

FAMILY WELLBEING (FWB) COMMUNITY REPORT 2021 – 2025

Five (5) Years of Empowerment in Action



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*This report shares the stories and impacts of the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program between 2021 and 2025. It focuses on people's voices and experiences – the qualitative findings.

It is a shorter, user-friendly version of the full report titled: ***Walking Together: Translating 20 Years of Family Wellbeing Research in Practice to Strengthen Wellbeing and Bridge Gaps in Community Engagement Frameworks.***

Separate reports will present the numbers and statistics (quantitative findings), including results from the Mayi Kuwayu study and a more comprehensive economic evaluation by Deloitte partners.

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Photo Courtesy of Francis John Maloney

Why We're Sharing this Report

This report is about the changes that came from the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program, an Aboriginal developed group empowerment program.

Over five years, from 2021 to 2025, the program was run in Yarrabah and other northern Australian communities. We want to show how the program helped people, families, and communities grow stronger.

Key messages from the report

What's Working!

Over the past five years, hundreds of people across our communities have walked the Family Wellbeing (FWB) journey.

Two in three people who start the program complete it. Many shares life-changing stories of healing, strength, and new hope.

Healing Open Doors

When people heal from past hurts, rebuild confidence, and reconnect with culture, they can step up – into jobs, further training, and leadership. But healing alone is not enough. For wellbeing to translate into real employment and education outcomes, strong community support and sustained government funding are urgently needed. Without this, too many of our young people will remain locked out of opportunity.



Value for Money – Big Impact, Small Investment

Every dollar spent on FWBY can return up to six times its value to stronger, safer, more empowered communities. It's proven. It's affordable. It makes sense.

The Urgent Next Step: Fully Implement Yarrabah 7-Pillar Strategy

Yarrabah 7-Pillar Strategy is a bold, community-led plan to support young people from healing into jobs and education. But it cannot succeed without proper funding and community backing. We need government and partners to step up and invest – now.

FWB is Ready to Grow but Can't Do it Alone.

FWB works because it's led by skilled, trusted local facilitators. Short-term, insecure funding puts them – and the future of the program – at risk. Without them, the program cannot hold its power.

A National Home for FWB

A new National FWB Centre will train more facilitators and researchers; support community-led delivery and evaluation; mentor the next generation of Indigenous Leaders.

Why FWB Matters for Our Communities

FWB Supports families to heal, grow, and lead. FWB helps young people stay in school, find jobs, and step into leadership. FWB is a proven, cost-effective way to create lasting change. But without strong community support and long-term government funding, FWB and community plans like the Yarrabah 7-Pillar Strategy cannot reach their full potential. Together, we can grow FWB and empower the next generation. The time to act is now.



How It All Started

Yarrabah is 56km south of Cairns. It is Australia's largest Aboriginal community, with around 3000 people. Most people here are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Back in 2018, the Yarrabah Leaders Forum (YLF) – a group of local leaders and service providers – created a big plan for the future of the community. They called it the “6 Pillar” and later “7 Pillar Strategy”. The goal was to build a safer, smarter, employed, healthier, and stronger community.

This plan focuses on important areas like.

1. **Safe community:** Making our community safe.
2. **Employed community:** Helping people to be financially secure and off welfare
3. **Smart Community:** Ensuring everyone has the capacity for lifelong learning.
4. **Sustainable Community:** Developing Infrastructure that meets the community's needs.
5. **Healthy Community:** Ensuring everyone is healthy, and the community is freed from preventable disease and illness.
6. **Culture: Country, Culture, Arts and Tourism:** – Strengthen and unify the Yarrabah Community through connection to Country & Culture.
7. **Supportive Foundations:** Building values, principles, standards, family support, and funding to help construct the desired community (Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, 2022).

By 2024-2025, the plan aimed to deliver real changes; new housing, a ferry service to Cairns, more tourists visiting, and more local jobs. The idea was to build up local skills and keep the benefits with the community.

But the leaders also knew something important; before people could get and keep jobs, they needed to feel strong on the inside. They needed good emotional health, confidence, and support.

That's where Family Wellbeing (FWB) came in. It sits under the 7th Pillar which is Support Pillar for the other 6 pillars.

What is Family Wellbeing (FWB)?

FWB is a program that helps people feel stronger, more confident, and more in control of their lives. It focuses on healing, empowerment and hope – especially for people who have faced tough times, like the impacts of colonization, racism, prejudice and the trauma of the Stolen Generation.

The Program was first created by Aboriginal people more than 30 years ago. But it is useful for everyone. It helps people deal with grief, loss, disconnection, and finding meaning in life.

