

## MAKE A NIGHT OR BREAK A NIGHT: ABORIGINAL YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL

National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University and Moorditj Keila South Perth Aboriginal Community Group (Southcare Inc)

I won't be able to drink much now. I've been to rehab, I've been to jail, everything. It's all catching up on me now. I just don't - I feel sick when I drink. So I'll have a few beers every now and then and leave it as that. Plus sometimes if I get really drunk and I go out, something bad always happens (male 18 yrs).

My mum said, 'I don't drink it because who cares if it tastes like lollies or not?' Then, that's why I was like, I didn't want to do it again because it's going to harm me. Anyway who cares if I don't like drinks? I don't even swear. I go to church every Sunday. I always have my speech. I'm really good at talking and all of that (female 12 yrs).

Well, one of my friends, she was drunk with a bottle and she laid on the train track, this was when we were younger and said, 'I want to die, I want to die' and all this, and then we had to get her off the track, because I was drunk too. Yeah, we had to grab her, get her up (female 19 yrs).

When we started to fight with some boys, it was because he was swearing at my little sister. It just turned out even bigger than what it should have got because we were arguing all the way for two or three years. Every time we'd seen each other we would just start fighting. I would end up getting like weapons and all that, like bricks, poles, whatever we got with to fight (male 18 yrs).

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Authors: Mandy Wilson, Jocelyn Jones, Julia Butt, Ted Wilkes and Dena Gower

Illustrations: Daniel Wilkes, Samuel Anderson Jones and Lily Wilson

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**WARNING: This book contains strong language.**





# Foreword

The National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) at Curtin University is a leading research centre that is helping to prevent and reduce alcohol and other drug-related harm in Australia. 'Drinking in the Suburbs', or as the young people renamed it, 'Make a Night or Break a Night', was a collaboration between Moorditj Keila Aboriginal Community Group (Southcare Inc.) and NDRI.

The concept for Drinking in the Suburbs was developed in 2011 after the Aboriginal community expressed concern about their young people drinking and getting into trouble on the trains in Perth. Thirty-two Aboriginal young people were interviewed about their experiences with drinking and their knowledge of health promotion materials and messages. From the onset Aboriginal youth were involved in the planning, recruitment, implementation and analysis of data. Young people have gradually been recognised as having the right to a voice in decisions that affect them and research which is about them.

Their experiences with alcohol tell a story of being an Aboriginal youth, experimenting with alcohol at an early age, and the challenges of drinking to fit in or socialise with their peer group and family. Riding the trains featured as a significant activity, where they would meet up to hang out together, drink and fight their enemies.

Most of the research and stories we hear about Aboriginal youth are negative. However, we know Aboriginal youth are doing positive things in their lives and communities that need to be acknowledged.

Aboriginal youth also have knowledge and new ideas that can help create positive change in their own communities. The young people suggested insightful and practical strategies to improve the effectiveness of health promotion messages.

The drinking and fighting amongst Aboriginal youth is common knowledge in the community, and the young people described in detail to the researchers the reasons around why they are on the trains and why they drink. Participants gave various scenarios to provide a better understanding of how it went down. An emerging pattern from the study was the experiences girls had of drinking and fighting - this issue is going to be explored in more depth in a follow up study called 'Fighting, Alcohol and Offending: Interventions Targeting Aboriginal Girls' funded by Healthway.

The young people also talked about positive things in their lives. Not surprisingly, they focused on how maintaining connections to their family, their community, and culture was important to them. They also talked about their dreams and aspirations for the future, such as finding a job and owning a car. The quotes of these young people reflect disadvantage, achievement and hope.

I sincerely thank the young people who participated in the interviews which enabled us to get their voices to be heard through the production of this book.

**Jocelyn Jones, Research Fellow, NDRI**

# Why young people drink

Some just do it for fun, to go with their mates, have a good time for the night ... I drink just to have a good night with my family (male 18 yrs).

I think I drink alcohol to block everything out, like so I don't have to deal with what's going on in my life and I don't have to deal with anybody. I just do my own thing, and then when I get drunk everybody has to deal with me instead of me dealing with everybody else and situations what go on in my life (female 18 yrs).



