

FOR THE

LOVE

OF OUR

PEOPLE

30 YEARS OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT



We will
CLOSE^{THE}**GAP**
with responsibility and opportunity



**CAPE YORK
PARTNERSHIP**

To the *old people* who lit the first fires.
To the *mothers and fathers* who carried the weight and the hope.
To the *children* who rise now, walking in two worlds—fluent in both.
This was never an agenda of mere *resistance* and *survival*.
It has always been a *march toward excellence*.
From the *red earth* to *round tables*, from our *campfires* to *courtrooms*.
For our families, and their children, to *live beyond* the shackles of welfare dependency,
From Cape York to New York - *that is our horizon*.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication contains images, names and quotes of deceased persons. We pay respects to their memory, their families, and their enduring legacy.



ANNIVERSARY ARTWORK

By Tania Major

'Dragonflies' uses the life cycle of the dragonfly to speak about community and growth. Dragonflies lay their eggs in small ponds — just as many of us come from small, scattered communities. When the wet season ends and the dry begins, the dragonflies hatch together and rise, their new wings shimmering in the sunlight.

For me, this transformation mirrors the journey of young people. With the right support, they too can grow strong, take flight, and move beyond the limitations of isolation. The painting celebrates resilience, connection, and the shared responsibility to nurture the next generation so they can soar.



Dragonflies

*Mixed media on canvas
by Tania Major*



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ENTITIES



INNOVATIONS & SOLUTIONS



BAYAN



Mpower



PERSONAL SAVER

READY SET & GO



REGIONAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS





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The Start of Our Story

For the longest period, Cape York's First Peoples governed themselves with complexity and care. Kinship, language, law, and economy bound us together across vast and diverse lands. We lived with responsibility – to family, to Elders, to Country.

Forced removals, the mission era, and imposed welfare policies excluded us from economic opportunity in the new Australia and undermined cultural authority. Rights were granted, but responsibility was stripped away. Alcohol replaced governance. Bureaucracy replaced authority. Dependence replaced dignity. Our people were no longer able to lead — they were managed.

Our old people stood up with courage and unity. They showed a generation how to have respect and humility, without losing culture.

Enough is enough!

they cried, firm and clear.

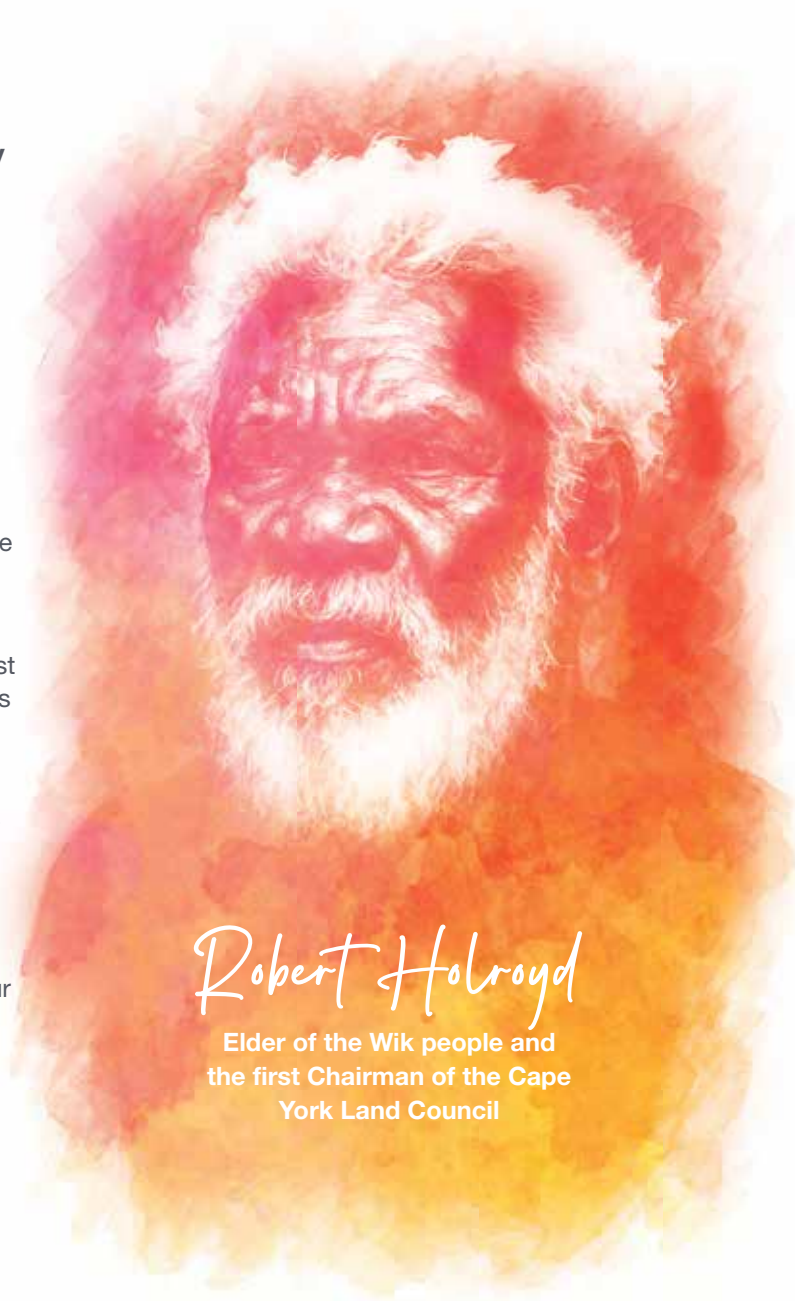
And then – we organised.

This is the story of how our people chose to rebuild in contemporary Australia, through practical reform designed around campfires and kitchen tables – focused on children, built on the unshakable belief that taking responsibility is our right.

It is also a story of influence. Cape York's reforms have shaped national debates, and proven what is possible when Indigenous people lead. Lives can be transformed. Futures can be redirected. Ancestral language and culture can be restored.

The Cape York Agenda stands as one of the clearest demonstrations of what is possible when individuals and families are given the means to take back responsibility.

Our work is not done. After 30 years of Indigenous-led reform, we are just getting started on a new chapter. We are building on the ground we have made, and the hard-won lessons of how enduring change can be achieved, so that our children may go further than us. So that they may inherit what our old people envisaged for them – not the weight of struggle, but the light of opportunity.



Robert Holroyd

**Elder of the Wik people and
the first Chairman of the Cape
York Land Council**

30 years of Indigenous-led Reform

Reclaiming Our Destiny

THE GENESIS OF THE CAPE YORK AGENDA (1980s, 1990s)

In the dust and determination of the 1980s and 1990s, our old people came together. From the furthest reaches of Cape York, they gathered with a single, urgent message: “We must unite, or we will be erased.”

Those Elders spoke not of grievances but of strategy. They planned a new era – where land rights were not just demanded, but organised for, and where alcohol abuse, passive welfare and educational failure were not just lamented, but confronted with purpose. The reform journey had begun.