FWB was delivered by Wugu Nyambil, the local Job Provider in Yarrabah. Wugu Nyambil believe job readiness isn't just about skills – it's about feeling emotionally ready for work too.

Who was Involved in the Project?

The FWB project was a strong team effort. The Yarrabah Leaders Forum (YLF) member Organisation committed to providing a furnished office and workshop space as in-kind support, while a donor funded salaries for the FWB team and operational costs. The FWB team was employed through Wugu Nyambil, and governance was retained by the YLF to ensure ongoing adaptation to local needs.

Key People Included:

- Fr. Leslie Baird and Prof. Komla Tsey – provided leadership and facilitator training through James Cook University (JCU) and from 2025, Central Queensland University (CQU).
- Lyndell Thomas (Coordinator and Female Facilitator) & Fred Mundraby (Male Facilitator) led the local work in Yarrabah Community. Other local people, including Evette Mundraby, employed casual facilitators and researchers from Wugu Nyambil.
- Karen Khan from Batchelor Institute as Facilitator for NT communities
- Dr. Mary Whiteside from La Trobe University Dept. of Social Work, who supported the facilitators through debriefings and preparing quarterly reflective reports.
- Professor Ray Lovett, Dr. Chris McKay, and the Mayi Kuwayu team at ANU supported the collection of surveys which help us to understand quantitative impacts.
- Rosie Bridge and Grace Holland from Deloitte who looked at the economic impacts of change.

Where and how was the Program Delivered?

The FWB program was adapted to fit different places and people. It was delivered as a short course in.

- Yarrabah & Lotus Glen Prison – over 10-12 weeks
- Apunipima Cape York and the Torres Strait – in two-day workshops for frontline workers
- Batchelor Institute (NT) – in one-week blocks for community groups in places like Maningrida and Alice Spring.

Topics in the program included:

- Human Strengths
- Life Journey
- Beliefs and Relationships
- Coping with Crisis and Grief
- Emotional Wellbeing
- Setting Goals

Sessions on financial wellbeing and enterprise development were later added in Yarrabah and Lotus Glen through the Yarrabah Business Development Hub.

Where the information in this Community Report comes from

To keep track of how things were going, the team did a few important things

1. They wrote down who came and what was talked about in the workshop/attendance sheet
2. They asked people what they learned and how they used it in their life. This feedback was written up in reports after each course. These reports were shared with participants, their families, and local organisations. There were 23 of these reports made across different project sites by 2025.
3. They wrote a short reflective report every 3 months about what was working well and what could be better. These reports were shared with the project partners. There were 13 reports written by 2025.

The team used this information to show how far the program was achieved, and what kind of difference it made in people's lives.

They looked closely at who came, what was said in the 23 workshop reports, and what was written in the 13 facilitator reports. This helped them to understand what the program achieved and what it meant for the communities and organisations involved.

Because the stories and feedback showed strong social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) outcomes, the team decided to go one step further. Even though it's not usually done this way, they used qualitative feedback to estimate the value of the program in dollar terms.

This was a first step, with the understanding that a full and more detailed economic evaluation will be done by Deloitte partners once the findings from the Mayi Kuwayu study are available.

This early estimate builds on a previous Return on Investment (ROI) study done in Yarrabah and includes what the program cost, as well as the benefits people said they experienced. It's a way of showing how programs like FWB can be both meaningful for people and a smart investment.



What We Found: The Impact of Family Wellbeing (FWB)

How Many People Took Part.

From 2021 to May 2025, the FWB program reached 783 people across six different places in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Of these, 517 people completed the course, which means a 66% completion rate – a strong result that shows people stayed with it because it made sense for them and their lives.

Where People took part (2021 – 2025)

Location	No. of People Attended	No. of People Completed
Yarrabah	538	313
Batchelor/NT	91	82
Lotus Glen Prison	82	53
Apunipima	42	41
Torres Strait	16	15
Shanty Creek Alcohol Rehabilitation	14	13
TOTAL	783	517

(Note: “Attended” means someone joined the program. “Completed” means they finished it. 2025 data is only up to May.)

Highlights from the Sites

- Yarrabah, the lead project community, had the most people take part – 538 people over five (5) years, with 313 completing.
- The gender balance was 51% women and 49% men, showing FWB speaks to everyone.
- Participation in Yarrabah grew each year, peaking at 221 people in 2024.
- Lotus Glen Prison saw 82 men attended, with 53 completing – showing the program worked even in tough settings like prisons.
- Batchelor/NT had a very high completion rate (90%), showing the program works well in remote communities too.



What People Said – Changes in their Lives

Stronger Personal and Emotional Wellbeing – Yarrabah

“The Program was excellent – healing for me”

“FWB took a lot of stress of me”.

