The Journey to Work

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

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Executive summary

The Journey to Work (TJtW) is a project that aimed to assist First Nations people with a psychosocial disability to build employment-related skills, through the delivery of employment orientation activities and individual, tailored vocational plans for participants. The project was delivered by WISE IDEA in partnership with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP), an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) based in Croydon, Victoria. The project ran from **1 September 2022 to 30 June 2025**. More detail on the program and its activities can be found in section 2.4 below.

In 2024 Think Impact was engaged to conduct an evaluative Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of TJtW to gain a deeper understanding of the social, health and economic value of the project.

Social value summary

> For every $1 invested in The Journey to Work project, $9.38 of social value was created.

TJtW project generated a total of $5,988,000 of social value from an investment of $639,000. This means that for every dollar invested in the project, $9.38 of social value was created. Figure 1 below provides a breakdown of the value experienced by each stakeholder.

Figure 1 Summary of value by stakeholder

Five groups of stakeholders experienced social value as a result of TJtW:

- **Community Members** received $3.1M of value, more than half (53%) of the total, as the prime focus of the project.
- **Government** received $1.1M (18%) of the value as a result of wellbeing and employment outcomes reducing the support costs of Community Members.
- **MMIGP staff**, as secondary participants in the project, received $918K (15.3%).
- **Community Members' families** received $792K (13.2%) in value as Community Members' improved wellbeing improved their relationships.
- **Employers** received $24K (>1%) of value from attending the First Nations Culture and Mental Health Awareness workshops.

Key findings

The Journey to Work created positive outcomes

TJtW project has delivered strong results for the people it supported with 50% of Community Members who were formerly unemployed because of serious mental health issues, now engaged in vocational roles because of their participation in the project.

The key to this success is that the approach created the conditions for safe reflection and learning to occur. This built the motivation of Community Members to engage with vocational activities on their own terms which resulted in sustained, long-term change.

The Journey to Work created a context that met the specific needs of its beneficiaries

Centring connection to Community and Culture provided a culturally appropriate and safe environment for reflection and learning to occur. The inclusive nature of a rich cultural environment promoted mutual respect, strong bonds and a sense of belonging.

Embedding the WISE IDEA Occupational Therapist (OT) in the context of MMIGP was essential for building trust

Having the WISE IDEA OT working in MMIGP spaces several days of the week was essential for building trust with Community. This increased the accessibility of the OT for Community Members and provided a degree of continuity. The provision of one-on-one therapy in a familiar, comfortable location increased the feeling of safety for Community Members, increasing the likelihood they would persevere with the project.

Joint working leads to more engagement and sustainable outcomes

The development of close working relationships between the WISE IDEA staff and MMIGP staff built awareness of the project within the Community and encouraged other Community Members to participate. Having a MMIGP staff member present during sessions ensured the environment remained culturally safe for Community Members.

TJtW built support networks for participants and encouraged peer support

The project facilitated the development of friendships among Community Members and provided additional people to turn to for support. These relationships fostered open communication, accountability and promoted a shared resilience, as individuals felt less isolated in their struggles and more empowered by the knowledge that others faced similar challenges. Through these interactions, Community Members developed a supportive network that extended beyond the project and formed the foundation for ongoing relationships.

Evaluation recommendations

The evaluation has two key recommendations:

- Develop an implementation guide and associated training materials to enable TJtW to be replicated and delivered at scale in a First Nations context. WISE IDEA should work with First Nations staff and Community Members involved in TJtW to develop this guide and materials.
- WISE IDEA should explore how to expand this successful approach. Changes in government funding provide opportunities for TJtW to be delivered in new contexts.

Glossary

The following terms and acronyms are used in this report:

Term	Definition
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Activity	The action and effort undertaken to create change (that is, outcome).
Anchoring	A social valuation technique that calculates the value of all outcomes as ratios of a primary outcome determined by stakeholders.
Attribution	An assessment of how much of the outcome was caused by the contribution of other organisations or people.
Beneficiary	People, organisations or entities that are intended to experience change as a result of the activity. Note: beneficiaries are key stakeholders.
Benefit pathway	An in-depth program logic that explores value flow through understanding early, intermediate and longer-term changes through exploration of cause and effect.
Benefit period	The period beyond the intervention that benefits last.
Community	The relationships that First Nations people share with each other. First Nations concepts of community engender a sense of belonging, including cultural, emotional and social ties that bind them to family, kin and Country.
Community Artist	The Community Artist co-facilitated the creative sessions with MMIGP staff in Stage 1 and was an experienced artist and researcher. Creative sessions support Community Members to connect with their culture and build capability for expression.
Community Members	When capitalised this term refers to participants and beneficiaries of The Journey to Work project.
Culture	The traditional lands, lore, languages, stories, expressions, ways of living and identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Deadweight	An assessment of what would have occurred anyway, in terms of achievement of outcomes, in the absence of the intervention/activity.
Discount rate	A rate of return used to calculate the present value of future value flows. Also used to describe the percentage by which a figure has been reduced.
Displacement	An assessment of how much of the change is a net benefit (i.e. a new change) or simply the movement of change from one place to another or the offsetting of one change for another.
Drop off	The rate at which outcomes deteriorate over time.
Financial proxy	Social value is calculated by placing a financial value on the quantified change commensurate with the degree of change experienced by stakeholders. These financial values are known as *financial proxies*.

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Indicators	Indicators are ways of knowing that change has happened. Indicators exist to provide evidence for whether and to what extent outcomes are occurring.
ILC	The Australian Government's Information Linkages and Capacity Building program. Funder of The Journey to Work project.
Investment	Within the context of an SROI, the 'investment' can take the form of grant funding, a procurement contract, pro-bono resourcing, revenue, impact investment or mainstream financial investment. Any SROI report should make clear the mix of investment under analysis.
Materiality	Information is material if its omission has the potential to affect the readers' or stakeholders' decisions. Materiality requires a determination of what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.
Mental health condition	Refers to a group of conditions that affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people. These can include health issues such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, substance use disorders and many others.
MMIGP	Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place
Modality	The way an activity is delivered to bring about intended change.
OT	Mental Health Occupational Therapists (OT) focus on helping people with mental health conditions to develop skills and strategies for daily living and working. They take a holistic approach, working on improving both mental and physical wellbeing to enable participation in activities meaningful to the person. WISE IDEA OTs specialise in the intersection of mental health and employment. They apply evidence-based knowledge, practical skills and experience to support people with mental health conditions in securing and maintaining employment. With expertise in assessing cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional factors affecting occupational functioning, they identify barriers and enablers to work.
OHP	The Optimal Health Program is delivered in collaboration with Melbourne psychologists, Clarity Health Care. OHP is an evidence-based health management program. It is holistic in addressing various aspects of wellbeing, including physical, emotional, social and intellectual health, and is strengths based. It supports participants to create personalised health plans that adapt to their changing needs including proactive strategies to manage and maintain mental health and emphasises supportive networks.
Outcome	The change that happens as a result of an activity or output. An outcome can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, direct or indirect, long-term or short-term, social, economic or environmental.
Outcome depth	The extent to which the stakeholders experienced the outcome, measured using indicators. Depth includes positive, negative or no change.
Outcome incidence	The proportion or number of people in the stakeholder cohort group experiencing the outcome.
Output	Outputs describe the quantities associated with an activity (e.g. number of people who took part in a project).

Psychosocial disability	Psychosocial disability is not about a diagnosis; it is about the functional impact and barriers which may be faced by someone living with a mental health condition. A psychosocial disability arises when someone with a mental health condition interacts with a social environment that presents barriers to their equality with others (NSW Government, 2023).
Results	Results are the outputs, outcomes or impact of activities.
Sensitivity analysis	A social valuation technique that tests how the judgements made throughout the analysis affect the result.
Social Return on Investment (SROI)	SROI is a framework for measuring and accounting for the broader concept of social value. It tells the story of how change is being created for the people and organisations that experience or contribute to it, by identifying and measuring social outcomes. Monetary values are then used to represent those outcomes.
Social value	Social value is the importance people place on the social and environmental wellbeing of people, communities or places. Social value is expressed in monetary terms; however, it is about value, not money. Money is simply a common unit, and as such is a useful and widely accepted way of conveying value.
Social valuation	This is the process using financial proxies to monetise social impact. This allows social impact to be communicated in financial terms.
Stakeholder	People, organisations or entities that either experience change as a result of the activity that is being analysed or contribute to the change taking place.
Theory of change	This is the starting point of measuring impact. It is outlining how you think the activities you run will lead to change. It tells the story of how stakeholders are impacted by an activity, program or initiative.
TJtW	The Journey to Work project.
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the peak body for ACCHOs in Victoria.
Vocational Outcome	In Occupational Therapy, vocational outcomes refer to the goals and results associated with an individual's ability to engage in meaningful vocational activities—such as study, employment, and volunteering—that provide structure, purpose, and personal fulfillment. While these results may contribute to current or future economic participation, they are not solely defined by financial metrics. Vocational outcomes may include increased independence and self-efficacy in vocational roles, career development or transition, improved work performance, sustained employment, and successful entry or re-entry into vocational activities following a period of disengagement. However, for the purposes of this SROI, and to allow social valuation, the focus is on the key or end outcomes that are achieved i.e. paid or volunteer work or formal training or education.
WISE Employment	WISE Employment is an Australian not-for-profit employment services provider established in 1992 to assist people with disability and from disadvantage into employment.

WISE IDEA	[WISE IDEA](#) is a centre of best practice in mental health and employment and is an initiative of WISE Employment. WISE IDEA brings together experts in mental health and employment to identify and address the barriers to work for people living with mental health conditions
WWtW	WISE Ways to Work, a 2-year pilot project including evidence-based vocational rehabilitation approaches. Building on the success of WWtW, WISE IDEA was developed in 2022.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project scope

This analysis focused on calculating the social value created by TJtW project for Community Members, their families and the wider community and society.

The timeframe for this analysis was **1 September 2022 to 30 June 2025.**

1.2 Project overview

The Journey to Work (TJtW) project aimed to assist First Nations people with a psychosocial disability to build employment related skills, through the delivery of employment orientation activities and individual tailored vocational plans for participants. It was funded by a grant from the Australian Government's Information Linkages and Capacity (ILC) Building program.