At the Remote Futures gathering (Townsville, July 1990), someone threw down a denim jacket. Then a dollar. Then a five, then a twenty. These modest

donations, from people who had little, bought fuel to drive the dusty corrugated roads to the first Cape York Summit later that year at Lockhart River.

Our Elders, who had lived through mission life and frontier upheaval, didn’t ask for handouts and programs – they demanded a hand up, and a future. They brought knowledge and clear-eyed pragmatism. What they lacked in funds, they made up for in unity, resolve and sacrifice.

Their legacy lives on in every young leader educated through the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, Cape York Leaders Program, Djarragun College, and Cape York Girl Academy, in every decision of the local leaders of the Family Responsibilities Commission, and in every family who now has the tools to take back responsibility and opportunity. It lives on in the Cape York Agenda – a vision of responsibility first kindled around campfires and still carried forward today.



The first Cape York Summit, Lockhart River - 1991, Elders, leaders and families from across the Peninsula gathered in unity, laying the foundations for the Cape York Agenda and a new era of Indigenous-led reform.

Without our Elders,

**we wouldn't be where we are today.
Because they have fought that fight
for us.**

KERI TAMWOY

Community Changemaker
and former Mayor of Aurukun



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The Reform Agenda Begins

REBUILDING FROM WITHIN (1990-2000)

As momentum grew, the Cape York Agenda united cultural leaders, parents, and thinkers from across Cape York to ask the hardest questions: How do we reclaim responsibility with the rights we've won? How do we restore what passive welfare has broken?

We knew the answers had to be bold, far-reaching. We could not wait for permission. We created our own institutions:



Cape York Land Council,
formed 1990, to drive land rights and native title recognition.



Apunipima Cape York Health Council,
formed 1994, to address health injustice and put health back into community hands.



Cape York Partnership,
formed 1995, to design solutions for the hardest challenges – from intergenerational welfare dependency to education failure, to cultural loss.



Balkanu,
formed 1996, to turn land rights into economic opportunities.

These entities were not service organisations. They were declarations of a better future.

When Noel Pearson published *'Our Right to Take Responsibility'* in 2000 – a book grounded in the vision of the old people and the conversations that shaped the early Cape York Summits – it challenged the national conversation on Aboriginal policy. It highlighted 'passive welfare', in place since the 1960s, as a corrosive force undermining traditional values of reciprocity, care, and responsibility. Passive welfare, it showed, had excluded us from the real economy and trapped us in a 'gammon' one that, together with a form of governance stripping us of responsibility, had precipitated social collapse.

Noel called for a shift to empowerment, based on individual and family development, where real economic participation is possible and reforms are Indigenous-led. This gave political voice to what our old people and community members knew: dignity and self-determination is restored when responsibility is reclaimed – in individuals, families, in communities. The **Family Development Strategy**, a focus for Cape York Partnership's reform agenda ever since, was born.

Soon after, **Alcohol Management Plans** were introduced in a partnership between community leaders and government – inspired by the Cape York Justice Study and by many of our women who were

at the forefront of efforts to stem the epidemic of harm from alcohol and other drugs. From Aurukun, in 2002, they spread across the region.

We now had a clear direction, and we would not back down. As our old people had said – to walk away from our people is not a right we have. Our role is to stand, to stay, and to fight for our right to take responsibility for our children's future.

Cape York Partnership has upheld this mandate – working alongside the people living the challenges, co-designing practical solutions with those who know the realities best and have the most at stake.

The Power of Partnership

From the early days of the Cape York Agenda, it was clear that Indigenous-led reform required more than clarity and aspiration – it required capability, tools, and systems. Some we had, some we did not. We needed allies.

In 2000, a quarter of a million people crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the Walk for Reconciliation. Around that time, change-makers from some of Australia's largest companies and foundations appeared at our side.

In 2001, **Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships (IEP)** was formed in Cape York, the start of what is now a national platform known as **Jawun**. Through this unique model, employees from Australia's top corporations and government agencies were seconded to work directly with Indigenous organisations on the ground. These individuals have supported local teams to strengthen internal systems, build business plans, launch programs, and grow Indigenous-led enterprise. Around 1200

skilled corporate and government professionals have been seconded to Cape York since 2001 (worth over \$57m in in-kind support). This was not consultancy. It was capability transfer.

The people of **Westpac** were among the first within corporate Australia to meaningfully support social justice. They committed to what would become Jawun's partnership model – sending their best and brightest to Cape York communities trying to turn visions into real change. The support of over 700 dedicated Westpac employees has been critical to our financial responsibility and education initiatives – accelerating economic and family empowerment, leadership development, and community resilience. They listened and they walked alongside us.

Westpac, **Boston Consulting Group** and other corporate and government partners brought together through Jawun, remain key enablers of Cape York's reform agenda. They built our capacity, and in doing so, deepened our own commitment to building strength from within.

DD The private sector helped us see beyond the welfare horizons

that dominated Indigenous affairs when our sole source of input was government.

Their sustained commitment over decades, and the commitment of their most valuable resource — their people — has shaped a new model for corporate–community partnerships tackling disadvantage.

NOEL PEARSON



Noel Pearson with Vit Koci from Westpac, early partners in the creation of Jawun, linking Indigenous-led development with corporate expertise for lasting capability uplift.



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On Our Terms

EDUCATION AS THE FIRST FREEDOM (2001–2010)

We know too well the failures of one-size-fits-all government programs to Close the Gap. Our people's lives are more than 20 years shorter than those of non-Indigenous Australians. Trialling innovative, Indigenous-led solutions grounded in our responsibility for ourselves, our families and communities, we were seeking true change that would last generations.

An Institution to challenge status quo policy

First, we committed to doing our own analysis and designing our own solutions. We needed a place for serious thinking. In 2004, the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYI) was formed under Griffith University as Australia's first Indigenous-led think-tank. From land rights to education reform, welfare rethinking to constitutional recognition, CYI has challenged rusted on policy thinking, disrupted the status quo and changed lives. A most significant campaign confronted the devastation wrought by alcohol abuse by supporting on-ground leaders to advocate for Alcohol Management Plans, that led to sharp reductions in serious assaults, child neglect, and injury, and became a foundation for the Cape York Welfare Reform trial. CYI has also influenced national frameworks like Empowered Communities.

Pathways for young people

Education became the cornerstone of our agenda. In the early 2000s, schools were failing, expectations were low, and failure had become accepted as the norm. Cape York schools were consistently at the bottom on national benchmarks, putting many children on a trajectory from school disengagement to contact with the justice system, unemployment, and poor health and other negative life outcomes. We refused to accept this as our children's destiny, and set about building reforms that restored responsibility in families and opportunity in schools.

In 2005, the Cape York Leaders Program (CYLP) (formerly the Higher Expectations Program Secondary (HEPS)) – was officially launched after two years of codesign. It remains Australia's only

Our vision is to shape Indigenous leaders

to take their place as community innovators and champions of change, delivering outcomes that will shape our future.