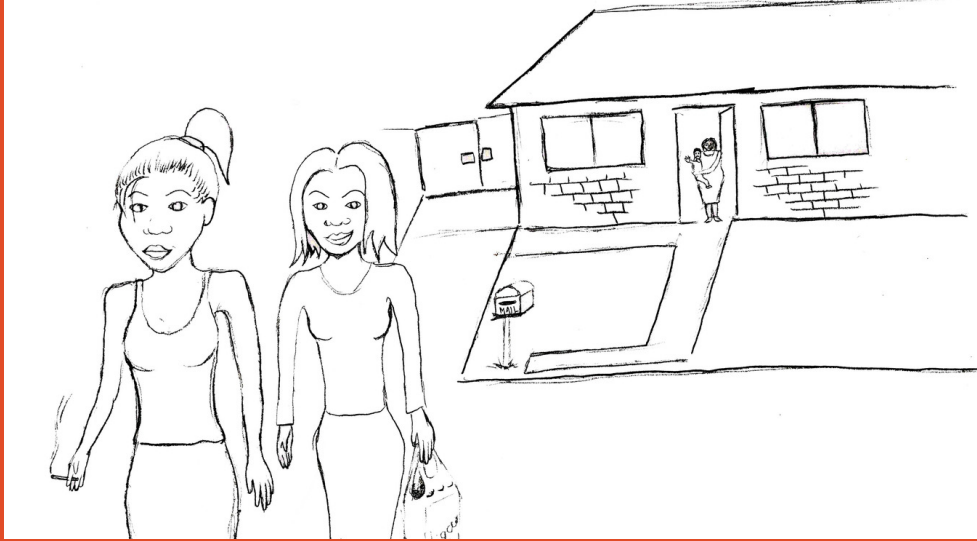
I think some of them do it to fit in with the crowd. If they're not doing it they think they're going to miss out on something when really you're not missing out on anything. They think it's cool to go out and get drunk (female 15 yrs).

So they drink because of depression or they drink because their parents don't treat them like they want to be treated or their friends don't treat them the way they want to be treated (male 18 yrs).

I don't know, like because they think they're little big shots or something (female 12 yrs).

I just like the feeling when you're drunk (male 17 yrs).

# A good night



Just went to the casino [with a friend], got drunk and come back home ... I was just a bit stressed and it just took all the stress off me to get away, to have a bit of space from baby. Me and my partner was arguing at the same time. He was gone. So yeah, it just felt good to be on my own and be with someone I could talk to and hang out with and have a drink with (female 19 yrs).

When there's all of my cousins and you just all sat around, back yard or go to the park and kick the footy around, have a game of footy. All having a good drink together ... just a little family day or something like that. With all the boys and whatever else. Other family (male 17 yrs).

Being out to the bush, drinking with a few cousins, uncles and that. Run amok in the bush. They're good days ... there's no one telling us what we can do in the bush and maybe we're just running amok and doing what we want to do (male 18 yrs).



# A bad night



A lot of things can happen to them, whether it's dangerous because they don't know what they're doing – like they have no control of their body. They can end up anywhere ... They could get mugged, bashed, things could be stolen off them, raped and all that (female 15 yrs).

Anything can happen, literally anything. You know like if you drown in water that day - you fall face down anywhere – you could be drunk as, fall down, fucking pass out in Freo, knock yourself out by accident and be in your own pile of vomit or your own puddle of blood, and that's it. Anything can happen. Anything. Doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter how big of a man you think you are, or how much you think you can drink. That's it. You know? Once you're drunk, then you're in a whole different world (male 18 yrs).

I was running with a couple of girls and after we'd get drunk we'd always end up doing something stupid, always break into a car or try and steal a car or something. But most of the time we was breaking into cars was to get home (female 17 yrs).

And alcohol affects people when they have sex. It's like under the influence of alcohol you just go for it and when you're sober you're thinking, 'what the hell happened last night?' (male 18 yrs).



# Why I don't drink



Because it can make my brain go small and like it could ruin my future, yeah, and I don't want my future being ruined (female 12 yrs).

When my mum, brother and that and sister and that comes over they start drinking, start getting a bit weary and that. It's just because I lived up watching people drinking, drunk, fighting, and I don't want that life. Like my whole life seeing what happens when people drink. It's not good (male 18 yrs).