The TJtW project was delivered by WISE IDEA Occupational Therapists in partnership with a First Nations agency. In 2021–22 this partnership was with Dardi Munwurro, a First Nations family violence service dedicated to building stronger families and safer communities based in Preston, Victoria.

In 2022 WISE IDEA commenced a partnership with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP), an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) based in Croydon, Victoria. Delivery of TJtW project in this partnership was the focus of this analysis. The project was judged to have delivered significant outcomes for its participants over a relatively short time.

In 2024 Think Impact was engaged to conduct an evaluative Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of TJtW to gain a deeper understanding of the social, health and economic value of the project. Specifically, this evaluation aimed to:

- contribute to the evidence base of what is known to be helpful for First Nations people living with a psychosocial disability to further their journey to work
- contribute to the evidence base of the ILC program itself and help to inform the future Government investment strategy
- support sharing data and lessons, which may be helpful across other Government projects.

1.3 Social Return on Investment

SROI is a framework for measuring and accounting for the broader concept of social value. It tells the story of how change is being created for the people and organisations that experience or contribute to that change. It does this by identifying and measuring social outcomes.

SROI is a principles-based approach that draws on well-established methodologies in economics, accounting and social research.

An SROI calculation provides an indication of cost–benefit, by comparing the investment required to deliver the activities with the value of the outcomes experienced by all beneficiary stakeholders. Social value is calculated by placing a financial value on the quantified change using what are known as **financial proxies**. SROI seeks to understand all types of value – social, economic and environmental – and represent this in a language which is widely understood by funders, investors, policymakers and decision-makers.

Involving stakeholders in understanding the change that has happened for them is the key principle that drives a SROI. It is an inductive approach, embedded in grounded theory from a social research perspective. Change is viewed through the eyes of the stakeholder and is subjective.

A fuller description of SROI is provided in Appendix A.

The amount of change experienced by stakeholders, and how it will impact their life in the future, will vary depending on their life circumstances and history. As such, the changes described in this report represent a snapshot in time. Each participant in the project started their journey at a different point, had different strengths and capabilities, and will continue to develop.

This report utilised elements of an accredited SROI evaluation undertaken for WISE IDEA in 2020, which used some similar approaches to assist non-First Nations people living with mental health conditions to gain employment. In addition, an accredited report completed for the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's Culture and Kinship program was used to inform outcomes specifically related to the wellbeing of First Nations people.

1.4   About the report contributors

Think Impact is a specialist social impact and sustainability consultancy working to create positive change for business, government, philanthropy and the community. It helps organisations understand, communicate and transform the impact of their work to manage for better impact. Think Impact has one of the most experienced SROI and social valuation teams in Australia.

The report authors are both accredited SROI practitioners, with one on the report assurance panel for Social Value International (SVI). Think Impact's approach to this project has been informed by deep experience in evaluation, working with First Nations stakeholders, and assessing the benefits of employment programs in a wellbeing context.

1.5   Limitations of this evaluation

In preparing this report, Think Impact has relied upon verbal and written information provided by WISE IDEA and MMIGP as well as information available in the public domain.

Stakeholder engagement captured the views of 15 stakeholders and therefore does not necessarily reflect the views of all beneficiaries or other stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement opportunities were limited due to a lack of availability of employed beneficiaries during business hours combined with their existing cultural and caregiving obligations at other times. As such, opportunities for formal SROI interviews, to determine discount factors and relativities, were limited. To account for this, this report has adapted the discount factors in the accredited WISE Ways to Work SROI, published in 2020, that used some similar approaches for non-First Nations beneficiaries living with similar psychosocial disabilities to TJtW participants. More details on how these were adapted can be found in Appendix A.

The dollar values stated in this report do not represent cash but are financial proxies denoting the value created. Financial proxies were drawn from the [2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI report](). An anchoring approach was used to adjust the relative values of each financial proxy to accurately reflect the experience of stakeholders. More details on this approach can be found in Appendix B.

Due to the long history of dispossession and appropriation of Aboriginal Country and Culture in Australia, ethical questions are raised when non-Indigenous evaluators attempt to assign a financial value to things that are central to Aboriginal life like Culture and Community. Drawing on previous work undertaken with First Nations evaluators in the 2023 VACCHO Culture and Kinship SROI, Think Impact takes a First Nations and community led approach to deciding if and how to value these kinds of

outcomes. In this evaluation, Community Members decided that these outcomes were 'priceless' and would not be valued. For more details on the approach see Appendix B.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material and the integrity of the analysis presented herein, Think Impact accepts no liability for any actions taken on the basis of the contents of this report.

If the information is determined to be false, inaccurate or incomplete then the conclusions outlined in this report may change. Under certain circumstances, further analysis of the data, findings, observations and conclusions expressed in this report may be necessary.

2. Context

2.1 First Nations people's mental health in Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people are at a high risk of experiencing mental health issues, with 31% of Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over experiencing a high or very high level of psychological distress as measured using the Kessler (K5) Scale (ABS 2024). Employment is generally a protective factor for mental health. Meaningful employment and work that facilitates Indigenous agency and economic self-determination improves mental health outcomes (Hunter et al., 2022).

For First Nations people, good health is more than the absence of disease or illness; it is a holistic concept that includes physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing, for both the individual and the community (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024). Good mental health is indicated by feeling a sense of belonging, having strong cultural identity, maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, and feeling that life has purpose and value (Dudgeon et al. 2014; Dudgeon and Walker 2015). Previous SROI evaluations have found that programs where connection to Community and Culture is a core element generate high levels of social value and wellbeing for First Nations participants (VACCHO, 2023).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2014 publication *Effective strategies to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* highlights that programs developed in accordance with nine guiding principles of the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' mental health and social and emotional wellbeing* are more effective. Effective programs for Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing promote self-determination, community governance, reconnection and community resilience. Key features of effective programs include:

1. Health as holistic, encompassing mental, physical, cultural and spiritual health.
2. The right to self-determination.
3. The need for cultural understanding.
4. Recognition that the experiences of trauma and loss have intergenerational effects.
5. Recognition and the respect of human rights.
6. Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage have negative impacts.
7. Recognition of the centrality of family and kinship and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.
8. Recognition of individual and community cultural diversity.
9. Recognition of Indigenous strengths.

WISE IDEA has noted that there is currently a lack of targeted, vocational-specific interventions accessible to First Nations Community Members living with mental health conditions in Australia. TJtW provides Community Members with mental health conditions access to tailored vocational support.

2.2 About WISE Employment and WISE IDEA

WISE Employment is a not-for-profit organisation that offers a range of employment services to employers and job seekers across the country. Concerned about the poor employment rates for people with mental health conditions and recognising the important role work plays in maintaining positive mental health, in 2022 WISE Employment established WISE IDEA. An initiative of WISE Employment, WISE IDEA is a centre of best practice in mental health and employment.

WISE IDEA's purpose is to improve the employment outcomes for people with complex mental health conditions and build the evidence-base for successful strategies. WISE IDEA develops, adapts, evaluates and promotes programs of support that help:

- people living with complex mental health conditions or psychosocial disability build skills to gain and maintain employment
- support workers, families and carers to provide effective assistance
- employers to provide responsive workplaces.

Mental health conditions are complex and there are many barriers to work, including the episodic nature of the conditions, lack of suitable adjustments, interrupted education and employment history, and stigma. Less obvious but significant barriers for many people living with mental health conditions are impaired cognitive functioning and social cognition. WISE IDEA develops programs that include strategies and skills that address these barriers.

2.3   About Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place

MMIGP is an ACCO that operates on a neighbourhood house model, evolving based on community needs and gaining support from the Government and the wider community. It has strong partnerships with other ACCOs and ACCHOs, local and state government and regional services, forming a strong network to support community engagement across the region.

MMIGP was established in 2000, when a small group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Melbourne's Eastern Metropolitan Region met to discuss maintaining their cultural identity and supporting each other. Their vision for an Indigenous Gathering Place became a reality in 2005. Today, MMIGP is a vital grassroots organisation where Community Members feel a strong sense of belonging.

MMIGP employs ten paid staff members and six volunteers, who manage programs and activities such as men's, elders', youth, and women's groups.

2.4   About The Journey to Work project

TJtW project aimed to assist First Nations people with a psychosocial disability to build employment related skills, by delivering employment orientation activities and individual tailored vocational plans for participants.

Forty-five community members, from a range of First Nations language groups across Australia, aged between 18 and 61 years, participated in the TJtW project, including women, men, LGBTQIA+ individuals, family members, partners, children and parents. Community Members represented a broad spectrum of vocational backgrounds, including students, unemployed individuals, casual and part-time workers, administrative staff, community service professionals and those who are self-employed. The majority of Community Members were not traditional owners of the land that MMIGP is based on.

TJtW is delivered in two stages. Stage 1 focused on delivering twice weekly group-based sessions: an evidence-based health management program (the Optimal Health Program, OHP) and creative sessions supporting Community Members to connect with their culture and build capability for expression. Combined, the aim was for Community Members to build employment related health-management skills, self-awareness and confidence to further their journey to work.

In addition to the group program, work-exposure opportunities with First Nations people-run businesses and local employers were coordinated, and capability building activities occurred which supported non-First Nations businesses to provide culturally appropriate environments and build the mental health literacy skills of the partner employers engaged with the project.

Stage 2 focused on working with Community Members one-on-one with an Occupational Therapist to explore vocational goals and develop an individual tailored vocational plan. If indicated by the Community Members' identified needs, group sessions were delivered which provided an opportunity for ongoing peer support, yarning, sharing a meal and a special focus on a topic relevant to the Community Members. Work-exposure opportunities with First Nations people-run businesses and local employers were coordinated as needs were identified within vocational plans. WISE IDEA continued to build the capability of the non-First Nations businesses as in Stage 1. Sustainability of the project was supported by developing a Pathways resource which provides mental health and vocation-specific information for MMIGP staff and Community Members.

TJtW project consists of the following five phases:

1. Preparation: Before the Community Member's journey began, WISE IDEA and MMIGP staff came together to prepare for the project and make sure they had the necessary tools and approach in place. WISE IDEA and MMIGP leaders created relationships, structures and processes for communication and problem solving. WISE IDEA and MMIGP staff were jointly trained in delivering an adaptation of the standard OHP that met Community Members' needs. The WISE IDEA Occupational Therapist (OT) was embedded in MMIGP so they were easy to contact. By working closely together, a trusting relationship was built help to ensure project success.