KIRSTY DAVIS

CEO, Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership

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30 YEARS OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

scholarship, support and mentoring initiative dedicated to remote or very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. More than 625 Cape York students have benefited from Secondary and Tertiary scholarships. The program enables Cape York youngsters from Year 7 to attend leading boarding schools in more advantaged parts of Queensland. Students who join CYLP from Year 7 stay the distance to achieve **Year 12 success, graduating with a QCE at a rate of 85%**. For those who reach Year 12 with CYLP, 94% graduate – exceeding the 76% national mainstream rate. In contrast, only 1 in 100 Cape York youngsters who stay in their community complete Year 12. Around **70%** of CYLP graduates secure **full-time work**, earning on average **\$50,000 more** per year than peers on welfare. Most other CYLP graduates go on to further study.

Without CYLP, I wouldn't be in the position of going to university

GERAEUH BOWEN

CYLP alumni

In 2007, The Leadership Academy was created to strengthen the skills of emerging and community-based leaders across Cape York – from youth to family and adult structural leaders. Designed as a leadership program grounded in community realities, it has equipped natural leaders to step forward with confidence. Most participants go on to become change agents in their communities, inspiring a ripple effect of positive change. More than 90% of participants have gained full time work following

their program, and influenced positive change in their own families and those around them.

This Academy was only possible through the philanthropic support of Ian McCauley and his family, a private investor and strong believer in mentorship. As Ian reminded participants:

Get a mentor to assist you in achieving your prospects. Give young people a chance, give them an opportunity."

IAN MCCAULEY

Philanthropic Partner

Responsibility in families

Launched in 2002, MPower (formerly Family Income Management) helped families take charge of their finances with the ethos, "**A better life begins with a budget.**" Alongside MPower, Student Education Trusts (SET – now READY SET and GO) were established in 2005 to help families save specifically for their children's education – for books, uniforms, school camps and formal outfits. Together, these initiatives promoted parental responsibility and long-term planning. Since then, families have saved nearly **\$5 million**, supporting almost **1,770 children** – a powerful demonstration of the value Cape York parents place on education, and a shift in expectation that if families do their part, schools must do theirs.

As families' confidence grew, so too did their ambitions. Our people had their own ideas – for home upgrades, land costs and other family goals – leading to the creation of new savings products such



as Pride of Place, Home Pride, Bayan, Homelands, and Personal Savers.

These were practical, financial capability solutions designed with our people, for our people. Our families, some of the most disadvantaged in the nation, took up the responsibility and saved \$6.2m using Opportunity Products.

These Opportunity Products have become an escalator for families and a generation of Cape York children to a better future.



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Innovative programs

The Work Placement Scheme supported young people to 'orbit' into private sector jobs available in places outside of Cape York while maintaining strong connection to their homebase. Literacy initiatives like Making Up Lost Time in Literacy (MultiLit) made up lost time in reading. A Leadership Academy supported adult leaders in-community. Together with other education innovations – Computer Culture, Higher Expectations Program Tertiary (HEPT) – these efforts challenged low expectations head-on, empowering families to realise their right to effective education, employment and development.

System-level change

In 2010, CYP established the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) in partnership with Education Queensland. Using Direct Instruction (D.I.) – an explicit, sequenced, and evidence-based approach – CYAAA schools in Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale delivered immediate results. Attendance at Coen and Hope Vale sits at 89%, among the highest in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities. Aurukun's attendance rose from catastrophic lows to over 70% before the State took over and saw it collapse again to below 30%, with no NAPLAN results registered.

Meanwhile, Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA), established in 2010 and became incorporated in 2013, imparted its Direct Instruction expertise across the country, and now supports teachers in more than 3,200 schools across Australia with training and D.I. curriculum materials.

Schools of strength

Djarragun College, a Prep–Year 12 school that Cape York Partnership saved from closure in 2011, is now one of Australia's leading examples of Indigenous-led education success representing 36 ancestral language groups from across Cape York and beyond. The College has graduated around 1,000 students, maintaining over 80% attendance and offering strong vocational education and training pathways. As a Registered Training Organisation, Djarragun provides on-site boarding, the Ngak Min Health Clinic, and hands-on hospitality training through its Birrgal Restaurant.

In 2016, the Cape York Girl Academy was established in response to concerns from Aunties and Grannies about young women disengaging from education, often due to teenage pregnancy. It remains Australia's first and only boarding school where young mothers can live and learn alongside their babies, supported in a culturally grounded environment that restores pathways to education, wellbeing, and work readiness. The Academy has already graduated more than 30 students, achieving an outstanding 97% attendance rate.

Education reform in Cape York has always been about more than marks. It is about reclaiming responsibility, restoring our children's right to learn, and giving them the same opportunities as any other child in Australia.

From Cape York to New York

“Our children will walk in two worlds

and enjoy the best of both, their culture will be a gift to their country, and they will join the mainframe of Australia, free to be modern versions of themselves.

They should be free to go out into the world in orbits, but always be anchored back home. As we say, from Cape York to New York.

My dream is that one day the non-Aboriginal kids of Australia will share that bi-culturalism. They will also have the privilege of learning something about and connecting with the original languages and cultures of this country, and that we all share in that great privilege.

NOEL PEARSON

Reform, at Scale

REBUILDING RESPONSIBILITY AND NORMS (2008–2014)

In 2008, the Australian and Queensland governments committed to a four-year trial of holistic reforms in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale, and Mossman Gorge – the culmination of years of our community members calling for a return to strong social norms, functional family life, and personal and family responsibility as the foundation for development. Known as the **‘Cape York Welfare Reform (CYWR) trial’**, it reflected CYI’s landmark 2007 publication, ‘From Hand Out to Hand Up’, an exemplar of co-design that built on Our Right to Take Responsibility. The trial advanced family development through responsibility and opportunity – helping families ensure children attended school, manage their homes and incomes, and build pathways to employment and home ownership. During the trial and beyond, there has been unrelenting advocacy for a radical shift from unemployment programs such as Work for the Dole, to real jobs. The establishment of business precincts and lighthouse projects paved the way for local entrepreneurship and enterprise.

A world first model

The CYWR trial became the practical expression of our **theory of change – responsibility** matched with **opportunity builds capability**. It demonstrated that policy co-designed with Indigenous leadership can restore norms, strengthen families, and rebuild authority from the ground up. Its legacy endures through the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) – the centrepiece of Cape York’s structural reform design. A world-first statutory body to empower respected local Elders and leaders

as Commissioners with real authority to act when families failed to meet basic responsibilities like school attendance and child protection.

Bipartisan legislation – with the Howard Government at the federal level and the Bligh Government in Queensland – created the only legal framework in Australia linking the federal welfare system with state service delivery. The FRC marked a decisive shift from the old service-delivery model and remains the key mechanism for making responsibility-based reform real.