“I’m eating better, exercising, watching my words, budgeting, living by my values”.

“I’ve given up alcohol – it’s been five (5) years now.”

Stronger Families – Yarrabah

“I’ve started loving myself in a healthy way – and showing that love to my family and kids”.

“FWB is now part of how I parent, especially with my grandkids”.

“I talk more with my family. We’ve had deep talks about life and love”.

“Women who were shy at first are speaking up”.

More Involved in Community – Yarrabah

“FWB helped me face my fears. I’m getting more involved with other women in the community”.

“We meet every Tuesday. We help each other. We understand each other”.

“We’re using FWB to support young people and families, especially around grief”.

New Leaders and Small Business – Yarrabah

Some people used what they learned to start small businesses or community projects:

- Nerridean & Lavin Keyes started a lawn mowing business with a second-hand push mower. Now they have a new sit on mower and now have a contract with Yarrabah Shire Council for Parks & Gardens Maintenances.
- Bernice Stafford teaches flower arranging.
- Fred Mundraby a former professional / champion in the Australian Boxing League is now teaching youths and adults fitness training through his part-time business “Mala Bulmba” as well as “Gutter-Cleaning”.
- Evette Mundraby has taken on FWB in outreach, visiting Elders in the community
- Christopher Harris considered a “master” potter in Yarrabah. Chris participated in the FWB program which regained his confidence after facing financial hardship after his retirement. Chris was re-employed back to the Art Centre to create more pottery and sold \$9000 work of art, bought a new car and now mentors’ other young artists.
- Fr. Leslie Baird delivers FWB fee-for-service to Cape Communities through Apunipima.

Voices from Other Places: What FWB Meant to them!

Better Personal Wellbeing

"It opened my eyes; I learned things about myself". (Torres Strait)

"I saw how our basic needs and life journey affect our problems". (Apunipima)

"It helped me see where I went wrong and how to fix it". (Lotus Glen Prison)

"I've set goals: get a license, buy a car, find a job." (NT)

"I've bottled things up for years – this opened the door to healing." (Torres Strait).

"It helps men talk about their emotions." (Lotus Glen Prison)

"I get depressed sometimes. Now I've got tools to help." (Apunipima).

Stronger Relationships and Community

"I always had relationship problems. I learned about 'Relationships' and will use what I learned." (Lotus Glen)

"I learned ways to deal with family problems." (NT)

"I want to be a role model for my kids and community." (Lotus Glen)

"I'll use this program with my own family first." (Apunipima)

"I help others understand mental and physical health, especially for teens." (NT)

"Inmates ask me for advice—I always say, 'Do the FWB course!'" (Lotus Glen)

More Skills and Leadership in Work

"It reminded us that all people share the same basic needs. That helps in our jobs." (Apunipima)

"The topics relate to what we do every day". (Apunipima)

"This course helped me become better at running workshops in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities." (Apunipima)

"I see FWB as a great tool to help families understand themselves better." (Lotus Glen)

"FWB gives us skills – but also a stronger sense of who we are". (NT)



How Much is FWB Value for Money?

Understanding the Impact in Dollar Terms

While this report focuses on the powerful social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) changes reported by participants, early estimates also show the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program delivers excellent value for money.

- **Estimated Return on Investment (ROI):** For every \$1 invested in FWB between 2021 and 2025, the estimated return ranges from \$2.20 to \$6.40 in social and economic benefits.
- **Cost-Effective Impact:** With an average cost of just \$3,288 per person, the program reached 517 people who completed it—and many more who benefited indirectly or partially.
- **Real-World Benefits:** These returns are based on improvements like better mental health, reduced substance use, stronger family relationships, increased employment and community involvement, and fewer interactions with the justice system.
- **More Than Just Dollars:** These figures don't capture deeper, long-term impacts—like strengthened identity, cultural pride, or community healing, which participants often say are the most powerful outcomes.

This early economic analysis, based on conservative estimates, strongly supports what participants have been saying for years: FWB works. A more detailed return-on-investment study will be completed by Deloitte once national survey data is available

What We've Learned & Where We're Heading

FWB Works — And It Pays Off

After five years of implementation across Northern Australia, the message is loud and clear: **FWB changes lives**—and delivers **real value for money**.

Return on Investment (ROI): For every \$1 invested in Family Wellbeing between 2021 and 2025, the estimated social and economic return is **\$2.20 to \$6.40**.

Average cost per participant? Just \$3,288.

This includes improved mental health, reduced substance use, stronger families, future employment, fewer justice system interactions—and most importantly, stronger communities.

But participants remind us:

“The best outcomes can't be measured in dollars—like pride, healing, and feeling human again.”