2. Group Engagement: The WISE IDEA and MMIGP facilitators met with the Community Member and introduced them to a group of other Community Members.

Working together through the OHP sessions, Community Members shared their stories and developed their self-awareness and confidence. Through creative sessions the Community Members connected with their Culture and built capability for expression. For those Community Members ready to explore their vocational goals, opportunities to be exposed to work were provided with First Nations people-run businesses, work-site tours and an employer information day. Throughout this process WISE IDEA and MMIGP helped individual Community Members to address their specific challenges as well as met with employers to ensure their workplaces were culturally safe.

3. Connecting to Community and Culture: Throughout TJtW, Community Members were given the opportunity to connect to Culture and Community through a range of group activities such as smoking ceremonies, guided bushwalks, yarning circles regarding volunteering and employment, and a visit to the Melbourne Museum's Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre. These experiences were vital to building up Community Members' pride in their Culture, their self-esteem and the deep social connection and sense of belonging that comes with connecting to Community.

4. Individual support: Through individual sessions facilitated by the WISE IDEA OT, Community Members were offered individual support to identify and explore their vocational aspirations and develop a plan to attain them. Community Members were supported to develop the life skills and routines they needed to be successful in their employment, study or volunteering. They were also supported to find a suitable role and explored strategies to help them maintain the role.

5. Workplace support: For those Community Members in a work, study or volunteering role, the WISE IDEA OT provided individual support. They also liaised with employers to provide recommendations regarding reasonable adjustments as required. It was not just WISE IDEA and MMIGP that provided support – through the learnings of group engagement and individual support, the connections they have made with other Community Members and the broader Community meant there were many people they could trust to help them, and some people could provide support to themselves.

A more detailed description of the TJtW project can be found in Appendix D.

Project funding

The 'investment' into the project was predominantly grant funding.

TJtW project was funded by a grant from the Australian Government's Information, Linkages and Capacity(ILC) Building program, NDIS Economic Participation Stream. Project delivery was also enabled by a contribution of volunteer time by MMIGP.

Table 1 Summary of investments in the delivery of WISE IDEA TJtW

Stakeholder/investor	Item	Description	Value
Australian Government – Information Linkages and Capacity Building	2022–2025 grant funding to WISE IDEA	A grant from the NDIS Economic Participation Stream	$631,540
Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place	Value of volunteer time 2022–2025	MMIGP provided 162 hours of volunteer time valued at $43.27 an hour[1] mainly in the 'Preparation' and 'Group Engagement' phases. MMIGP staff held a key role in both phases including organising and	$7,010

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[1] For more information on how volunteer time is valued see: https://explore.fundingcentre.com.au/help-sheets/valuing-volunteer-labour

Stakeholder/investor	Item	Description	Value
		attending planning meetings, co-facilitating program sessions, promoting the program within Community, providing transportation and culturally specific support to participants and engaging Community Members to ensure inclusive participation. In the 'Individual Support' phase, MMIGP's involvement shifted to a supportive role including participating in occasional follow-up meetings and offering continued assistance to Community Members active within MMIGP's programs.	
TOTAL INVESTMENT			**$638,550**

3.   Who experienced change

3.1   The Journey to Work theory of change

One foundation of a SROI is a theory of change. The theory of change tells the story of how stakeholders are involved in TJtW project and their understanding of how their lives or circumstances have changed as a result. The theory of change depicts the story for those stakeholders who are experiencing what are referred to as 'material' outcomes.

A theory of change for TJtW project was co-developed with key WISE IDEA staff, including the OT who supported Community Members. After identifying the outcomes that stakeholders experienced and any key enabling factors, the chain of events that led to change were mapped out. The result of this activity was a detailed benefit pathway diagram, provided in Appendix A, as well as a narrative theory of change shown in Figure 2 below.

Connecting to Community and Culture provided a foundation and context for reflection and learning to happen

Group engagement built social connection and self-esteem that motivated Community Members to engage with the program

Individual support helped to improve mental health and built confidence in Community Members ability to succeed in their vocational goals

Workplace Support from WISE IDEA, Mullum Mullum and peers helped Community Members to overcome barriers and doubts to thrive in vocational activities

Figure 2 The Journey to Work theory of change

3.2   Who received social value

A SROI analysis seeks to measure the material outcomes experienced by stakeholders as a result of the activities. For this project, the following stakeholders were identified as experiencing material changes:

- **Community Members** – the primary focus of the project
- **Community Members' families** – received benefits through the changes their family members experienced
- **MMIGP staff** – experienced change as role models and as secondary participants in the project because of capability building with WISE IDEA staff
- **Employers** – benefitted from participating in workshops delivered by WISE IDEA
- **Government** – benefitted through reduced support costs and increased tax revenue as a result of Community Members gaining employment.

While some activities may have delivered some value to the environment and the wider community in general, these changes were not deemed to be material and were not modelled.

More detail on how value is created for these stakeholders is provided in the following section.

4. The social value created

> For every $1 invested in The Journey to Work project, $9.38 of social value was created.

The project generated a total of $5,988,000 of social value from an investment of $639,000. This means that for every dollar invested in the project, $9.38 of social value was created. Figure 3 below provides a breakdown of the value experienced by each stakeholder.

Total value: $6M

Figure 3 Summary of value by stakeholder

Community Members received $3.1M of value, more than half (53%) of the total, as the prime focus of the project. **Government** received $1.1M (18%) of the value as a result of wellbeing and employment outcomes reducing the support costs of Community Members. **MMIGP staff**, as secondary participants in the project, received $918K (15.3%). **Community Members' families** received $792K (13.2%) in value as Community Members' improved wellbeing improved their relationships. Finally, **employers** received $24K (>1%) of value from attending the First Nations Culture and Mental Health Awareness workshops.

More detail on the social value created for each stakeholder is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Summary of value by stakeholder group

Stakeholder	# of stakeholders	Value per stakeholder	Total value	% value
Community Members	44	$72,000	$3,148,000	53%
Government	1	$1,105,000	$1,105,000	18%

MMIGP staff	13	$71,000	$918,000	15%
Community Members' families	151	$5,000	$793,000	13%
Employers	83	$300	$24,000	<1%
TOTAL			**$5,988,000**	**100%**

These results are discussed in detail in the following sections. All figures in this section have been rounded to reflect their indicative nature. In addition, the range within which the ratio sits is presented within the sensitivity analysis in Appendix C.

4.1 Outcomes for Community Members

Outcome summary

44 Community Members experienced a total of 11 outcomes as illustrated in Figure 4. As outlined above, the outcomes described below were experienced and prioritised to a greater or lesser degree by different Community Members depending on their lived experience. The language of 'improved' and 'strengthened' should not be interpreted to imply that Community Members had a deficit of these outcomes previously. The relative value of these outcomes therefore represents the average experience of all Community Members.

Figure 4 Relative value of outcomes for Community Members

Outcomes not valued

With '**strengthened connection to Community**' and '**strengthened connection to Culture**' Community Members were provided with a positive context for reflection and learning to occur.

> 'I didn't feel intimidated in the (group sessions). Everything is mapped out. Feels safe. Consistent. Felt like I had friends and family. We got to connect outside of class through culture.' – Community Member

> 'They (a Community Member) had a rough time (with admissions to hospital). (They are) a good example of the change (that the project can create). (They) learnt to be comfortable with their mob and get back into the community.' – MMIGP staff member

> 'A safe space has been created to share our stories and learn more about each other.'
> – Community Member

MMIGP and WISE IDEA staff confirmed that all the value stakeholders experienced flows from these two key outcomes. This is aligned with previous social valuations in the First Nations space, including the VACCHO Culture and Kinship SROI (VACCHO, 2023) that demonstrated that programs centring Culture, Country and Community can be highly effective in improving health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations people. A focus on the spiritual, cultural and emotional health of participants can help address the underlying trauma of marginalisation and dispossession that is the root cause of much unhealthy behaviour and choices.

At the request of MMIGP these outcomes have not been assigned a financial proxy as they are deemed to be priceless. When asked about the monetary value of connecting with Culture and Community, a MMIGP staff member emphasised its immeasurable significance:

> *'Trillions, plus trillions. The programs are what is needed. Training and pre-employment support are priceless. Every individual program provides something unique and serves a different purpose. While engagement in group sessions fosters mental well-being, it is much more than that – it's about holistic social and emotional well-being. It's everything.'*

Key outcomes achieved

While 'strengthened connection to Culture' and 'strengthened connection to Community' were not assigned a financial value, stakeholders agreed they were foundational outcomes and that all other outcomes flowed from them.

The most highly valued key outcomes were 'improved self-esteem' (31% of total value), 'improved mental health' (20%), 'increased ability to engage in meaningful vocational activities' (22%) and 'improved social connection' (16%). 'Improved family relationships' (7%), 'improved employability' (4%), 'increased confidence in ability to succeed' (3%), 'increased financial security' (<1%) and 'increased physical health' (<1%) made up the remainder of the value. These outcomes are consistent with those of other WISE IDEA programs that have been evaluated.

Working on their health and wellbeing together, as well as taking part in creative sessions, Community Members **improved their self-esteem.**

> *'I feel self-worth and purpose now. I am ready to explore something else.'*
> *– Community Member*

> *'(The project) was very motivating, very grounding. Uplifting.' – Community Member*

> *'I am noticing the different confidence that (the project) is bringing out of them. They're not ashamed of themselves anymore.' – MMIGP staff member*

> *'Over the course of the sessions, Community Members became more relaxed in being "themselves". You could see changes in their body, face and their ability to express themselves.' – WISE IDEA Community artist*

By gaining self-esteem, Community Members stated they were more motivated to continue to participate in the project. Their persistence led to **improvements in their mental health.**

> *'I was anxious. (The OT sessions) helped with emotional regulation. They also helped with prioritisation – always makes sure I look after myself.' – Community Member*

> *'(The OT) was a lifesaver. My anxiety affects me physically – I wasn't leaving the house. They gave me the confidence to get going again.' – Community Member*

> *'I would have been suffering emotionally if I didn't have something to turn to for help.'*
> *– Community Member*

'Nobody wants to be depressed. Having the (Optimal Health Program) book and working on the exercises makes you grow. Seeing everyone else doing it helped.'
– Community Member

'I used to be an angry person ... I hold a lot of hate towards police, government due to intergenerational trauma. Thanks to the project I can reflect and see where I messed up.' -
– Community Member

As indicated, this was the second most valuable outcome valued.