I just couldn't remember the next day and then I woke up at my cousin's house, didn't even know how I got there. I was like no stuff that. Someone can get hurt - I could get hurt because it's dangerous, didn't even know where you are (male 15 yrs).



# Trains and train stations

Friday nights just go along the train line. Just go to Oats Street [train station]. Nothing's at Oats Street, go back to Gosnells and everyone would be at Gosnells [train station] then, just sitting around Gosnells drinking – they would all sit around drinking and fighting and all that (male 18 yrs).

To see friends, see old friends if you're doing – usually I see a lot of friends and just get off and drink with them and then our group gets bigger and end up getting back on trains (female 19 yrs).



I don't really go there all the time. It's like a second option if the night's boring where I am at. I just go there to see people I know. See what they are up to. [What's happening at the train station?] Everyone's just being uncivilised (male 16 yrs).

I had a fight on the train station, but I mean once you realise that you had it like, you could end up killing somebody; like if they roll on the train and they get knocked out, unconscious, and then the train could be like coming in two minutes and then it's like are they going to get up? Like I mean you feel bad after everything, but I have known a few people that have been knocked out on the trains and knocked out on the platforms (female 17 yrs).

# Relationships with transit officers



When they get on the train the first people they walk up to and ask is the black people, for their tickets. They don't give us – Friday night they don't even worry about asking anyone else, just check the black people and that's it. Then they'll fine us and jump off (male 19 yrs).

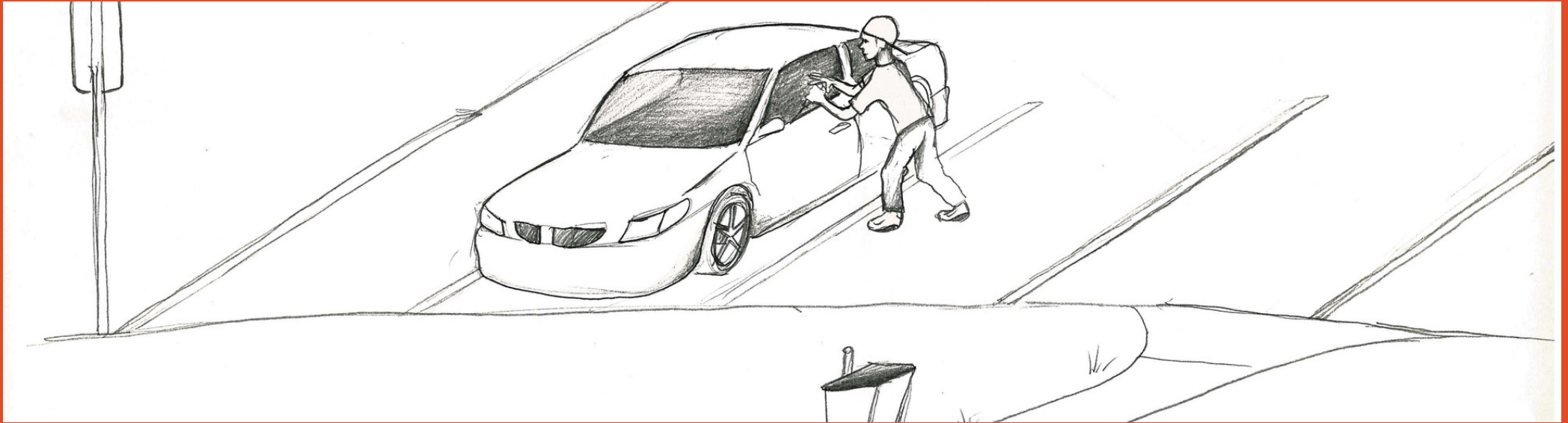
Because they'll be way up the other side of the train line and if they see us black kids get on there, bang, they'll walk all the way down here and ask us for our tickets and walk back up (male 18 yrs).

I got really, really intoxicated and I got taken into the back of a paddy wagon. I was swearing at transit guards, yeah, I was really drunk and then they were all like [next time they saw her], 'Oh, hi, how are you?' – I'm like 'hmm, do I know you?' 'Last Thursday'. Oh, embarrassing! (female 19 yrs).

