Initj Benang

Building strong foundations to raise Moorditj Maarman

Initj Benang – *tomorrow's fire* – is preparing Aboriginal young people for responsible adulthood, by establishing, reconnecting, reinforcing and empowering them on their cultural journey

Culture & Healing as an Alternative Pathway

Aboriginal people across Australia have experienced dispossession of Lore, language, land, and cultural practices since colonisation - minimising, limiting and or removing a sense of cultural identity and belonging.

The changes from the traditional cultural identity to the modern perception, has left a void in many Aboriginal communities where there is no longer an acknowledgement of cultural Lore, identity, and responsibility to lay foundations for the transitioning journey from adolescence to adulthood.

Cultural Corridors acknowledge the need to provide additional avenues for Aboriginal youth and young adults to establish alternative pathways outside of the Justice and punitive systems. Together, Elders, contemporary rites of passage facilitators, and local Aboriginal mentors developed the initiative called *Initj Benang*, meaning 'Tomorrow's Fire' in Noongar.

Contemporary Rite of Passage

Initj Benang is a cultural immersion and contemporary Rites of Passage program, providing Aboriginal young people with underpinning knowledge, hands-on exposure and experience of foundational cultural principles which prepare them for transition to adulthood by:

- Exposing participants to the true beauty and strength in Aboriginal culture, as opposed to imposed perceptions.
- Supporting Aboriginal men and youth to find themselves, become more connected to their community, & beginning to heal.
- Applying traditional principate, lore and culture in a modern and contemporary environment.
- Providing cultural connection, knowledge and values to have the tools to deal with modern challenges.

- Guiding young Aboriginal men and youth to re-claim cultural values and systems (language, lore etc.) to ensure it's the bedrock for young people to learn and grow and ensure they live successful lives in the future.
- Reminding participants who they really are – proud, strong, courageous and resilient.

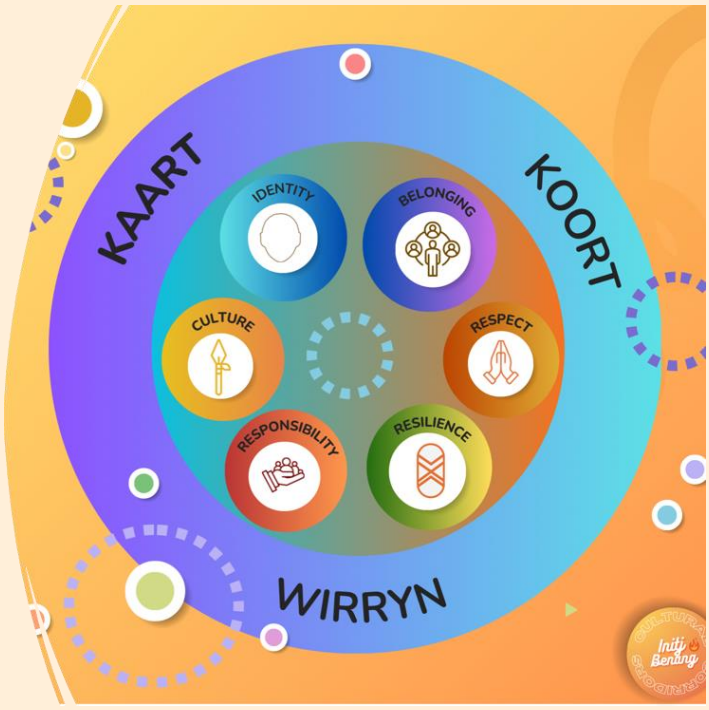
When the young fellas reached the fire place & stated to dance; that let us know that it's real now.

- Uncle Noel Nannup

Connecting On-Country

Central to the Initj Benang journey is a three-day cultural Immersion camp, facilitated on-country by Aboriginal mentors and supported by Elders. Where possible, participants' fathers or father-figures join them for this experience.

This unique environment provides the setting for the intensive development of strong relationships, opportunities for reflection, and the sharing of culture. Families gather celebrate the young men's return from camp, which is a special moment to recognise their growth and place in the community.



The program is delivered using analogies of the 3 elements that fire requires – heat, fuel & oxygen – by focusing young people on:

- **Kaart (Head)**
  - Identity
  - Culture
- **Koort (Heart)**
  - Belonging
  - Respect
- **Wirryn (Spirit)**
  - Responsibility
  - Resilience

Within these focus areas, participants experience a range of activities including learning significant local traditional stories, dance, tools and art of the land, alongside family trees, team building, self-reflection and more.

This central experience is complimented by an introductory engagement session – where participants and facilitators meet to build relationships before the camp experience. Following the camp there is a reunion session when the group gather to reunite and share their experiences. Young people also organise regular opportunities in the months following the camp to catch up with facilitators for ongoing mentoring support.

Early Impact

A pilot camp took place in April 2024, with 7 young men aged 14-17 years.

Early outcomes for some of this cohort included:

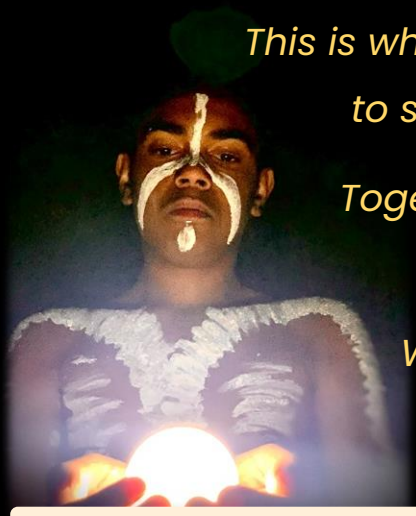
- Improved Noongar Language Skills
- Felt more comfortable listening and sharing
- Improved decision making & goal setting
- Improved relationships with mentors,
- Increased support networks
- increased connection to kinship.

Facilitator Levi, told us about the impact of the experience on Max*:

When young Max showed up at the bus, he just clung to his parents, head down and didn't speak to anyone.

That night when we were sitting around the fire; the way that Pop and Uncle just embraced him and really cemented his identity – that was magic.

But the change in that young man! How we opened up, took responsibility, and transferred that to leadership and took responsibility of everyone else – it was just phenomenal.



This is where our young people are missing out today. We need to start from the roots - that's where the elders have that.

Together, we will go forwards to give the future generation the Rites of Passage, and to Close the Gap.

We're going to our way, for our People. And it's working.

- Uncle Frank Bobongie Snr

The Next Stage of Initj Benang's Journey

This is where we'll put a call to action or ask

Plus contact details