And the FRC works, As Coen local Commissioner, Allison Liddy OAM, explained:

“The FRC functions well

because it is led by Indigenous people. It takes certain understanding to be able to give advice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Since FRC started, we’ve seen a lot of good changes here in Coen. But if we were to lose it, we would start a downward cycle back to the way things were before.

ALLISON LIDDY

Local FRC Commissioner *Pictured right.*



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“It's important that services like the

O-Hub are run
by local people

who understand the needs of the
community, they know and trust us.
My aunty is over 80 years old, but she
knows how to use our computers when
paying her bills, because of the skills
learned at O-Hub.

JOANNE BOWEN

Hope Vale O-Hub Team Leader

Around the FRC, Opportunity Hubs (O-Hubs) gave families access to practical supports, or 'Opportunity Products,' for success in everyday life. From 2010, the Strong Families Parenting Program strengthened parenting skills and family relationships in order to create safe, nurturing environments for children. More than 3,000 people have used MPower to budget, cover their bills, save, and spend responsibly – a bridge to transition from crisis to planning, and from debt to transformative wealth creation. In 2017, a dedicated financial counselling service was introduced, delivering 4,649 sessions across 868 cases for 516 MPower members to help address complex financial challenges. The service also began taking on Cape York First Nations trainees, supporting one young Mossman Gorge woman through her studies to become a full-time, accredited financial counsellor – now employed by CYP and helping her own people build financial independence.

Building Financial Independence

Financial capability has also been about supporting families with tax reporting and protecting them from predatory practices. Campaigns such as our 'Do Not Knock' program, established in partnership with local councils and government regulators, used signage and education to stop predatory door-to-door trading in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale, and Mossman Gorge – giving families the tools and the protection to keep their money safe.

Home Pride & Ownership

Despite home ownership being a key pillar of CYWR and a fundamental opportunity for a good life – complex land tenure and the lack of the basic 'invisible infrastructure' that exists to support home ownership elsewhere, were serious impediments to progress. While work occurred to normalise tenancy obligations through the FRC, and programs like Bush Owner Builder, Pride of Place and Home Pride strengthened families' pride and responsibility in the family home, only at Millers Block in Hope Vale were home ownership outcomes able to be realised.

Four Bush Owner Builder houses have been built to date; over 430 households have joined Pride of Place to renovate their homes with sweat equity (over 3000 hours); almost 100 Home Pride members have invested over \$180,000 in backyard 'blitzes'; and 38 Homelands members have saved over \$220,000 to meet land and property costs.

“With MPower,

money grows like a tall tree in the forest,
until it reaches the sky.

ROY GIBSON

Mossman Gorge Elder

Creating Indigenous Business

Economic opportunity grew alongside social responsibility. New initiatives like Bama Services (formerly Djarragun Enterprises, founded 2010), Cape York Employment, and Cape York Enterprises created hundreds of real jobs in construction, landscaping, facilities maintenance, timber, and more recently cleaning. Bama Services has employed nearly **400 Indigenous staff**, with more than 100 upskilled through tertiary qualifications.

Building the Workforce

Cape York Employment (CYE), founded 2013, has supported more than 1400 jobseekers into real jobs and job pathways across Aurukun, Coen, and Lockhart River. This includes its School to Jobs innovation which mentors senior students at Djarragun College, CYLP and the Cape York Girl Academy, then transitions them to employment opportunities in industries from health and education to mining and construction – 60 young people have been placed in employment to date. Cape York Enterprises, also founded in 2013, has served as an investment platform for Indigenous businesses such as Cape York Timber.

Cape York Institute (CYI) developed the Job Guarantee policy direction and (CYE) has since tested and proven its impact on the ground. In communities where unemployment hovers around 85%, CYE created 46 genuine, community-needed jobs – real roles with purpose and pay. Close to 100 people have benefited across Aurukun, Coen and Lockhart River with many moving on to positions of greater responsibility in schools, councils and other workplaces. The results show that when real work is available, people step up – and communities grow stronger.

Shaping the Next Chapter of Reform

The CYWR and ongoing reform efforts became a model for Indigenous policy reform, demonstrating how government and Indigenous-led organisations can co-design long-term solutions. It marked a shift toward “supported responsibility” – empowering communities to take charge of their futures within a framework of mutual obligation, opportunity and partnership.

The success of these reform efforts crystallised our thinking, strengthened our resolve, and shaped the next chapter of our work.

“Having a job means I can give my kids more – a better education, better living.

It's also about being a role model.

HELENA HOLLINGSWORTH

Bama Services,
Garden Maintenance Supervisor



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Innovation & Influence

RESTORING VOICES, RESHAPING SYSTEMS (2015–2025)

The past decade has been one of innovation and consolidation – turning the hard-won lessons of reform into lasting institutions that build capability across every part of life.

Culture and language were revitalised through the launch of the Pama Language Centre in 2015. The Centre seeks to restore the voice of Country through preservation and revitalisation of our ancestral languages and culture, including by developing and supporting curriculum. For language is more than words – it is identity, sovereignty, and spirit. More than 15 language nations and hundreds of community representatives have participated in Pama Language Centre programs.

“When I started to speak my language, I felt complete.”

SUSAN KENNEDY

Mpakwithi Author, Artist and Language Champion, New Mapoon

Health and wellbeing were reimagined through Ngak Min Health (formerly D Health), which opened on Djarragun College’s campus in 2019. The clinic gives students, families direct access to culturally safe healthcare, including mental health, occupational and speech therapy. For more than six years, Ngak Min

has broken down barriers and focused on preventive care by embedding services in the daily lives of young people.

Social enterprise and digital tools brought innovation into Cape York’s households. Mayi Market was founded in 2020 after decades of Cape York leaders demanding fair food prices for remote communities. COVID-19 was the final straw—governments had long ignored exorbitant costs and their direct link to shocking health outcomes. More than 20,000 boxes of fresh food have now been delivered at Cairns prices to remote communities, families investing \$1.7 million in their own nutrition. Pama Platform, launched in 2021, integrates services like MPower, Opportunity Products like READY, SET and GO, and Homelands accounts into one user-friendly web-app. Already over 1,100 users have created budgets and resumes, tracked savings and food orders, and stored key documents, supported by ‘Pama Points’ that reward positive habits and digital independence. Recognised with a Sydney Design Award in 2021, Pama Platform is transforming how remote communities engage with tools for economic and personal empowerment.

National influence grew as Cape York joined other Indigenous regions to co-design a bold new way for governments to work with First Nations people. The result was the *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report (2015)*, a blueprint

for structural reform built on place-based policy, shared accountability, and joint decision-making between community members and government. With bipartisan support, Empowered Communities (EC) has begun to transform how policy and investment decisions are made. Where funding was once determined by government alone, joint panels now review and provide recommendations on initiatives – reducing waste and duplication, holding services to account, and ensuring alignment with local priorities.