Working with the WISE IDEA OT, Community Members gained a better understanding of what kind of vocational activities are most suited to their interests, skills and temperament, leading to an **increased ability to engage in meaningful vocational activities**.

'I applied for a funded course and now I am studying a Cert III in Land Conservation & Management.' – Community Member

'I connected with a First Nations art studio, now I have solo exhibits.' – Community Member

'She (a Community Member) told me that the project made her feel as though she was in the right head space and gave her the confidence and sense of purpose to start writing again and even share her work publicly.' – WISE IDEA Community Artist

22 Community Members (50%) attained a vocational outcome after starting the project unemployed.

Working with other Community Members in the group work sessions provided opportunities to **improve social connection** which helped build engagement with the project.

'I felt like I was part of something, a belonging.' – Community Member

'You come to the project because you get lost in your own mind (otherwise). You meet other people with similar problems.' – Community Member

'They (a Community Member) were really struggling (socially) but we have seen a real turnaround (I now see them) talking to people, elders and kids.'
– Community Member's parent

Positive psychological changes led to a greater ability to manage their emotions and **improved relationships with their families.**

'(I have) better insight (into myself), a deeper connection with community and with my family.' – Community Member

'My family and I have noticed the changes of not being so hard on myself. I am more positive and actually more motivated to be engaging in other activities.'
– Community Member

The one-on-one sessions with the WISE IDEA OT further strengthened the outcomes experienced in the group sessions by providing personalised strategies, advice and support. By building employment skills, Community Members **increased their employability.**

'(I'm) much better prepared for employment.' – Community Member

'(The project) helped match my skills and experience to a good (paid) position.'
– Community Member

'They're [Community Members] getting more structure in their day, whereas most of them haven't been taught. They need to be guided with that, and even when they're taking these jobs or training or getting licenses.' – MMIGP staff member

Exploring vocation provided an understanding of what options were best suited to individual interests and skills which **increased confidence in their ability to succeed.**

'I have gained more confidence in myself and knowing that I can do anything I put my mind to.' – Community Member

'It's been a test to myself to see if I can stay committed to the project and I have. Thank you.' – Community Member

'(The project) was reassuring. (Helped) build back my confidence (and) remind me of my skills.' – Community Member

'She has shown good perseverance (both) medically and psychologically. She grabs it (a challenge) and takes it to the next level.' – MMIGP staff member

Those Community Members who gained paid employment **increased their financial security.**

'I applied for, and completed, an Aged Care course. Now I am working in an Aged Care job.' – Community Member

'I was unemployed for 5 years; I went to a First Nations Job Fair and got a job in admin advertised at the Fair.' – Community Member

Increased self-esteem motivated Community Members to exercise self-care and **improve their physical health**.

'(The project) helped me look after myself (both) mind and body.' – Community Member

'She (a Community Member) was provided with extra support. (Gained the confidence) to go to the gym. Was able to talk.' – MMIGP staff member

Thelma's story: Healing Through Art, Community and Employment

Thelma, a 39-year-old Palawa woman with family ties to Tasmania's Cape Barren Island, has faced a lifetime of challenges – mental health, substance abuse, psychosis and systemic racism and personal loss. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression, Thelma has also navigated domestic violence, housing instability and the justice system. Raised by her mother in an otherwise unstable environment, she refers to her mother as her best friend who meant everything to her. Thelma didn't meet her father until she was 27 but developed a connection with him as an adult.

In April 2023, Thelma endured devastating loss, with the passing away of her mother, father and uncle within a short period of time, whilst also experiencing severe domestic violence and associated significant distress and mental ill-health.

With the support and encouragement of MMIGP staff and Elders, Thelma joined WISE IDEA's TJtW project. Thelma committed to the weekly sessions and found safety, support and cultural connection. Despite the challenges she was facing, Thelma attended the group sessions regularly, embracing the structure and support they provided. She found purpose in the sessions and they helped her rebuild her 'sense of self-love, personal growth and motivation.' Thelma valued having a reason to leave the house, and re-engage with her community, from which she had felt distanced during her struggles.

Thelma's openness and courage in sharing her story created powerful connections with others in the group. Through these conversations, she began to see a future where employment and stability were possible: 'It was a test to see if I could stay committed – and I have. Thank you all so much.'

Thelma's engagement with the creative expression sessions coordinated by WISE IDEA's Community Artist and her participation in the yarning circle discussions both helped her to explore her love of art, which she realised was central to her healing journey; she wanted to 'stay busy, keep growing and continue building on the progress made.' This was a significant turning point in developing Thelma's creative career and personal stability.

After completing Stage 1 of TJtW in July 2023, Thelma continued to receive regular support from the WISE IDEA OT based at MMIGP and progressed with her plans. She secured a studio at Blak Pearl, strengthened her ties with The Torch and recommenced selling her art.

Thelma acknowledges the support of MMIGP, WISE IDEA's TJtW program, The Torch, Blak Pearl, Coburg Arts Studio and Yoorrook in helping her navigate her artistic career and personal stability. MMIGP provided Thelma with a crucial support system, offering safety, cultural connection and a sense of belonging when she needed it most.

Thelma has sold over 200 paintings and her work has been featured in magazines, major exhibitions and retail stores. She remains deeply engaged in community work, using her story and talent to help others find healing through creative expression. Her journey is one of resilience, cultural connection and self-discovery.

Thelma reflects on her personal experience of TJtW with pride, stating, 'I feel very connected to my communities. I feel like I am a good role model for my era.' She is proud of the commitment she made to TJtW program during a difficult time. It gave her the confidence to manage her mental health and commit to pursuing her artistic career. 'Art grounds me with my emotions – whenever I feel something, I paint, and you can see it in my work. It gives me a better quality of life. If I were just living off Centrelink, I would have only the bare minimum. Now, I get to enjoy my life and help others engage in art too.' | Thelma created the artwork on the cover of this analysis. See more of Thelma's artwork.

Key outcomes valued

The value of each outcome is summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Summary of outcome value for Community Members

Outcome	Total value	% value
Strengthened connection to Culture	Priceless	–
Strengthened connection to Community	Priceless	–
Improved self-esteem	$965,000	31%
Improved mental health	$623,000	20%
Increased ability to engage in meaningful vocational activities	$708,000	22%
Improved social connection	$358,000	11%
Improved family relationships	$211,000	7%
Improved employability	$127,000	4%
Increased confidence in ability to succeed	$94,000	3%
Increased financial security	$33,000	1%
Improved physical health	$29,000	1%
TOTAL	**$3,148,000**	**100%**

4.2   Outcomes for Community Members' families

Outcome summary

Community Members' families experienced only one outcome – **improved family relations** – which accounted for 100% of the value they experienced.

Outcome narrative and valuation

Community Members' families benefitted from the improved mental health and self-esteem of the project participants which led to **improved family relations.**

> 'My family was happy to see me doing well. By being active and involved in paid employment, I am a good role model for my family. They are happy to see me being productive.' – Community Member

> 'They (a Community Member) are now more talkative, helps more around the house and does chores without "whinging". We have better family relationships, and they are better at doing tasks … helping more at home.' – Community Member's parent

151 family members received this outcome generating $793,000 in social value as shown in

Table 4 below.

Table 4 Summary of outcome value for Community Members' families

Outcome	Total value	% value
Improved family relationships	$793,000	100%
TOTAL	**$793,000**	**100%**

4.3   Outcomes for MMIGP staff

Outcome summary and valuation

13 staff members experienced $918,000 in social value from eight outcomes as shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 Relative value of outcomes for MMIGP staff

MMIGP staff were involved in the project from its inception, taking part in group activities, providing opportunities to learn about Culture and providing role models for Community Members. For many staff the project provided an opportunity to increase their self-esteem and improve their emotional resilience leading to them experiencing almost all of the outcomes that Community Members experienced. The only exceptions were **increased ability to engage in meaningful vocational work** and **increased financial security** which they did not share as they were already employed. As for Community Members, **Connection to Community** and **Connection to Culture** underpinned all the other outcomes MMIGP staff experienced.

The value of the outcomes MMIGP staff experienced is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Summary of outcome value for MMIGP staff

Outcome	Total value	% value
Strengthened connection to Culture	Priceless	–
Strengthened connection to Community	Priceless	–
Improved self-esteem	$392,000	43%
Improved mental health	$302,000	33%
Improved family relationships	$136,000	15%
Improved social connection	$42,000	5%
Improved physical health	$18,000	2%
Improved employability	$11,000	2%
Increased confidence in ability to succeed	$4,000	<1%

TOTAL	**$918,000**	**100%**

4.4 Outcomes for employers

Outcome summary

83 employers attended the workshops and experienced two outcomes as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 Relative value of outcomes for employers

Increased awareness of needs of people living with mental health conditions was the most valuable outcome, accounting for 60% of value, while **increased awareness of First Nations culture** accounted for the remaining 40%.

Outcome narrative and valuation

Employers benefitted from participating in workshops that helped **increase their awareness of First Nations Culture** and **increase their awareness of mental health needs**. This awareness may lead in time to a greater level of cultural safety for their First Nations employees and more inclusivity of employees with mental health needs, but this was not able to be measured within the scope of this evaluation.

> *'There is definitely more awareness and understanding of First Nations culture within the organisation.' – Employer*

> *'Attending the Cultural Awareness Training held by WISE IDEA added a dimension and understanding of First Nations experience, history and culture, which helped improve how our organisation approached inclusivity.' – Employer*

The value experienced by employers is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Summary of outcomes for employers

Outcome	Total value	% value
Increased awareness of needs of people living with mental health conditions	15,000	60%
Increased awareness of First Nations culture	10,000	40%
TOTAL	**$25,000**	**100%**

4.5 Outcomes for government

Outcome summary

State and federal government experienced four outcomes as shown in Figure 7 below

Figure 7 Relative value of outcomes for government

The most valuable outcome for government was **reduced welfare costs** which accounted for 42% of the total value. **Reduced healthcare costs** and **reduced social services** accounted for 27% and 25% of value respectively while **increased tax revenue** accounted for the remaining value (6%).