Just don't be too loud and that when you've got your drink on you. That's more or less – I don't know if they don't know if you're having a drink or they just let you go. But if you're quiet enough for them to not draw attention then you should be right (male 18 yrs).



# Experiences with the criminal justice system



They [police] target me and my mate all the time. Like I see them pull people over, they let them go. They pull me over, I have to take my shoes off, I have to take my jumper off, I have to take my belt off. They punch me everywhere, everything. It's just like for what? (male 18 yrs).

I've got a lot of charges at the moment, but that's all before I got pregnant. Breaking into people's houses and that. I dunno why, I was just really angry about my past. Going through domestic violence at a young age as well (female 17 yrs).

They [young people] don't know what the consequences are. They don't. People say they don't care. At the end of the day when you're locked up, behind big, brick walls, away from your family it's a different story ... It doesn't really matter if your family's in there or not, it's more about your loved ones. The ones you love on the outside (male 17 yrs).



# Fighting

Facebook is a pain in the arse and it just causes a lot of arguments because people write to this person this-and-that and then that person says well, meet me at this place on Thursday night and me and you will smash it out. Then that's how fights happen. Everyone reads it on Facebook, a smash happening in Booragoon or Gateways, then everyone rocks up, watches the smash. Then one of them goes home bruised ... (male 18 yrs).

It's all liquid courage. I don't go to parties to start trouble but when I'm drunk and then drunk people try to put their arm over me or talk shit to me, I hate it. I start clicking in the head. I can literally hear clicks in my head. Then I just snap, that's it. (male 18 yrs).

Well I don't fight, it's just when they talk about my family – because that's just, you know, I get really angry and I can't control my anger sometimes and I just let loose (female 15 yrs).



# Fighting



I just feel bad in the morning [after a fight]. Then there are just other times when you can't wait to see them next time because you just want to hit them. It's stupid (female 20 yrs).

There was about four blokes hitting my mate down the road. He had a fight with them. They rang us up and said that they [the other guys] mobbed them. So we went for a walk, we spotted them and we walked up and chipped them. So we had a smash with them and then I took one over here and then we just saw them all running – they was all running around just four of them. Then they all grouped back up together and I ran at the pack because my mate was there, they was mobbing my mate. So I run and tried to hit one, I hit one. Another fella come from the side, picked me up and dropped me straight on my back. Stomping me. Grabbed a brick and dropped it straight on my head then (male 18 yrs).

I don't know. It starts with one person mob one person and then it starts from there. Then he's going to get mobbed and then you're going to get mobbed from the others – some [others] will start fighting. Then he'll get hit with a machete or something and then it starts from there (male 16 yrs).



# Strategies for keeping safe



Oh what I do to keep safe – be aware of where you're going to sit; be aware what's around. So if you were drinking like at train stations, don't get too close to the edge (female 17 yrs).

I'd have a few mates with me and also a few guys. These guys are from school and our friendship is really strong. Yeah, we'd just stick in groups and stuff (female 15 yrs).

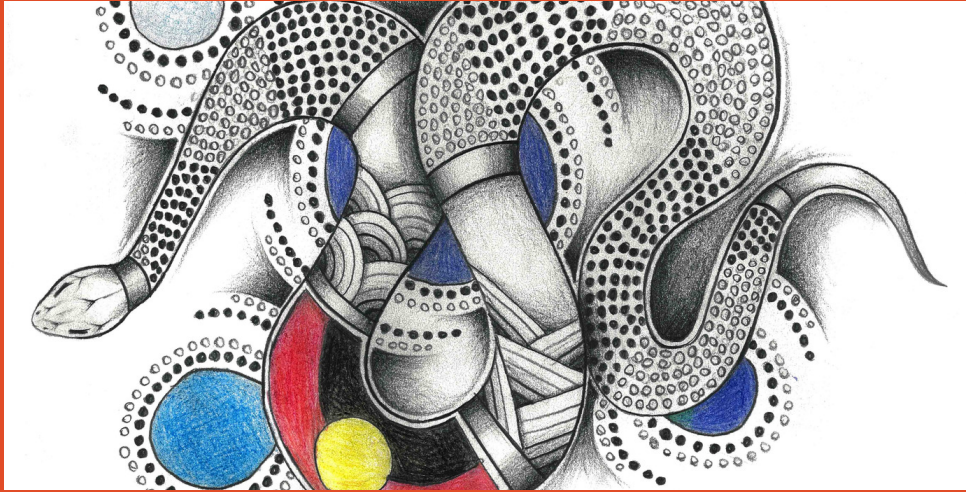
Hanging out at the back of whoever I'm with. Hang out at the back, so I can see what's going on. If someone wanted to walk off or anything else happens. Well, I make sure that I can see what's going on around me (male 17 yrs).