In Cape York, where EC is known as Pama Futures, Joint-Decision-Making panels have assessed \$105 million in program grant funding ensuring local knowledge informs funding allocations and design to ensure best fit for local development priorities. This structural reform builds upon earlier Cape York breakthroughs such as the Government Champions initiative which continues to provide local communities with direct access to key government decision makers, and Negotiation Tables, which inspired today’s Joint Decision-Making Process.

Cape York Institute played a leading role in shaping the national case for Constitutional Recognition. Through more than two decades of rigorous policy work, advocacy, and dialogue, CYI helped design the framework that became the Indigenous Voice to Parliament proposal – a guaranteed voice in matters affecting our people. This decade of innovation and



We are like fish swimming
around in a bowl blocked
by an invisible wall. We see
time pass, everyone passes
us by, as if we don't exist.
To the country, we are the
living ghost.

*For the first time
Pama Futures saw us.*

MATT ROSS-KELLY

Mossman Gorge

influence connected Cape York's reform agenda to the national struggle for recognition, grounded in the belief that structural reform is essential to bring decision-making closer to those most impacted

by government decisions. CYI has been deeply invested in advancing Constitutional Recognition – from the Uluru Statement from the Heart to the 2023 Referendum – and remains steadfast in its conviction

that empowerment must be built into the nation's governing framework.

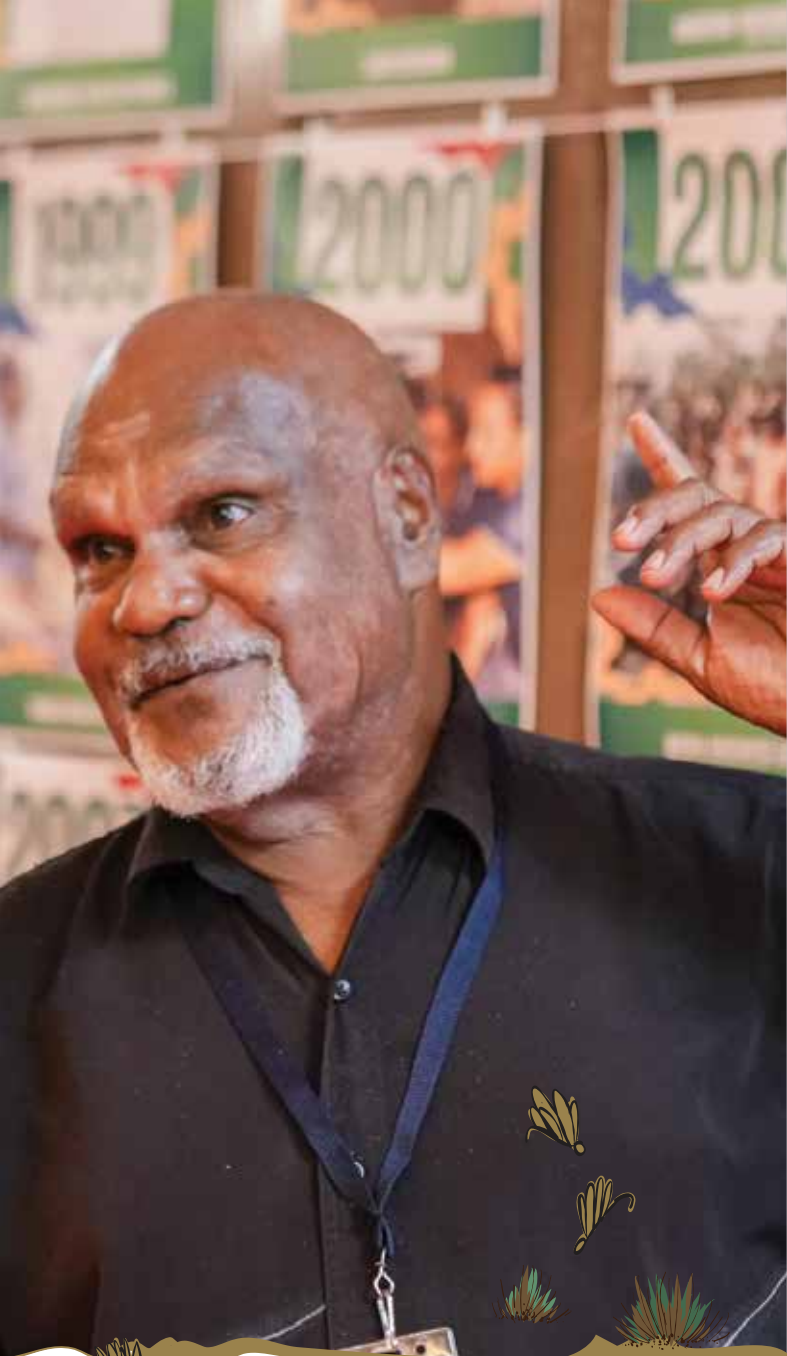


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Today – Together, We Will Close the Gap with Responsibility and Opportunity

A Proven Theory of Change

Building on the hard-won gains, and recognising the unfinished business of the land rights and self-determination era, Cape York Partnership pursued a vision forged by our Elders, cultural custodians, and family leaders. They knew our people could rebuild Indigenous capability if equipped with the tools from the ground up. They understood that true empowerment could never come from passive welfare or top-down policy, but only where our right to take responsibility is met with real opportunity.

Our agenda is grounded on a foundational premise: if responsibility is restored and opportunity made real, then people can truly choose lives they have reason to value. It is a grounded and transformative philosophy – one that reimagines the relationship between Indigenous people and the Australian state:

THEORY OF CHANGE

Responsibility + Opportunity = Capability

Over three decades, this formula has shaped one of the most comprehensive reform efforts for those stuck on the bottom rungs of Australian society. It is Indigenous-led, place-based, and grounded in the real lives of our people. Not a government initiative. Not a project. It is a reform agenda – that will not rest until there is equity.

Ours is a story of persistence. Of influence. Of hard-won gains.

Against the struggle, the collective of organisations under Cape York Partnership has delivered impact across every domain of life:

EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

2500[^] individuals supported
with education and leadership opportunities

625+ students
into pathways of education and leadership through Secondary and Tertiary Scholarships CYLP scholarships

500+ adult leaders supported
with skills and opportunities through Cape York Leadership Academy scholarships

94% Year 12 success rate
among CYLP students at boarding schools, compared with less than 1% for those who remain in community

70%[^] of CYLP graduates
secure full-time employment, earning on average \$50,000 more per year than peers on welfare

1,000[^] graduates
of Djarragun College, with an 80% attendance rate

30[^] graduates
of Cape York Girl Academy, with a 97% attendance rate

89% attendance rate
at Coen and Hope Vale CYAAA schools

[^] Indicates approximately

FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

\$6.2 million saved through Opportunity Products (SET, Bayan, Homelands, Personal Saver) that enable families to save for education, land and property costs

\$4.8 million saved by families with SET – READY, and SET, GO accounts supporting almost 1,770 children

3000+ community members have used MPower to manage money, pay bills, and plan for their futures