Outcome narrative and valuation

The state and federal government benefitted from the project as a result of the increases in Community Members' mental and physical wellbeing through **reduced healthcare costs** and **reduced social services costs**. The government also benefitted when Community Members gained paid employment through **reduced income support costs** and **increased tax revenue.**

Government experienced a total of $1,105,000 in value as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Summary of outcome value for government

Outcome	Total value	% value
Reduced welfare costs	$459,000	42%
Reduced healthcare costs	$299,000	27%
Reduced social services costs	$279,000	25%
Increased tax revenue	$67,000	6%
TOTAL	**$1,105,000**	**100%**

For readers who wish to understand the detail involved in calculating these values, a full set of data and calculations are available in Appendix A.

Based on the sensitivity analysis, the ratio sits within a range of $7.66 and $10.37

This range represents the minimum and maximum social value created by the project accounting for the judgements made throughout the analysis may have impacted the results. More details on how this range was calculated can be found in Appendix C.

Joshua's journey: From overwhelmed to empowered

Joshua*, an Aboriginal man in his late twenties from Victoria, currently lives in Melbourne with his father. His mother had a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder and died by suicide in 2022.

Prior to moving in with his father, Joshua lived with his partner, and shared parenting responsibilities for their one-year-old daughter. However, the stressors built up; their relationship broke down; he was unemployed, in debt, and concerned about his daughter's care – all seriously affecting his mental health and confidence. Despite these challenges to his mental health, Joshua hadn't accessed support until February 2024, when his father, an active member of Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP), introduced him to the Place.

The MMIGP Chief Executive Officer, Program Manager, Men's Worker and WISE IDEA OT worked collaboratively to support Joshua through the process of intake and assessments. They supported him to attend the initial one-on-one sessions and made referrals to relevant support services, linking Joshua in with Centrelink, Mob Jobs, The Orange Door and First Peoples Health.

During the OT sessions, despite the personal challenges he was facing, Joshua expressed interest in learning new skills and building his 'people skills'. He had a particular interest in horticulture and his goal was to eventually run his own business. Although he self-reported as being highly motivated to find a job, anxiety about his financial situation would overwhelm him, leading to a lack of confidence about starting a job.

The focused one-on-one goal setting OT sessions helped him organise his priorities. He was able to set realistic vocational and employment goals, engage in the MMIGP social and cultural activities, and strengthen his bond with his father. The sessions enabled Joshua to develop a personal map that included a pathway to employment, building a sense of direction, confidence and self-esteem as a result.

The barriers that had previously overwhelmed him were addressed, particularly lack of income and no phone credit to make work-related calls.

Through MMIGP, Joshua accessed First People's Health, providing Joshua with culturally safe comprehensive healthcare and counselling. His concerns about his personal relationships and debt led to a referral to The Orange Door, which provided immediate support and financial assistance to get his driver's licence and car insurance as well as paying his phone debts. This enabled him to travel to work and collect his daughter. As of July 2024, Joshua has become permanently employed full-time as a Cleaning Maintenance and Groundsman at a local workplace. Joshua continues to attend MMIGP's Men's Group with his father and engage in the cultural activities held there. The First Peoples' counselling helped him to talk openly about his mental health with his father – something they had both previously avoided. He is also working on building his relationship with his ex-partner as they co-parent their daughter.

Joshua is now managing full-time work, co-parenting and home life with increased resilience. He has a check-in every two to three weeks by phone with the WISE IDEA OT who provides advice and support as required.

He has reflected on how far he's come, and that the tools and techniques he has been equipped with, and the culturally appropriate support he receives have made him more confident and better able to organise his life. He is now able to provide support to his daughter and his father as well as hold down a full-time job.

* Name has been changed

5.   Findings and recommendations

5.1   Findings

The Journey to Work is created positive outcomes

TJtW project provided support to First Nations people who are long-term unemployed because of their complex mental health conditions and for whom in many cases this unemployment is compounded because of a range of associated factors. Despite this, the project has delivered strong results for the people it supports, with 50% of Community Members who were formerly unemployed engaging in vocational roles because of their participation in the project.

The key to this success was that, rather than focusing solely on employment outcomes, WISE IDEA's TJtW approach created the conditions for safe reflection and learning to occur. This enabled the building of motivation for Community Members to engage with vocational activities on their own terms resulting in sustained, long-term change.

The Journey to Work created a context that met the specific needs of its beneficiaries

Centring connection to Community and Culture provided a culturally appropriate and safe environment for reflection and learning to occur. The inclusive nature of a rich cultural environment promoted mutual respect, strong bonds and a sense of belonging. Giving Community Members the chance to reconnect with their heritage, traditions and values can help them see their identity in a more positive light, especially if they have mostly experienced it through exclusion or racism in the past. Through this they can view it as it as a source of pride and a way to overcome anxieties about social connection and economic participation.

MMIGP's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Members are in the best position to decide how to address issues experienced by their Community. A consistent strengths-based approach focusing on self-determination and building authentic partnerships by involving Community with decision-making ensured TJtW project was not only culturally relevant, but it fostered long-term resilience and meaningful change driven by the Community itself (Ryall et el., 2021).

Embedding the WISE IDEA Occupational Therapist (OT) in the context of MMIGP was essential for building trust

Having the WISE IDEA OT working in MMIGP spaces several days of the week was essential for building trust with Community. This increased the accessibility of the OT for Community Members and provided a degree of continuity. The provision of one-on-one Occupational Therapy in a familiar, comfortable location increased the feeling of safety for Community Members, increasing the likelihood that they would persevere with the project.

The proximity of the OT's desk to MMIGP staff members facilitated ongoing mutual capability building and support, and more unplanned conversations regarding Community Members. These conversations allowed for a deeper understanding of individual needs and concerns, as many staff members were connected with Community Members through familial relationships.

Joint working led to more engagement and sustainable outcomes

Building close relationships between the WISE IDEA and MMIGP staff built awareness of the project within the community and encouraged other Community Members to participate. Having a MMIGP staff member/co-facilitator be present during OHP sessions ensured that the environment remained culturally sensitive for Community Members. In addition, Community Members seeing MMIGP staff at

project activities encouraged Community Members to participate, and as there was trust within this existing relationship, it increased the likelihood of Community Members following a suggestion from a MMIGP staff member.

TJtW built support networks for participants and encouraged peer support

The project facilitated the development of friendships among Community Members and provided additional people to turn to for support. These relationships fostered open communication, accountability and promoted a shared resilience, as individuals felt less isolated in their struggles and more empowered by the knowledge that others faced similar challenges. Through these interactions, Community Members developed supportive networks that extended beyond the project and formed the foundation for ongoing relationships.

5.2   Recommendations

Develop an implementation guide and associated training materials to enable TJtW to be replicated and delivered at scale within a First Nations context

The success of TJtW is due to the individuals involved in the project and the relationships that developed between them. As indicated, several key factors were identified as crucial:

- The WISE IDEA OT's interest, skill and long-term participation in the project provided continuity for Community Members at points where MMIGP experienced significant changes in staff and leadership. The OT's person-centred, gentle, curious approach assisted rapport and trust building.
- The OT received regular, high-quality guidance and support by more experienced therapists. This supervisory support enabled the OT to maintain and build strong working relationships within MMIGP.
- In addition, by being embedded at MMIGP, the OT was able to attain a degree of acculturation that allowed them to more effectively navigate the complex social relationships between Community Members and build understanding of their specific needs in a cultural context.
- The presence of a key staff member within MMIGP, who had previously been employed by WISE Ways to Work, provided an advocate internally in the organisation. This assisted in reducing the barriers to establishing and implementing the project.
- In addition, the key staff member's enthusiastic approach coupled with their understanding of OT and OHP allowed them to address Community Member questions and concerns about the project in a way that was culturally safe.

The continuity provided by the OT and the advocacy of the key staff member, and the relationships they build with each other and Community Members, were essential for establishing the credibility of the project and creating an environment of trust that encouraged Community Member participation. For TJtW to be delivered effectively for other First Nations communities, strategies to replicate these key roles and relationships at scale will be required.

To ensure that the benefits of TJtW can reach many First Nations people, it is recommended that WISE IDEA develop an implementation guide with associated training materials to support replication of TJtW in a First Nations context.

The guide and materials should be designed for both Mental Health OTs and First Nations agency staff (including managers, Elders, and leaders), so they can adapt and run TJtW in other First Nations communities. It will be critical to build on existing community relationships. This type of approach will help support First Nations people to take more control over the programs that affect them. It also makes the program easier to expand, keeps delivery consistent, and helps build skills within partner

organisations. To create the implementation guide and associated training materials, WISE IDEA should work closely with First Nations staff and Community Members already involved in delivering TJtW.

WISE IDEA should explore how to expand this successful approach

WISE IDEA has developed a successful approach.

Changes in government funding provide opportunities for TJtW to be delivered in new contexts with different groups of people.

The recent integration of the NDIS and disability portfolio into the expanded Department of Health, Disability and Ageing presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen alignment between the mental health and psychosocial disability sectors. As part of this transition, the federal government will collaborate with states and territories to design Foundational Supports for individuals not eligible for the NDIS – an important step toward enhancing the sustainability of the scheme.

While the initial focus of Foundational Supports may not be on adults with a psychosocial disability, there is a broader opportunity to extend support for people living with psychosocial disability, including through initiatives such as TJtW.

TJtW has demonstrated strong alignment with the objectives of Foundational Supports – particularly in promoting social and economic participation, building confidence, and developing life and vocational skills. Its flexible, person-centred design enables targeted support at key transition points, such as school-to-work pathways. In addition, it provides structured assistance for adults with psychosocial disability, helping to build the capabilities and independence required to pursue their chosen employment and vocational goals. This positions TJtW as a scalable and effective model within the evolving Foundational Supports framework.

Appendix A Methodology

A.1   SROI framework and principles

SROI is a framework for measuring and accounting for the broader concept of social value. It tells the story of how change is being created for the people and organisations that experience or contribute to that change. It does this by identifying and measuring social outcomes. Financial proxies are used to place a value on the outcomes that occur for stakeholders.