I found out if I drink with a couple of people I will go out stealing, but if I drink with heaps of people, I just stay there and just party (male 17 yrs).



# Health promotion



I'd do a stand up thing and say, 'Well you don't want to listen to me, it's your own fault, but if you want to listen to me' – because I remember when everyone used to say to me, 'I remember when I used to be young'. I used to get sick of hearing that. I know you used to be young, obviously. Yeah, I should've stayed in school. They shouldn't criticise. They should be like, 'I should've stayed in school but I did a dumb choice and I just wanted to drink and do this' – that type of stuff. Not 'I should have done this, I should have done that' – me, me, me. Well you should have but you didn't. You could have, but you didn't – that type of stuff (male 17 yrs).

There is hardly anything out there any more for the young people. I mean my mum was telling me that all the young Indigenous kids back in the old days, they used to just meet up and have like a little dance, do sports every weekend, but where has all that gone now? I mean nobody knows their tradition no more. Like nobody wants to go out to the bush and experience all that stuff anymore. It's like we're all losing our cultural stuff. I'd like to see old fellas, a couple of old people, even if they have an ad just for old fellas to tell whoever's got respect for their nan and their pop they'll actually sit there and listen. I sat back and listened to the old fellas, yeah (female 17 yrs).

All the ads on TV are bullshit, you know what I mean? Because they've never experienced it. They've never experienced the violence or drug use or the alcohol abuse, none of that ... You get all these promotions like the don't smoke campaigns ... like that's going to help, what, giving out stickers and shit (male 18 yrs).

# Good skills



Working with my hands. Doing woodwork and all of that stuff, welding. I do all that (male 18 yrs).

I'm good at art, I'm good at maths, science, sports, dressing good [laughs] (female 13 yrs).

I've got a lot of good qualities. It's just whether I want to use them or not. Honestly, I'm a very happy person. I love living life. I just love to enjoy life. I just like to party. I just like to have fun (male 18 yrs).

Just mainly, I don't know, creating stuff. And I like to draw and that. Mum does painting sometimes if she gets bored. I just painted when I was locked up (female 17 yrs).

# Future aspirations

Honestly, I'm going to be the man my dad should have been. I want to be a man, I want to be a father – a real father – and I want to be a provider. They're my three goals. That's all I want to do. Just provide for my family, look after my family, and be a man (male 18 yrs).

When I grow up I want to work on the mines, have money to put a tombstone on my brother's grave. Buy a car, buy myself a house, and live happy (female 13 yrs).

Well owning your own house eventually. Having everything that you generally see in movies – the usual stuff. Have a normal family. That's what I plan to push for it to go. That's where I'm aiming (male 20 yrs).

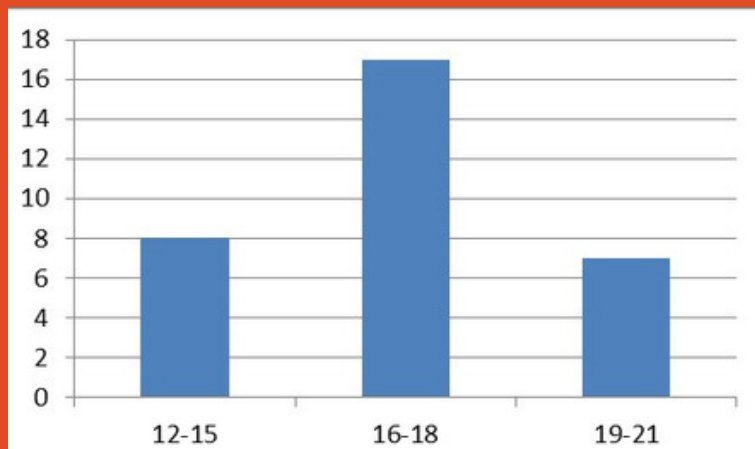
I don't want to be like other young mothers that leave their kid with their mum and dad or elsewhere, because I don't want my kid going to welfare. Because I've been to welfare. That's why I'm going to make sure the kid's got a home and that they get an education and don't go hanging around with bad people (female 17 yrs).