4650 Financial Counselling and 870 Family Case Management sessions

\$1.7 million has been spent on food boxes through Mayi Market

796 Family Responsibilities Commission Case Plan referrals to MPower – 529 unique clients

\$206k Debt Waiver 2024-25

Due to exploitative predation of vulnerable people

Superannuation recovery assistance in 2018 recovered

\$4.6 million in lost superannuation

Tax Return support facilitated **\$141,780 in savings 2019-2024**

CULTURAL STRENGTH

15+ language nations and hundreds of community representatives

embraced Pama Language Centre work to breathe life back into ancestral languages in communities and schools

HOME AND PROPERTY

Four Bush Owner Builder houses built to date

430+ households renovated their homes through Pride of Place (over 3000 hours)

100^ Home Pride members invested \$180,000+ in backyard 'blitzes'

38 Homelands members saved \$224,000+ for land and property costs, and paid \$160k in land costs

Bayan for Home Ownership 25 home buyers have saved \$160k 1 family purchased a home

EMPLOYMENT

2800+ Indigenous jobs created or supported through direct employment or initiatives

Bama Services 75% Indigenous workforce 400+ people employed since 2010, 100+ upskilled through tertiary qualifications

1440+ jobseekers into jobs and job pathways through Cape York Employment

60 young people transitioned to employment via School to Jobs program – 77% retained in work

200 First Nations persons employed at CYP 65% Indigenous Employment

On track to meet 2023 goal of creating **300 jobs in 3 years**

Job Guarantee Trial 46 jobs created Aurukun and Lockhart River, 100 jobseekers

70+ Indigenous businesses incubated through Cape York Enterprises

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Hundreds of health checks, immunisations and other preventive care measures implemented in a culturally safe way by Ngak Min Health, embedded on-site at Djarragun College

GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

Since 2008, Family Responsibilities Commission has served as a genuinely bi-cultural institution where **local authority is supported to uphold family responsibilities**, including around school attendance and child protection

\$105m in funding has been assessed by joint decision-making panels (Pama Futures) to reduce wastage and ensure alignment to local priorities – a process which also builds local capability and leads to local employment outcomes

^ Indicates approximately

INNOVATION, TECH AND FOOD SECURITY

\$1.7^ million invested in family health and nutrition through 20,000 boxes of fresh food delivered (at Cairns prices) to remote communities through Mayi Market

1,100+ community members used web app Pama Platform (recognised with a Sydney Design Award) to create budgets and resumes, track savings and food orders, and store key documents

This is what happens when Indigenous people lead reform as designers and drivers. The impact is seen in systems changed, families transformed, norms restored, and lives redirected. It is personal, cultural, and generational.

Cape York's reform agenda has also helped open and shift national conversations – it has lit a path forward in our communities and for the nation.



CAPE YORK
PARTNERSHIP

A Turning Point

Indigenous-led reforms are beating the odds. Yet we are still amongst the most impoverished people in this country. The promise of a fair go has yet to be realised for all Cape York youngsters. Our children start at the bottom, and too often, stay there. Too many families continue to lack access to key opportunities – a good education and a job – that every Australian can expect.

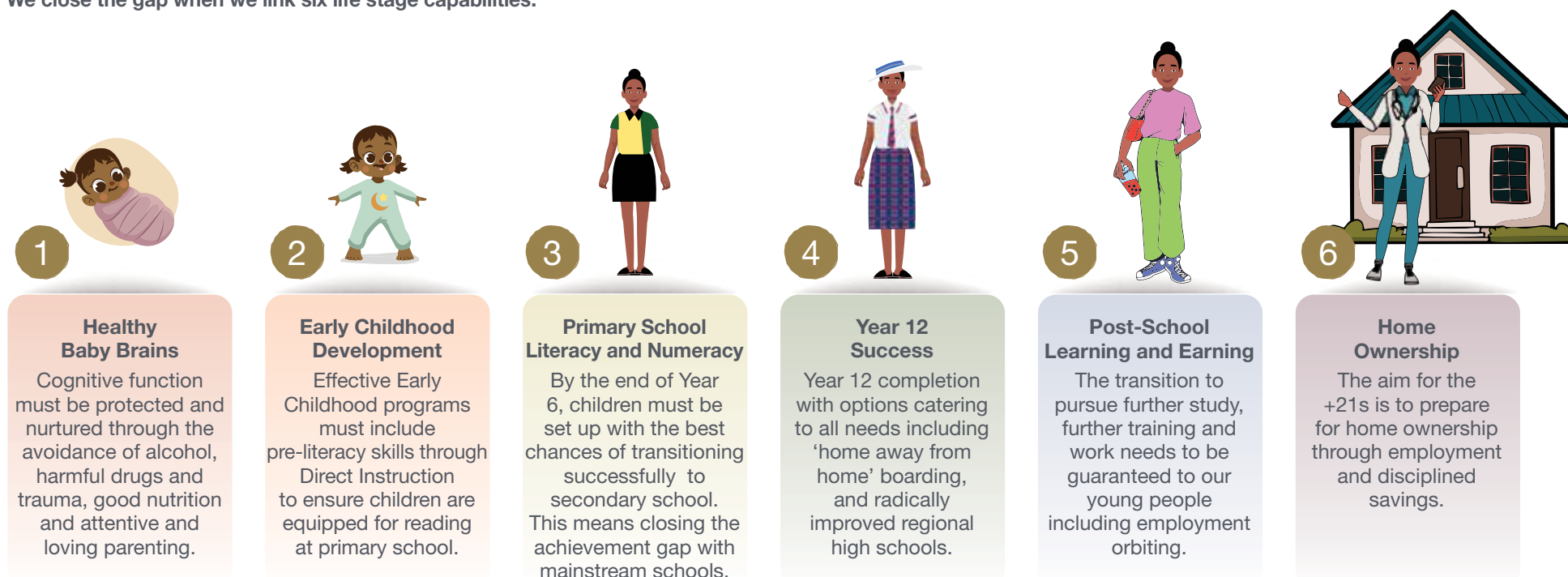
The foundations have been laid. We have learned about Closing the Gap. Organisations with capability have been built. Young Cape Yorkers whose families have stepped up to take responsibility, and who have been met with opportunity, have shown us how to Close the Gap. The proof is in our hands.

Each stage of a child's journey depends on the care, discipline, and investment of families. It is families who hold the key to closing the gap in a generation.

Our experience shows young people will close the gap with reforms to sequentially build their

capabilities over the six life-stages from 0 to 21 years. This is how the gap closes – steadily, stage by stage, child by child, we can build the key capabilities needed to Close the Gap in a generation.

We close the gap when we link six life stage capabilities:



Each capability builds on the last. Benefits compound. Success breeds success. Capabilities compound within families and across generations. This is when the gap truly closes.

If do this for every Cape York youngster from 0 to 21 years we will close the gap within 21 years.

We can close the gap by 2050, in a single generation. By building capability – child by child, family by family.