SROI is an approach that draws on well-established methodologies in economics, accounting and social research. It is underpinned by eight principles which ensure the analysis understands the changes that take place and the additional value that has occurred through the activities being delivered:

1. **Involve stakeholders** – Inform what gets measured, and how this is measured and valued, by involving stakeholders.
2. **Understand what changes** – Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.
3. **Value the things that matter** – Making decisions about allocating resources between different options needs to recognise the values of stakeholders. Value refers to the relative importance of different outcomes. It is informed by stakeholders' preferences.
4. **Only include what is material** – Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.
5. **Do not over-claim** – Only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating.
6. **Be transparent** – Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.
7. **Verify the result** – Ensure appropriate independent verification and assurance of results.
8. **Be responsive** – Make decisions to optimise value for stakeholders based on the results.

A.2   Methodology

The methodology to model the social value of TJtW included four stages of work underpinned by stakeholder engagement to identify and validate the domains of change and outcomes, then research to inform the social value modelling. These four stages are aligned with the six stages outlined in the Social Value International (SVI) SROI guide as shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8 The Journey to Work SROI methodology

Stage 1 – Establishing scope and exploring the content

An inception meeting was held with WISE IDEA to understand the scope and limitation of the evaluation in addition to identifying key stakeholders for context interviews. It was identified that access to TJtW beneficiaries would be limited as many are employed during business hours (as a result of the project) and/or have significant caring or cultural commitments that would make scheduling traditional one on one stakeholder interviews difficult.

Based on this, and in alignment with best practice with working with First Nations organisations, it was determined that WISE IDEA and the evaluators would meet with senior leaders from MMIGP to determine the best way to gather information from stakeholders. A meeting was held at MMIGP offices with Elders, respected people and staff in attendance. WISE IDEA provided food for all as this had been established as an informal protocol for welcoming new people into the community.

Stage 2 – Stakeholder engagement and theory of change development

Stakeholder engagement

During the initial meeting with MMIGP it was determined that stakeholder engagement would be carried out through a 'Yarning Circle' attended by Community Members and staff, facilitated by a community Elder. Yarning is a First Nations cultural process that involves the exchange of information through storytelling. Yarning is a fundamental aspect of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing that centres the building of relationships and mutual trust as a context for knowledge sharing.

The yarning circle took place on 10 November 2024 with nine people in attendance, including two Elders (one of whom was also a family member of a Community Member), two staff members and four Community Members. Over the course of the two-hour session, the Elders facilitated a conversation that provided participants with an opportunity to introduce themselves and tell their stories in the context of their understanding of their indigeneity. This process provided other Community Members with opportunities to identify points of similarity and connection that created an atmosphere of trust and mutual support that made them feel comfortable to provide personal disclosures about the changes they have experienced as part of the project. During this process the evaluator took notes but did not participate in the discussion.

During this discussion it was determined that the Staff Members in attendance had experienced the majority of the outcomes that Community Members had. This made them material stakeholders.

Interviews were scheduled with evaluators and direct beneficiaries of the project. However, after one interview it was decided that this process had the potential to retraumatise the beneficiaries who may still be struggling with anxiety when talking with people they do not know. As such, the WISE IDEA OT, who had built strong and trusting relationships with the beneficiaries, was trained to carry out impact yarning and value yarning.

In addition, the WISE IDEA OT's working location at the MMIGP offices meant that they were better able to secure interviews with beneficiaries. The WISE IDEA OT carried out one-on-one interviews with seven stakeholders: a parent of a Community Member, the facilitator of the creative group sessions, an employer, a staff member, two Community Members and the Chief Executive Officer of MMIGP.

Table 8 Stakeholder engagement overview

Stakeholder	Method	Number engaged
Community Members	One on one interviews (carried out by Think Impact and WISE IDEA)	3
	Yarning Circle	4

MMIGP Staff	One on one interviews (carried out by Think Impact and WISE IDEA)	3
	Yarning Circle	2
Community Members' families	One on one interviews (carried out by WISE IDEA)	1
	Yarning Circle	1
Employers	One on one interviews (carried out by WISE IDEA)	1

Theory of change development

After outcomes had been harvested from the stakeholder engagement, the evaluators and key WISE IDEA staff completed a sensemaking workshop to understand how value is created for stakeholders. As a result of this workshop, a detailed benefit pathway was developed for Community Members, their families and MMIGP staff, shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9 Benefit pathway for Community Members and their families and MMIGP staff.

Feedback from employers indicated that the only outcome that could be verified was an increase of awareness from the First Nations awareness and mental health programs that they participated in.

Outcomes for government stakeholders were drawn from the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI which carried out extensive research to determine outcomes for a similar cohort of stakeholders.

A theory of change diagram was developed to provide a simple narrative for how value is created for the main beneficiaries as shown in Figure 10 below.

Connecting to Community and Culture provided a foundation and context for reflection and learning to happen

Group engagement built social connection and self-esteem that motivated Community Members to engage with the program

Individual support helped to improve mental health and built confidence in Community Members ability to succeed in their vocational goals

Workplace Support from WISE IDEA, Mullum Mullum and peers helped Community Members to overcome barriers and doubts to thrive in vocational activities

Figure 10 The Journey to Work theory of change

Calculating the SROI

In calculating the SROI this evaluation drew on two previous accredited SROI reports. In 2020 Think Impact completed an accredited SROI for WISE Employment's WISE Ways to Work pilot project. The pilot project shared many similarities with TJtW project in terms of the psychosocial disadvantages of its beneficiaries and the nature of the intervention, with the exception that it was not exclusively offered to First Nations beneficiaries. As such, it was deemed appropriate to utilise and modify proxies and discount factors from the 2020 report for this evaluation.

More details on the specific components of the social value model are provided in Table 9 below.

Table 9 Social value model inputs

Model element	Data source/approach
Financial proxies are used to monetise social outcomes. Each outcome was assigned a proxy commensurate with the value created.	Where outcomes were the same or similar to those of the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI, the same proxies were used, adjusted for inflation if required. Proxies for new outcomes were drawn from existing databanks and previous evaluations. All proxies were adjusted to match the relative value of each outcome as defined by stakeholders using an anchoring approach described in more detail in Appendix B.
Outcome incidence is the number or percentage of stakeholders that experience the outcome. High outcome incidence indicates that the majority of stakeholders in a group experience the outcome.	Based on judgements from the WISE IDEA OT and MMIGP staff on whether each individual beneficiary experienced the outcome and to what degree. This judgement drew on case notes for each beneficiary and ongoing conversations with each stakeholder about their mental health and employment journey.
Deadweight is a measure of the amount of outcome that would have happened even if the activity had not taken place. It is calculated as a	Where outcomes were the same or similar to those of the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI, the same deadweight was used. Deadweight for new

percentage. High deadweight figures indicate that a significant amount of the outcome would have happened regardless of the activity.	outcomes was determined using practitioner judgement.
Attribution is an assessment of how much of the outcome was caused by the contribution of other organisations or people. Attribution is calculated as a percentage (that is, the proportion of the outcome that is attributable to others). Low attribution percentages indicate that the outcome is attributable to the activities of the project and there are limited other interventions, people or experiences that were responsible for the outcome occurring.	Attribution for each outcome was drawn from the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI. Due to differences in the subgrouping of participants between the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI and this analysis, deadweight could not be carried over directly. As such, the average deadweight for each subgroup in 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI has been used.
Benefit period indicates how long the value will last and is calculated in years. Benefit period captures the value created for outcomes that last after the activity has stopped.	Benefit periods for each outcome were drawn from the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI. Benefit periods for new outcomes were determined using the same methodology as for that report.
Drop-off, calculated as a percent, indicates the degree to which the outcome is likely to be influenced by other factors over time. Attribution to the activity or intervention will diminish over time for most outcomes because outside factors are likely to influence the outcome. Drop-off is only calculated for outcomes that last more than one year.	Drop-off for each outcome were drawn from the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI. Drop-off for new outcomes were determined using the same methodology as for that report.

An additional accredited report, the Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisation's Culture and Kinship Program evolution, completed by Think Impact (and supported by Kowa Collaboration) in 2023, provided proxies for connection to Culture and connection to Community that were used for the sensitivity analysis only.

Using and embedding the report

The final deliverable was a summary report including a breakdown of how value was created for each stakeholder group, recommendations and a detailed methodology. WISE IDEA provided more detailed content on the project methodology for Appendix D.

The draft report was provided to the client for validation and feedback before a final version was produced.

Appendix B Valuing the outcomes

This appendix provides information about how the outcomes have been measured and valued within the SROI model.

The SROI methodology uses financial proxies to estimate the social value of non-traded goods to different stakeholders. Non-traded goods are those things that are not bought and sold in a marketplace, like confidence, social inclusion and relationships, and therefore they do not have an easily recognisable value attached to them. By estimating their value using financial proxies, we can understand the relative importance of different types of outcomes and combine the valuations to arrive at an estimate of the total social value created by a set of activities.

Assigning financial proxies is a way of representing the relative importance to a stakeholder of the changes they experience. The values, although expressed in monetary terms, do not reflect financial transactions or equate to a financial return.

To provide the most accurate proxies for this evaluation within the constraints of the limited scope, proxies for each outcome were sourced from the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI. This was possible because the majority of the outcomes independently identified by stakeholders in this analysis were the same or similar to those from the 2020 report. However, when stakeholders ranked outcome in order of importance it was found that the **relative values** of outcomes were different to that of the 2020 report.

To account for this, an **anchoring approach** was utilised. Anchoring involves designating an outcome as an 'anchor' outcome and then adjusting the value of the other outcomes in reference to it. For this evaluation the most highly valued outcome 'improved self-esteem' was selected as the anchor outcome. Anchoring was achieved by setting the value of the proxy for 'improved self-esteem' as the highest value outcome. The proxies for all other outcomes were then adjusted or replaced to ensure that their relative value to the anchor outcome was aligned with the ranking provided by stakeholders.

The data and proxies that have been used to construct the SROI model are presented in the tables that follow. This data is provided to satisfy *Principle 6 Be transparent*.