This early ROI analysis builds on past evaluations and participant voices. A full economic evaluation by Deloitte partners will follow once survey data from the Mayi Kuwayu Study becomes available.

We Know It Works – But We Must Do More

1. People Feel the Impact Early. Nearly 800 people have experienced FWB since 2021, including over 500 in Yarrabah. Most feel a shift early on – often saying, “why didn’t anyone teach us this when we were young?” Yet many also grow tired of repeating their stories for evaluation. Their challenge to us: “What more proof does people need to believe that FWB works?”

2. One Size Doesn’t Fit All – And that’s a Strength.

- Older Job Seekers found healing, purpose, and strength to support their community.
- Younger participants, rangers and justice-involved people often found the confidence to pursue study or work.
- But many still hit systemic barriers – rigid systems that don’t account for trauma, healing, or readiness.

If healing is the missing piece, FWB fills that gap—getting people emotionally strong before asking them to take on new training or jobs.

3. Right People, Right Support

FWB relies on facilitators with deep cultural wisdom and emotional intelligence. These are not just “trainers”—they’re frontline healers and leaders. But the work is tough and under-resourced. We need long-term investment in this unique workforce—or risk losing them.

4. Real Empowerment Needs Systemic Backing

In Yarrabah, FWB inspired many to take the next step—but often, there was nowhere to go. The community’s 7-pillar plan outlines a bold vision for local jobs, training, and development. Without real backing from governments and funders, community-led efforts get stuck.

5. The Risk of Leaving People Behind

National government goals like 80% in further education by 2050 will fail unless we build systems that include and empower First Nations communities—on their terms.



What's Next: Building a National Family Wellbeing Centre for Healing, Hope and Impact

Given the rising rates of First Nations incarceration, suicide, family violence, and child removals, the time for scalable, evidence-based action is now.

The Family Wellbeing (FWB) program has shown it can break cycles of trauma, strengthen cultural identity, and nurture leadership across generations. But to meet growing demand and sustain impact on scale, the next chapter of FWB requires national coordination, rigorous evaluation, and long-term investment.

Together with the Yarrabah Leaders Forum and Central Queensland University, we are working to establish a National FWB Centre—a living hub for healing, innovation, training and transformation.

This Centre will lead the translation of best practice and culturally congruent family support research and experiential knowledge into real-world practice and systematically evaluate outcomes, including return on investment.

It will also serve as a national voice advocating for greater recognition and sustainable funding for family support across Australia. To ensure long-term sustainability, the Centre will draw on a diverse mix of funding partnerships—bringing together universities, philanthropy, and public-private investment.

It will also invest in mentoring and resourcing the next generation of FWB research practitioners, ensuring strong leadership succession as founding leaders begin to transition toward retirement.

Walking Together Toward Impact

FWB is more than a program—it is a nation-building tool rooted in empowerment, healing, and hope. With over two decades of evidence and the backing of strong First Nations leadership, we are ready to scale its reach and deepen its impact

FWB works. FWB pays off. The time to grow it is now.

This summary is based on the report: Walking Together: Translating 20 Years of Family Wellbeing Research into Practice to Strengthen Wellbeing and Bridge Gaps in Community Engagement Frameworks



Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of Cleveland Fagan, a key architect of the Yarrabah Leadership Forum 7 Pillar Development Strategy.

Thank You

We want to say a big thank you to all the people who joined the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program. Thank you for attending the sessions, sharing your stories, and helping each other along the way. You are the heart of this work!

- We thank the Yarrabah Leaders Forum for having the big idea to start this project. Your strong and dedicated leadership made it happen.
- We thank our previous facilitators Roszaly Aitken and Ross Maloney who supported FWB delivery in Yarrabah.
- We thank the Lowitja Institute and the research centres before it. You believed in using research to help make real change in our communities. You also gave us the first bit of money to start this project, which helped us get more support.
- We thank the kind and visionary Australian Donor who gave long term support.
- Finally, we thank Robert Friskin, Suzanne Andrews, Ruth Fagan, Ross Andrews, Anita Lee Hong, Ailsa Lively, Bettina Rosser, Melissa Thomas, Helen Tait, Dewayne Mundraby, Marcianne Wala Wala, George Pascoe, Leon Yeatman, Ray Lovett, Leonie Williamson, Nadine Hunt, Chris McKay, Rosie Bridge, Clare Nolan, Grace Holland, Jacqueline Cameron, Ann Nicholls, Elissa Williams, Tanya Parker, Carmel Pedron, Claire Walker, Professor Janya McCalman, Rachael Ham, Peta Readeaux, Ella Kris, Susannah Mosby, Professor Yvonne Cadet-James, our funding partners, and many others who have helped us along the way. Your support means a lot to us.



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