“We must stop hoping children succeed despite the system and start ensuring they succeed because of it.”

AUDREY DEEMAL

General Manager, Cape Operations,
Cape York Partnership



**CAPE YORK
PARTNERSHIP**

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FOR THE LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE

For more than three decades, Cape York has shaped national thinking.

From summits to welfare reform, from education to economic participation and empowerment, the ideas born here have influenced governments, policy and communities across Australia. At the heart of that work has been one of the nation's most influential and original thinkers – our founder, **Noel Pearson**. Noel's intellectual leadership has helped Australia confront some of its hardest truths and imagine better ways forward. He has always said his early drive and learning came from the old people he worked alongside – the great men and women of Cape York whose wisdom, courage and resolve set the foundation for all that followed. Because of them, Cape York has always been a proving ground for reform – showing what can be achieved when Indigenous people design solutions for themselves and their futures.

Recognition for Unity and Hope

Constitutional Recognition was to be the **great national reform** – the culmination of a generation's work to complete the Australian story. Noel's call for recognition through a constitutionally enshrined **Voice to Parliament** reflected Cape York's founding principle, that real change comes from partnership, not paternalism. His vision was that Australia's First Peoples be recognised not as a matter of symbolism, but as a practical act of nation-building – a permanent voice in our own affairs. It was, in every sense, the next logical step in the long journey from welfare dependency to empowerment and true equality in opportunity.

The path to that referendum was one of extraordinary persistence and national scrutiny. Over 30 years, there were a dozen parliamentary inquiries, expert panels, and reports – making it one of the most examined and debated public policy proposals in the nation's history. Through it all, Noel remained steadfast – it was his life's work. His vision for recognition was always about unity – bringing together the world's oldest living cultures with one of its youngest democracies – a shared story. We fell short, it cut deep, and revealed a hard country and a harder truth. In the remote communities of this nation, where people have the most to lose, support for a guaranteed Voice was strongest.

Our hope lies in the **six million Australians** who stood with us. That they continue to walk beside us and stand firm in the belief that **this nation can be better**, and will one day recognise its First Peoples in the Constitution, as the foundation of who we are.

We Can Close the Gap

The importance of Indigenous empowerment – and of responsibility and opportunity – remains. The green shoots of Indigenous-led change, real and hard-won against the odds, are rooted in culture, sustained by our strength, and made possible through enduring partnerships. They strengthen our belief that we can close the gap for our children, in one generation by building capability child by child, family by family. We continue this work for the love of our people.

It is up to all of us to bequeath to our children a better future, and a stronger nation.

“The gap isn't inevitable.”

Cape York reforms have proven that we can close the gap in a generation. Year 12 is the powerhouse outcome for our young people. It is the single strongest predictor of employment, health, income, and life expectancy. It determines whether a young person steps into adulthood with options – or without them.

The next two decades of reform must be defined by our focus on the 0–21 years, the foundation years where futures are made or lost. Every child, from birth to adulthood, must be given the opportunity, support, and belief to complete Year 12 and go further. With the right supported opportunities our families can close the gap for their children.



FIONA JOSE

Group CEO, Cape York Partnership



CAPE YORK
PARTNERSHIP



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FOR THE LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE
30 YEARS OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Thirty years on from the founding of Cape York Partnership,
we honour the ground made and the resolve still burning.

From the *first stand* of our old people to today's *hard-won gains*,
a new national story has taken shape. *Yet the task before us is clear.*

A quality education for every child is the hinge on which the future turns
– the power that lifts a people and strengthens the nation.
Until it is secured for all, the Cape York Agenda is unfinished.

Our purpose is unrelenting: to empower the people
of Cape York to choose lives they have reason to value.

We do this for the love of our people, and for the hope that
our children may have a better future in their own country.



CAPE YORK
PARTNERSHIP

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Since it began, champions of the Cape York Agenda have known that community-led reform requires more than aspiration – it needs allies.

We have been joined by extraordinary partners who believe the most enduring change comes from the ground up, and through First Nations people driving their own priorities for development, with support best given through capability transfer and uplift.

30 years ago, Westpac and BCG walked alongside us to spark an ambitious vision for change in Cape York. From those early days, countless partners from corporate, government, philanthropic and community sectors have joined the journey, each contributing knowledge, resources, innovation and belief in what is possible when Indigenous leadership drives the agenda. We deeply acknowledge and thank every organisation and individual who has stood with us, and most importantly, the families and communities who have walked beside us for three decades. This milestone belongs to all of us, a shared legacy of courage, partnership, innovation and enduring impact, and we look forward to the next chapter of driving true change together.

A special thank you to the generous sponsors of a commemorative 30-year gala held in 2025.

30 YEAR EVENT SPONSORS

Major Sponsors



Key Sponsors





OUR REFORM JOURNEY

OUR
FOUNDATIONS



65k+

Our Deep Past

For tens of thousands of years, Cape York Peninsula is home to a richly diverse range of Aboriginal peoples.

1800s

Colonisation

Aboriginal people suffer dispossession and severe disruption: violent frontier conflicts, disease and displacement, break-up of families, erosion of social norms.

Communities suffer powerlessness and lack of voice in decision-making affecting their futures.

1967

Referendum on Aboriginal Rights

Include Aboriginal people in the national census. Allowed the Commonwealth Government to make laws for Aboriginal people (previously only states could).

FOR THE LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE
30 YEARS OF FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation

Launch

Land reform and tenure resolution sought to progress Indigenous-led economic development and land management.

1996

Cape York Partnership

Launch

Created to drive the Cape York Agenda.

1995

Apunipima Health Council

Launch

Locally-led health solutions are demanded by community.

Injinoo Health Conference sees representatives from 17 Cape York communities and homelands meet to address poor health outcomes.

1994

Cape York Land Council

Launch

Land rights and native title interests are an urgent concern for communities.

The Lockhart River Summit unites Traditional Owners envisioning Aboriginal leadership and self-determination - the first of 28 summits over 34 years.

1990

RECLAIMING OUR DESTINY

The Genesis of the Cape York Agenda
1990-2000

Wik decision in High Court rules that native title can co-exist with pastoral leases, expanding on Mabo decision (1992).

1999

Welfare Reform Priorities

Policy

Passive welfare dependency is rife - community has had enough.

(1997) 'Bringing Them Home' report on Stolen Generations.

Wujal Wujal Land & Health Summit articulates community priorities of land rights, health, self-governance and youth empowerment.

2000

Family Development Strategy

Policy Innovation

Advocacy grows for a new approach to empowerment based on responsibility, culture, Indigenous leadership.

CYP & Queensland Government work together to promote corporate and philanthropic partnerships for Cape York.

Walk for Reconciliation sees 250k people march over Sydney Harbour Bridge.

'Our Right to Take Responsibility' is published by Noel Pearson.

Weipa Business Summit engages multiple stakeholders in discussions of discuss economic futures and business opportunities.