Table 10 Proxies used to value outcomes

Stakeholder(s)	Outcome	Financial proxy	Rationale	Source
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Increased connection to Community	Priceless	Determined to be priceless by First Nations stakeholders.	N/A
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Increased connection to Culture	Priceless	Determined to be priceless by First Nations stakeholders.	N/A
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Improved self-esteem	$24,600	Based on wellbeing technique (HACT research), value of high confidence in adults (individual of unknown age and living in London).	UK social value bank

Stakeholder(s)	Outcome	Financial proxy	Rationale	Source
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Improved mental health	$19,158	Commensurate with monetary equivalent costs associated with depression, anxiety using wellbeing valuation. Using a conservative 20% improvement in mental health.	Fujiwara, D. and P. Dolan (2014), 'Valuing mental health. How a subjective wellbeing approach can show just how much it matters', UK Council for Psychotherapy
Community Members	Increased ability to engage in meaningful vocational activities	$23,631	Research has shown that people would be willing to forego 23% of their earnings to have a job that was meaningful. The average salary in Australia is 1975.80 weekly or $102,742.	Harvard Business Review website – '9 Out of 10 People Are Willing to Earn Less Money to Do More-Meaningful Work' Australian Bureau of Statistics website – 'Average weekly earnings, Australia, Nov 2024'
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Improved social connection	$13,340	The statistical value of a life year ($248,708 in 2024) disability weight of mild to moderate social phobia 0.18. Assume a 30% improvement.	Australian Government, Office of Impact Measurement: Assessing impacts guidance – value of a statistical life
Community Members Community Members' families MMIGP Staff	Improved family relationships	$9,230	Based on wellbeing technique (HACT research), value of being able to rely on family.	UK social value bank
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Improved employability	$3,750	Equivalent to the cost of participation in a Certificate II Registered Training Organisation course – Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways.	Australian Government – myskills website
Community Members MMIGP Staff	Improved confidence in ability to succeed	$3,207	Commensurate with the value of climbing Kilimanjaro. This is a significant experience that becomes part of your life narrative.	Stingy Nomads website – 'Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro Cost and Complete Guide'

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Stakeholder(s)	Outcome	Financial proxy	Rationale	Source
Community Members	Increased financial security	$2,000	Equivalent to being able to raise $2000 in an emergency (part of definition of Financial Resilience).	Financial Resilience in Australia (2017); Centre for Social Impact & National Australia Bank
Employers	Increased awareness of First Nations culture	$3,795	Equivalent to a 4-hour program workshop on Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination. Program is aimed at discussing the establishment of an equitable, productive, inclusive and diverse work environment in organisations.	Diversity Australia website
Employers	Increased awareness of needs of people living with mental health conditions	$5,600	Mental ill-health costs employers an average of $5,600 per employee with severe mental illness per annum in absenteeism and presenteeism.	Mental Health Australia and KPMG, 'Investing to Save', May 2017
Government	Reduced welfare costs	$40,456	Maximum Newstart Allowance before income and asset testing for single adult, no dependents.	Services Australia website
Government	Increased tax revenue	$5,939	TJtW provides employment opportunities for candidates who are or may be unemployed. This creates tax payable to the government.	Fair Work Australia website Australian Tax Office website – tax calculator
Government	Reduced health care costs	$9,597	Total government expenditure on health services per person in 2022-2023 was $9,597. This includes Public Hospitals, Private Hospitals, Patient Transport, Dental Services, Public Health and Other.	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Health expenditure report, Nov 2024

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Stakeholder(s)	Outcome	Financial proxy	Rationale	Source
Government	Reduced social services costs	$924	The number of people experiencing FDV in Australia in 2022 (most recent data) is 2.2M. Total government spending on supporting FDV victims minus welfare and health care payments is $2.03B. Includes costs to police, incarceration, violence prevention programs and the costs to children living with violence i.e. OOHC.	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, FDSV report, Feb 2025

Appendix C Sensitivity analysis

The SROI model has been developed by applying the eight principles of the methodology. Where professional judgment has been required, a conservative approach has been used. However, any approach requiring judgement, assumptions and extrapolation carries the risk of errors in the data and findings. For this reason, a sensitivity analysis has been conducted to understand the influence that variation in some inputs would have on the SROI ratio.

There is potential that the ratio presented in this report is both over and underestimated. The variations explored would result in the ratio varying from **$7.66** through to **$10.37** for every $1 invested. The variations include:

- **Valuing First Nations outcomes –** Within this project**,** First Nations stakeholders requested that the 'Connection to Culture' and 'Connection to Community' outcomes not be valued as they are viewed as priceless. However, in other SROI evaluations with First Nations stakeholders these outcomes have been valued using techniques that align with First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing and with the permission of First Nations stakeholders. One such evaluation is the accredited SROI that was undertaken for the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's (VACCHO) Culture and Kinship evaluation in 2023. Using the average value of the proxies from the VACCHO report for these two outcomes would have raised the SROI to **$9.86.**
- **Accounting for anchoring adjustments** – Stakeholders were asked to rank the outcomes for Community Members and Staff in order of importance. The outcome 'improved self-esteem' was identified by stakeholders as being the most valuable outcome. Using an anchoring approach, the values of all other outcomes were modified to reflect this relative value. In making these adjustments the values of two outcomes, 'improved mental health' and 'improved social connection' were reduced. Estimating the value of the SROI with these original, higher, values would have resulted in the following changes to the SROI:
  - Using the higher value for the 'Improved mental health' proxy would have raised the SROI to **$10.32**
  - Using the higher value for the 'Improved social connection' proxy would have raised the SROI to **$10.37**
- **Attribution –** While the stakeholders who took part in the 2020 WISE Ways to Work SROI were living with similar mental health challenges to the participants in TJtW project, only a small (<5%) of them identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. This contrasts with TJtW project where all participants identify as First Nations. As there is a lack of employment programs specifically for First Nations people living with mental health conditions the changes that Community Members and Staff experience during the project may be higher than those from the WISE Ways to Work project that the modelling draws on. Halving the attribution to things other than the project for Community Member and Staff outcomes would increase the SROI to **$10.21**
- **Benefit Period –** We can also test the assumption that outcomes for this evaluation do not last as long as stated in the WISE Ways to Work model. Reducing the benefit periods for outcomes by one year would reduce the SROI to **$7.66.**

Appendix D The Journey to Work Project

D.1 Project aims and objectives

TJtW project aimed to assist First Nations people with a psychosocial disability to build employment related skills through the delivery of employment orientation activities and individually tailored vocational plans for participants. The objectives of the project included:

- Community Members to build employment related health-management skills, self-awareness and confidence to further their journey to work.
- To provide work-exposure opportunities with First Nations people-run businesses and local employers.
- To build the capability of non-First Nations businesses to provide culturally appropriate environments.
- To build the mental health literacy skills of partner employers engaged with the project by delivering mental health training.

D.2 Organisation capabilities and expertise

WISE IDEA is a centre of best practice in mental health and employment. It brings together experts in mental health and employment to identify and address the barriers to work for people living with mental health conditions. WISE IDEA was funded under the Australian Government's Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program as the lead agency to deliver TJtW project.

Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) that operates on a neighbourhood house model with a strong network that supports community engagement in their region. MMIGP has evolved into a vital grassroots organisation where community members feel a strong sense of belonging. In selecting a First Nations agency project partner, consideration was given to past experiences of working in partnership with the agency, the agencies' culture in terms of a readiness to learn, an understanding of the importance of evaluation and demonstrated practical commitment from staff and senior leaders to deliver the project.

D.3 Staff capabilities and expertise

WISE IDEA staff

The project involved several WISE IDEA staff including an Occupational Therapist (OT), Community Artist, Project Support Officer, Senior Occupational Therapist/Research and Evaluation Lead and WISE IDEA's Director.

The OT allocated to lead and implement the project had experience working with people living with complex mental health conditions, vocational rehabilitation, the NDIS sector in psychosocial disability, and an interest in working with First Nations communities. The OT also completed First Nations Mental Health First Aid and Cultural Awareness Training prior to the project.

The Community Artist was an experienced artist and researcher and has created a wide range of productions in partnership with First Nations agencies, and mentors young artists. They are committed to reconciliation and recognition of Indigenous cultures.

Both the OT and Community Artist were trained in the delivery of the [Optimal Health Program (OHP),](#) which formed a key component of the first stage of TJtW project.

The Project Support Officer was a graduate psychologist with experience working as an employment consultant. This role provided administrative support including meeting scheduling and group/event planning.

The Senior Occupational Therapist/Research and Evaluation Lead has worked in mental health, including community, forensic, and social enterprise sectors. This role provided professional supervision to the OT and evaluation advice.

All WISE IDEA staff are managed by the Director. The Director has held senior leadership roles in mental health services for more than 20 years, leading the development of therapeutic models of care and brokering innovative, collaborative partnerships. These partnerships included working closely with First Nations agencies and Elders.

MMIGP staff

The MMIGP staff were key to the project's development and implementation. This included the Programs Manager and CEO. The Programs Manager is a First Nations staff member who has worked as an Indigenous employment consultant for many years. They had previously worked at WISE Employment including in the WW2W pilot program and have been trained in the delivery of OHP.

The MMIGP Programs Manager was very connected to the Community Members at MMIGP, and their pre-existing relationships and experience meant they were aware of the value of evidence-based programs of support for people living with mental health conditions in their journey to work. Their role functioned as the primary contact point for WISE IDEA, an advocate for the project within MMIGP and an enabler in building a trusting relationship between the partner agencies. At the commencement of the project, MMIGP's CEO had 40 years of experience in the Aboriginal community at local, state and national levels. Their various roles required a high level of responsibility for the social and cultural wellbeing of the Aboriginal community.

D.4   Project governance and structures

WISE IDEA governs projects using project management tools and approaches with:

- defined and resourced project team roles (e.g. Project Lead, Project Sponsor, Occupational Therapist)
- project plan outlining scope, project team, timelines, tasks, deliverables, risks and identified mitigation strategies
- governance structures including a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between partner agencies and Project Steering Group with terms of reference (e.g. outlining the scope of the work, how agency staff work together, frequency of meetings).

The active engagement of senior leaders in both organisations was essential to create an authorising environment for the project. This enables the project staff to work through any challenges with senior leader decision making support as required. The partnership between organisations to support this project must be authentic as characterised by shared goals and purpose, equally valued contributions, responsive service delivery, and a fundamental respect for Community perspectives and beliefs (Ryall et al., 2021).

Guidance and support

Providing regular, high-quality guidance and support by more experienced therapists to TJtW staff was key to the success of the project. Delivered by WISE IDEA's Director and Senior Occupational

Therapist/Research and Evaluation Lead, this guidance enabled reflection and skill development (e.g. clinical capability, maintaining professional roles and boundaries, self-care) required to work as an OT within a First Nations community setting.