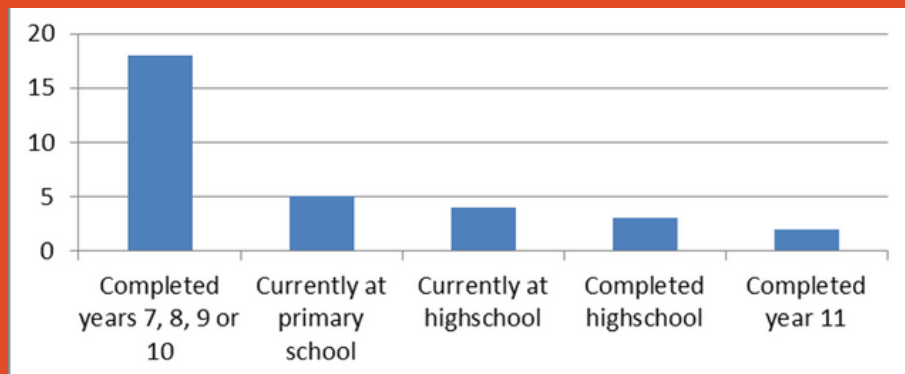


# Who were the young people?

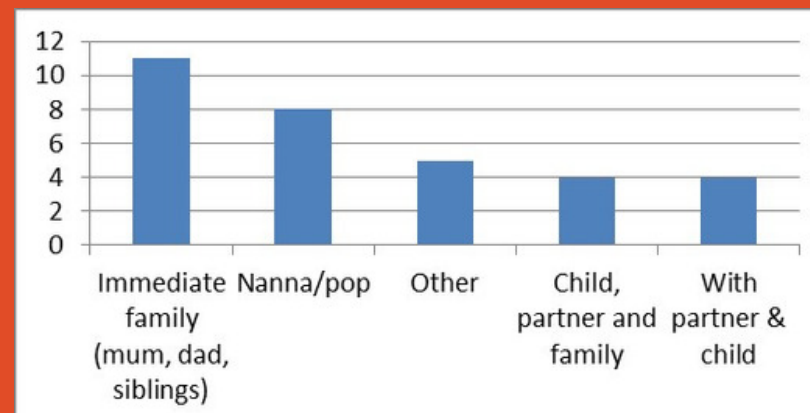
Thirty two young Aboriginal people took part in in-depth face-to-face interviews for this project. There were 13 girls and young women, and 19 boys and young men between the ages of 12-21 years.



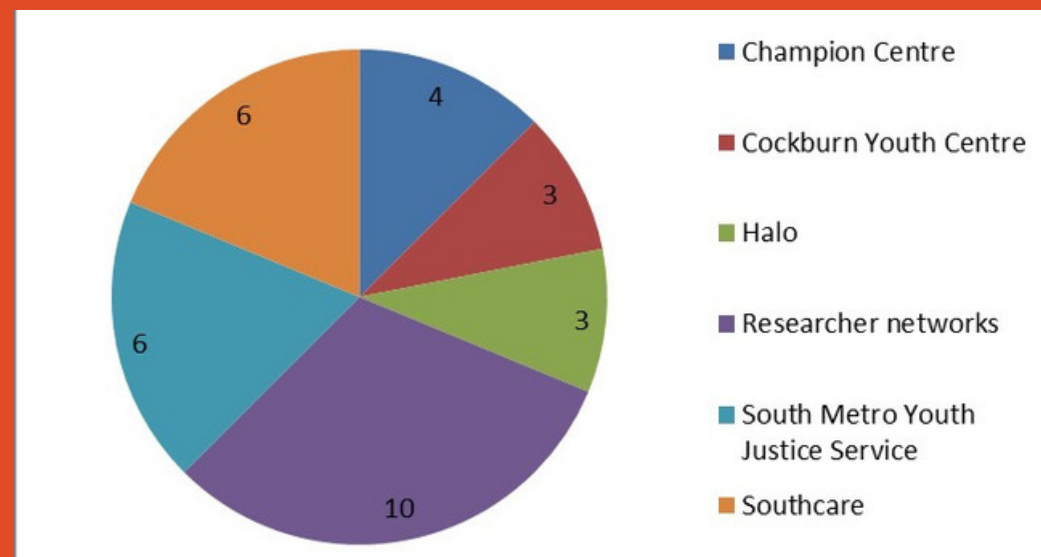
Nine young people were still in school, with five in primary school and the remaining four in Years 8 to 11. Of those who were no longer at school (23), 18 (78%) had left by the end of year 10.



