counselling... I think I knew in high school I was depressed... And I think I knew with depression, you need to talk to a GP."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"...I get support from support services, but not as much as I need and then I end up finding the support I need without support services by myself, without anyone else's help..."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"A lot of people find it challenging to speak up or talk about their issues. And then there's the challenge of just holding everything in really, for them, their mental health. And then that turns into things like self-harm and suicide and that happens a little bit too often, up here in [town] and the Kimberleys."*

–PARTICIPANT



## Wanting safe, inclusive and accessible services

Most participants wanted the services they already used to increase representation (hire LGBTQA+ staff, Aboriginal staff or Aboriginal LGBTQA+ staff) and upskill current staff by providing LGBTQA+ or Aboriginal cultural safety training.

*"I think we need more Indigenous queer people employed in support services."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"...definitely setting up conversations, and meetings, presentations – things like that – specifically about Aboriginal LGBT people."*

–PARTICIPANT

Most of the participants did not see a need to create services specifically for Aboriginal LGBTQA+ people.

All participants wanted to see an increase of visible signs of acceptance (flags, posters, resources, etc.)

Some participants who asked for LGBTQA+ specific care from services found the response unhelpful. One participant experienced their first introduction to support for gender diversity by accessing a LGBTQA+ friendly service. Overall, however, participants did not see many services in Broome or Kununurra as safe spaces.

*"There's all these places in town that say they're LGBTQ-safe but I don't wanna walk in there."*

–PARTICIPANT

One participant emphasised the need for holistic services.

*"[I would] get a lot of money from wherever... to help them get back on their Country for emotional health and healing."*

–PARTICIPANT

Opposite to most of the participants, one participant expressed a need for a safe space specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ people. This shows how individual needs for care differ, and why young people should have options available to them.

*"That you don't know who you're gonna meet. It might be somebody you know; it might be somebody that's extremely homophobic and you're not sure, just to have reassurance around it being a safe space would be essential because there's barely no safe spaces to go to."*

–PARTICIPANT

Lack of accessibility was a common complaint when discussing problems with current services. Participants shared how financial barriers and long waitlists for support services like counselling would make it harder to receive good care.

Some participants found that when they were finally able to see a support service, they received unhelpful care, generally lacking Aboriginal-specific, trauma-informed and/or culturally safe skills. This then led participants to start their search again for a better service.

Telehealth services were seen by some participants as a helpful way to make it easier to use services.

*"...I think it being accessible with money, financially, and probably it being a health centre, but like a space where people can just come and chill out and relax and have activities if it's for kids as well, like have a playground and things. And be with queer people, but also non-queer people and be a community that it's all just one, but queer people absolutely feel comfortable of entering that space."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"...to find someone who is Indigenous and who is safe with all that stuff, there's none, and there are only some that you can get bulkbilled, but then their wait times are just incredibly long and people would just not even bother."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"...it didn't feel real or like I could trust these people. Further down the line I decided to find a new psychologist through one of the clinics here in [town] and I found an amazing psychologist. I just speak with her over skype. Which I thought it would be hard, but it's actually, good for me. ...she works with Aboriginal people. She has this big understanding of all of these things. She also just speaks to me like a friend, so... but it did take two years to find."*

–PARTICIPANT

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The visibility and representation of Aboriginal LGBTQA+ people in the Kimberley has improved since the beginning of this project. Changes have been seen already in the communities with some services listening to the calls of their LGBTQA+ community members for more visible signs of acceptance and representation of staff.

In April 2024 Broome hosted its first Kimberley Blak Pride Festival, a week-long expansion of its previously successful Kimberley Blak Pride event held in 2023.