Critical reflection, defined as the ability to design, analyse, evaluate and re-adjust practice with the aim of using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophies within practice (Ryall et al., 2021), occurred regularly with both WISE IDEA and MMIGP staff. This supported the OT to understand broader issues within community such as lateral violence, racism and discrimination which were preventing Community Members from participating in activities supportive of their health and wellbeing.

D.5 Practical considerations

WISE IDEA project staff were embedded alongside MMIGP staff for the duration of the project which provided an accessible, familiar and culturally safe environment. Telephone or online sessions were utilised for Community Members unable to attend in person due to location, timing, financial or health challenges. The Group Engagement sessions were run in the middle of the day on a Tuesday and Thursday ensuring that Community Members could attend with minimal impact on their parenting responsibilities and so that a nourishing meal could be shared. Scheduling of groups and individual sessions always worked around important events in the First Nations calendar, and delivery was flexible enough to accommodate unplanned happenings such as Sorry Business. For Community Members unable to participate due to transportation barriers, MMIGP staff and the WISE IDEA OT provided transport when required. This not only enabled participation at sessions, but also the ability to attend special events such as graduations. Text message and telephone prompts were frequently used as reminders to confirm attendance.

D.6 Implementation

Preparation

Building capability together

Prior to the commencement of TJtW, project staff from WISE IDEA and MMIGP engaged in group OHP facilitator training delivered by WISE IDEA. As a licensee of OHP, WISE IDEA worked collaboratively with the licensor to deliver the training and for the Community Artist to update the training slide deck to ensure that the language and graphics used were culturally appropriate. MMIGP and WISE IDEA worked together to identify MMIGP staff with the capability, capacity and connection with Community Members to co-facilitate the Group Engagement sessions in Stage 1 of the project. Training together fostered trust, strengthened collaboration, and deepened an understanding of each organisations' cultural dynamics. Sustainability of the project was supported by the development of a Pathways resource which provides mental health and vocation specific information for MMIGP staff and Community Members.

Embedding WISE IDEA OT

The WISE IDEA OT was based at MMIGP for several days each week to implement the project. In addition, they attended MMIGP staff meetings, engaged regularly with MMIGP staff, attended community and cultural events after hours and occasionally on weekends. This reinforced the development of trust and connection with the entire MMIGP community.

Taking the time to get to know the Community, creating shared partnership goals, shared communication processes and shared accountability was essential for the success of the project. This includes learning about the Community, Community perspectives and beliefs and local histories like prior relationships between First Nations people and service providers (Ryall et al, 2021).

Partnerships

A key element of support for Community Members was connection to external service providers who could provide culturally responsive specific supports as indicated within the Community Member's Vocational Plan. A range of service providers/support agencies were engaged including First Nations, community health, family violence, employment, psychosocial disability, volunteering, higher education and general employers. Partnerships were created to meet practical needs including accessing identity documents essential for work (e.g.: birth registration, passports are required for Police checks and Working with Children checks).

Evaluation

Internal TJtW project evaluation focused on gathering information from the participants about outcomes to understand the effectiveness of the program for the purposes of quality improvement and program enhancement. From experience, project staff were aware that evaluation processes needed to be brief and incorporated into the program delivery (e.g. not separate meetings) as much as possible. Easy to understand, brief qualitative outcome measures were used pre and post completion of Stage 1 and 2. An evaluation co-design approach ensures that agreed outcomes are decided with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about what they want to achieve, particularly around self-determination and empowering their families (Ryall et al, 2021).

Intake

WISE IDEA and MMIGP developed project eligibility criteria where participants: identified as a First Nations Person/or be a parent of a First Nations Person; identified as having a mental health condition; have an employment, volunteering, study or other community engagement goal; have the ability to attend each session whilst not being affected by alcohol or illicit drugs; were willing to participate in a group setting and reflect on their experiences and actions.

MMIGP identified potential participants. Based on existing relationships, a MMIGP staff member was assigned a group of Community Members to invite to an in-person information session which provided opportunities to build rapport between Facilitators and potential participants. As maintaining health and work is important to most people, the MMIGP Facilitators shared their personal journeys and reflections on the benefits of TJtW project. MMIGP staff contacted Community Members via text message and telephone to confirm attendance, and transport assistance was provided if required. Intake sessions took place individually with the OT and interested Community Members and were designed to gather background information and provide more detail and answer questions about TJtW project.

Connecting to Community and Culture

For First Nations people, connection to community and culture underpins all aspects of life and is recognised as integral to health and wellbeing. This connection provides a strong sense of identity, belonging and purpose, elements that are critical in building confidence, resilience and hope for the future. Connecting to community and culture was a foundational aspect of delivery of this project and is reflected through some examples below:

- delivering the project from MMIGP's sites or locations with cultural significance, with easy access to MMIGP staff who could be role models and provide guidance and support,
- using smoking ceremonies both as welcome to/acknowledgement of country to foster cultural and spiritual grounding
- partner employers participating in cultural awareness education to promote inclusive, culturally safe workplaces.

Group engagement

Stage 1 of the project focused on participation in the 8-week group program with twice weekly sessions:

- One weekly session was the modified evidence-based health management program (the OHP) curriculum. Modification focused on adapting the content to meet the cultural needs of Community Members, e.g. health management included traditional health management methods. Sessions were co-facilitated by the OT and MMIGP staff.
- One weekly session was based on creative activity which supported Community Members to connect with their culture and build capability for expression e.g.: visual diaries including drawing, poetry and materials from nature walks, cultural dance and yarning circles. Sessions were co-facilitated by the WISE IDEA Community Artist and MMIGP staff.
- Co-facilitation ensured cultural safety, trust and engagement with Community Members and effective Facilitator support to participants (group size ranged from 5 to 15).

In addition to the 8-week program, four weeks focused on building on the progress made through the group sessions and providing opportunities for exposure to potential vocational pursuits. This included:

- worksite tours including a tour and question and answer session with a Melbourne-based Aboriginal social enterprise
- employer presentations by local employers and partner organisations showcasing opportunities for different volunteer or paid roles tailored for First Nations community members
- celebratory events which provided an opportunity for Community Members and MMIGP to share their experience of the project.

Individual support

Stage 2 of the project focused on Community Members participating in individual sessions with the OT to explore vocational goals and develop a tailored vocational plan. This stage provided the opportunity to extend support for Community Members' journey to work over a longer period if they had participated in Stage 1, noting that new community members could participate in Stage 2 even if they did not participate in Stage 1. This stage involved:

- undertaking an OT assessment focusing on the Community Members' strengths and challenges
- development of a vocational plan including the identification of vocational goals and recommendations
- individual sessions focused on supporting Community Members to work toward identified goals – sessions were primarily focused on management of daily living activities to prepare for work including routines and interests and accessing cultural supports; and finding a suitable role (work, study, volunteering) including readiness and connections with partner organisations.

If indicated by the Community Members' identified needs, group sessions were delivered which provided an opportunity for ongoing peer support, yarning, sharing a meal and a special focus on a topic relevant to the Community Members. Examples of this include sessions focused on 'Getting Ready for Work' including discussion about volunteering and obtaining necessary documentation for work, and 'Racism at Work', a mob-only session led by the MMIGP CEO.

The frequency and duration of individual sessions was tailored to each Community Member's needs. Typically, sessions occurred fortnightly, progressing to monthly or every second month for those who were actively engaged in vocational roles. Some Community Members accessed weekly sessions for a period to assist them to navigate specific challenges and manage unexpected or unfamiliar life situations. Sessions ranged from brief telephone check-ins to extended in-person sessions that involved connecting with MMIGP staff if time-sensitive support issues arose.

The WISE IDEA OT used a strengths-based approach, ensuring that they listened deeply with interest and compassion and used communication skills including asking open ended questions and promoting strengths-based language. This included questions such as: *What are the things that are important to you? How do you usually do X?* and *How do you like to spend your time?* This ensured that Community Members led the conversation and shared the parts of their story that were the most defining to them and their social and emotional wellbeing (Ryall et al., 2021).

Furthermore, throughout the Community Member's journey it was essential for the OT to support informed decision-making by learning about what solutions or directions that the person wishes to take, respecting their right to decide what they need, and recognise that any decision needs to belong to and make sense to the person (Ryall et al., 2021).

Workplace support

A part of Individual Support, this provided targeted sustainable support once the Community Member was in a work, study or volunteering role. Support is aimed at providing specific strategies to overcome doubts and challenges to thrive in their vocational role. Examples include liaison with employers for reasonable adjustments tailored to the Community Member's needs, coaching around decision-making, time and energy management, workplace problem-solving and communication, referral to health providers and building readiness skills such as routine development, and managing cognitive demands. It is not just the OT and MMIGP staff that provided support to Community Members; through the learnings of Group Engagement and Individual Support, the connections they have made with other Community Members and the broader Community meant that there were many people they can trust to help them, and some people can provide support to themselves.

D.7   Key learnings

- Embedding the staff in, and delivering the project from, an ACCO supports engagement of Community Members by increasing cultural safety and reducing access barriers (e.g. transport to the program).
- Embedding staff outside of their 'parent' organisation is likely to result in some degree of acculturation; the process by which people learn and adopt the values and norms of a culture. While acculturation is desirable to some extent to support effective navigation of complex social relationships between Community Members and understanding their needs in a cultural context, this should be balanced with professional role requirements.
- The long-term nature of this project and consistent project staff allows time for all project staff and Community members, to get to know each other and support the development of strong, trusting relationships.
- Defined responsibilities of partner organisations, governance structures and roles support accountability and working together toward the same goals.
- Maintaining open lines of informal and formal communication and being flexible with timelines allowed the project to adapt to challenges or accommodate unplanned cultural needs (e.g. Sorry Business).
- The importance of food when Community gathered: sharing nutritious meals can be celebratory, comforting and nourishing: noting at times, this was the only substantial meal that day for some Community Members.
- Ensuring culturally and person relevant program content increased engagement and motivation to participate.
- Recognition of participation and progress built self-esteem, self-efficacy and pride.
- Working in partnership led to more sustainable outcomes, but partners must invest time and effort in the relationships.
- Community Members consistently preferred yarning as a method of evaluation.

- Providing resources (e.g. calendars and stationery) and developing timetables encouraged reflection and planning and encouraged alignment where they may be differences of perceptions of time.

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