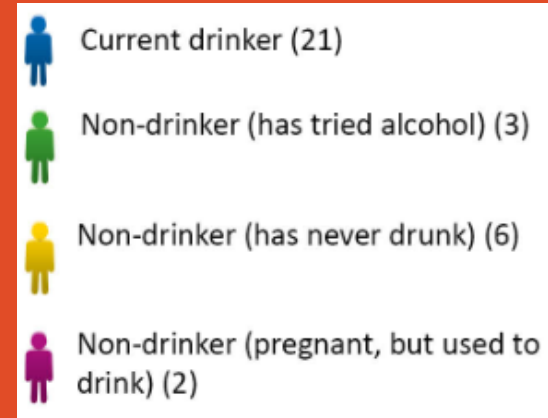
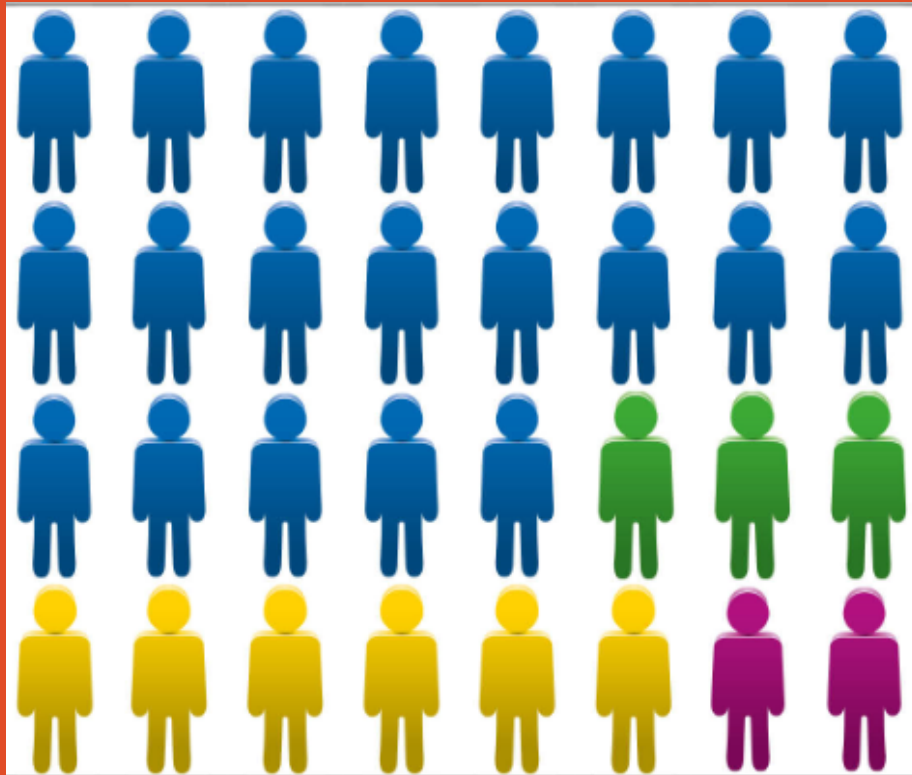
Most either lived with their immediate families or grandparents.



Participants were recruited from various organisations and from among researchers' own networks.



# Drinkers and non-drinkers





Because I have an identity [being Aboriginal]. I know who I am and where I am from. I know what we represent, the meaning of us (female 20 yrs).







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