The Kimberley Blak Pride Festival Report showed what hosting this event meant to those who participated in it:

*"It made me feel proud of who I was."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"To celebrate and support my family who is of SBLGBTIQA+ community and celebrating them and their journey while enjoying the celebration myself and watching them strive through life being who they are."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"It was incredible. I felt like, for the first time, in 15 years in Broome, I was able to be myself for a full week. I have never had such a life and gender affirming social, personal, professional and celebratory week. This festival has given me the courage to be myself more in Broome and to lean into the INCLUSIVE spaces."*

–PARTICIPANT

*"The chance to show young people how Queer, Blak and deadly people can be while being supported, loved and empowered."*

–PARTICIPANT

This is a great start, but more work is always needed. See our Walkern Katatdjin Roadmap to see what you can do to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people around you.

## Further research

- Quantitative and qualitative research on experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ people in the Kimberley region is needed to better understand their needs
- Research needs to have diverse regional representation from across the Kimberley region

## Community

- Call out discrimination, homophobia and racism
- Learn more about being Aboriginal, young and LGBTQA+
- Attend Kimberley Blak Pride Festival events

## Services

- Incorporate safe spaces
- Provide inclusivity training to staff
- Invest in representative and diverse resources (Kimberley mob specific LGBTQA+ resources)
- Hire and mentor Aboriginal LGBTQA+ staff
- Develop policies that protect LGBTQA+ staff and clients
- Improve sexual health education (particularly for diverse LGBTQA+ sexual health needs), expand knowledge and understanding of LGBTQA+ experiences
- Update service intake forms to include diverse pronoun options
- Establish gender-affirming care referral pathways
- Improve mental health referral pathways
- Improve accessibility, reduce waiting lists (expand funding/services available) and consider utilising telehealth
- Attend Kimberley Blak Pride Festival events (Pride March, Out and Proud Symposium) to show your support. Better still, provide sponsorship to help make the event sustainable

## Resources and further reading

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ people Factsheets: [www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-lgbtqa-people](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-lgbtqa-people)
- Suicide Prevention in LGBTQA+ young people: Best practice guidelines for clinical and community service providers
- Gaaya Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2035
- Walkern Katatdjin: Community Report
- Walkern Katatdjin Phase 2: National Survey Community Report
- Walkern Katatdjin Roadmap
- Training health providers to work with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people: Needs Assessment Report Volumes 1 & 2
- Breaking the Silence Report
- VACCHO Rainbow Mob training

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## Links

- Walkern Katatdjin website: [www.rainbowknowledge.org.au](http://www.rainbowknowledge.org.au)  
From here you can view our Data Governance Statement, resources and learn more about our other projects
- Kimberley Blak Pride page: [www.facebook.com/kimberleyblakpride/](http://www.facebook.com/kimberleyblakpride/)

## Artwork stories

**CRISSY** is a young Bunuba person who lives in Junuwa community. On the weekend they drove out to the freshwater springs with their jimarri (friends). They love out on country. There had been rain recently, so country was glowing with green. While all the jimarri were out enjoying the sunshine, Crissy decided she wanted to 'invite in' some of her cousin-sisters. Crissy had felt this pressure to 'come out' ever since she realised she was pansexual. From feeling the pressure she realised she didn't want to 'come out', but instead invite people in.



### LAZANTHI AND KENESHA

are a young lesbian couple who both live in Fitzroy. They have been best friends since little kid time and have always been very caring and supportive of one another. Lazanthi was the first person Kenesha told about her identity as a sister-girl (transgender woman). Kenesha reassured her that nothing has changed between them. Seeing Kenesha's courage inspired Lazanthi to express her romantic feelings for her. Beautifully, they felt the same way about each. But before they lived happily ever after, they both triple checked with their grandmothers to make sure it was right way marriage. The ancestors were on their side, and they were in the clear.

## Graphic design

**KELLI SAVIETTO**, a graphic designer based in Boorloo (Perth), draws on her Nyikina and Yawuru heritage from the Kimberley region of WA. Passionate about Indigenous representation, she specialises in brand identity, publication design, and illustration. Through her artwork, Kelli brings her clients' stories to life, weaving cultural narratives that resonate and connect. [kellisavietto.com](http://kellisavietto.com)

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