Alcohol Management Plans

Launch

COAG Trials

Policy

Safety is a priority for communities, amid rampant alcohol misuse.

CYP, Apunipima and Aurukun Justice Group develop community-driven reforms (including targeting alcohol abuse), rolled out in Aurukun (2002) and then right across the region.

Work Placement scheme shows participation in enterprise and work is best means of youth behaviour change.

2002

CYP precipitated the Qld Government commissioning the Cape York Justice Study by Tony Fitzgerald QC which highlighted levels of violence, substance abuse and social dysfunction.

Jawun

Innovation

(formerly Indigenous Enterprise Partnership)

Corporate Australia begins to engage actively with its social responsibility.

Untapped opportunities exist for corporate and philanthropic partnership to support Indigenous capability uplift

2001

ON OUR TERMS

Leadership, Education, Partnership
2001-2005

MPower Innovation (formerly Family Income Management)

Communities want control of family finances as part of wider reform efforts.

This CYP led financial literacy / capability program is extended to 7 communities, and Westpac provides banking and financial expertise as a project partner.

Innovative digital solutions are sought to bridge the digital divide, improve educational outcomes, and preserve cultural heritage.

2003

Negotiation Tables Innovation

Queensland Government adopts CYP's proposal of Negotiation Tables as a model for Government-community partnerships.

2004

Cape York Institute Policy Innovation

With a need for permanent, Indigenous-led solutions, Griffith University auspices Cape York Institute (CYI).

The Howard government announces it will disband the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a national Indigenous representative body.

2005

Welfare Reform Design Policy Innovation

Across Cape York, communities focus on welfare reform solutions.

CYI proposes Cape York Welfare Reform trial to the Queensland Government.

Student Education Trusts Innovation (now READY, SET and GO)

SET enables families to save for education expenses, promoting the power of budgets and personal responsibility - this shift restores agency, raises expectations, and positions parents as equal partners in their children's education.

Work Placement Scheme Innovation

Youth seek private sector job opportunities as part of their rightful place in the economy.

WPS pilots with meat industry, and later Mission Australia.

'Orbiting' - from home to more advantaged places for good quality work and education opportunities, while maintaining cultural connection - is acknowledged as vital.

Higher Expectations Program Innovation (later Cape York Leaders Program)

Education is recognised as the cornerstone of development.

Educated youth need support to bridge the educational divide including through supported access to boarding schools and tertiary education.

Leadership succession, via youth empowerment, is a priority for Elders.

MultiLit Launch

Effective literacy instruction is seen to improve education outcomes and bridge literacy gap.

REFORM, AT SCALE Seeing the Results of Change 2007-2013

2007

'From Hand Out to Hand Up' report

Cape York Institute Leadership Academy

Through widespread engagement, community Welfare Reform pillars are agreed: rebuilding social norms; education; employment; and housing.

Tania Major, Higher Expectations Program's (HEP's) first student, is Young Australian of the Year.

Indigenous leadership seeks empowerment across community, corporate and government, sectors.

Essay: 'White Guilt, Victimhood and the Quest for a Radical Centre (The Griffith Review)' is published by Noel Pearson.

2008

Student Case Management Innovation (formerly Attendance Case Management)

Attendance Case Management Framework launched to promote 100% school attendance.

Welfare Reform Trials Policy

Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale, and Mossman Gorge commit to rebuild social norms and reduce welfare dependency.

Australian and Queensland Governments commit \$96m for a 4-year trial of the proposed reform.

Pride of Place Innovation

Pride of Place is a CYP backyard renovation project where family members save and commit 'sweat equity' complimented by Garden Clubs and competitions.

'Radical Hope: Quarterly Essay Education and Equality in Australia' is published by Noel Pearson.

2009

Family Responsibilities Commission Policy Innovation

Family Responsibilities Commission Act passed in Queensland Parliament, allowing a world first trial to link collective responsibility with government assistance.

Local Commissioners are engaged in a unique community-led statutory body in welfare reform communities.

ABSTUDY Bypass Reform Innovation

CYI advocacy leads to ABSTUDY Bypass Reform for CYWR communities, so Indigenous students can use ABSTUDY to attend boarding schools away from home. This expanded on the 'special consideration' from ABSTUDY given in 2004 to CYLP's secondary scholarship program.

2010

Strong Families Innovation (formerly Parenting Program)

CYP invests in parenting skills, family relationships, and safe, nurturing environments for children with CYP's Strong Families.

Closing the Gap framework adopted by COAG (Council of Australian Governments) to reduce Indigenous disadvantage in health, education, and employment.

Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Innovation

Built on the 'science of learning', combining Direct Instruction with the Class, Club, Culture model for academic, creative, character, and cultural excellence.

Direct Instruction is rolled out via CYAAA at campuses in Coen and Aurukun (Hope Vale in 2011).

Bama Services Innovation (formerly Djarragun Enterprises)

CYP creates meaningful employment opportunities in construction, landscaping, facilities and cleaning through CYP's Bama Services.

Mossman Gorge Gateway Innovation Opportunity Hubs Launch

'Lighthouse initiatives' are introduced in the 4 welfare reform communities (Hope Vale, Coen, Aurukun, Mossman Gorge).

CYP O-Hubs are opened to deliver innovative solutions for financial literacy and wellbeing at local level (Aurukun O-Hub opened 2011).

Mossman Gorge Gateway Centre is established to create economic empowerment on Country through cultural tourism.

2012

'Radical Hope, Education and Equality in Australia' is published by Noel Pearson.

'Up from the Mission' Selected writings published by Noel Pearson.

Bush Owner Builder Innovation

CYP co-designed and innovated an on-Country and Homeland housing solution.

Djarragun College Launch

CYP takes on Djarragun to provide a culturally rich quality academic, sporting, arts, and vocational pathways opportunity.

2011

Cape York Leaders Program Innovation

Education, the most important reform, sees a range of initiatives (HEP Secondary, HEP Tertiary & Leadership Academy) streamlined as CYLP.

2013

Home Pride Innovation

CYP supporting families to create a safe home environment for our children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act is a symbolic step toward constitutional recognition.

Good to Great Schools Australia Launch

GGSA created to transition schools from poor to great through 'science of learning' curriculum innovation including D.I., and professional development supporting CYAAA and schools Australia-wide.

Cape York Employment Launch

CYP provides an Indigenous-led Community Development Program and trials Job Guarantee policy innovation.

Cape York Enterprises Cape York Timber Launch

Real job opportunities exist in the regional economy for Indigenous people.

Entrepreneurs and businesses need support, resources, investment and incubation.

2014

'A Rightful Place: Race, Recognition and a more complete Commonwealth' is published by Noel Pearson.

2016

Pama Language Centre Launch

Language preservation is a cornerstone of cultural wellbeing.

CYP assists communities to record, revitalise, and maintain their ancestral languages.

Empowered Communities Innovation

Empowered Communities is launched as an Indigenous-led framework for new, more balanced partnership with governments - true power-sharing.

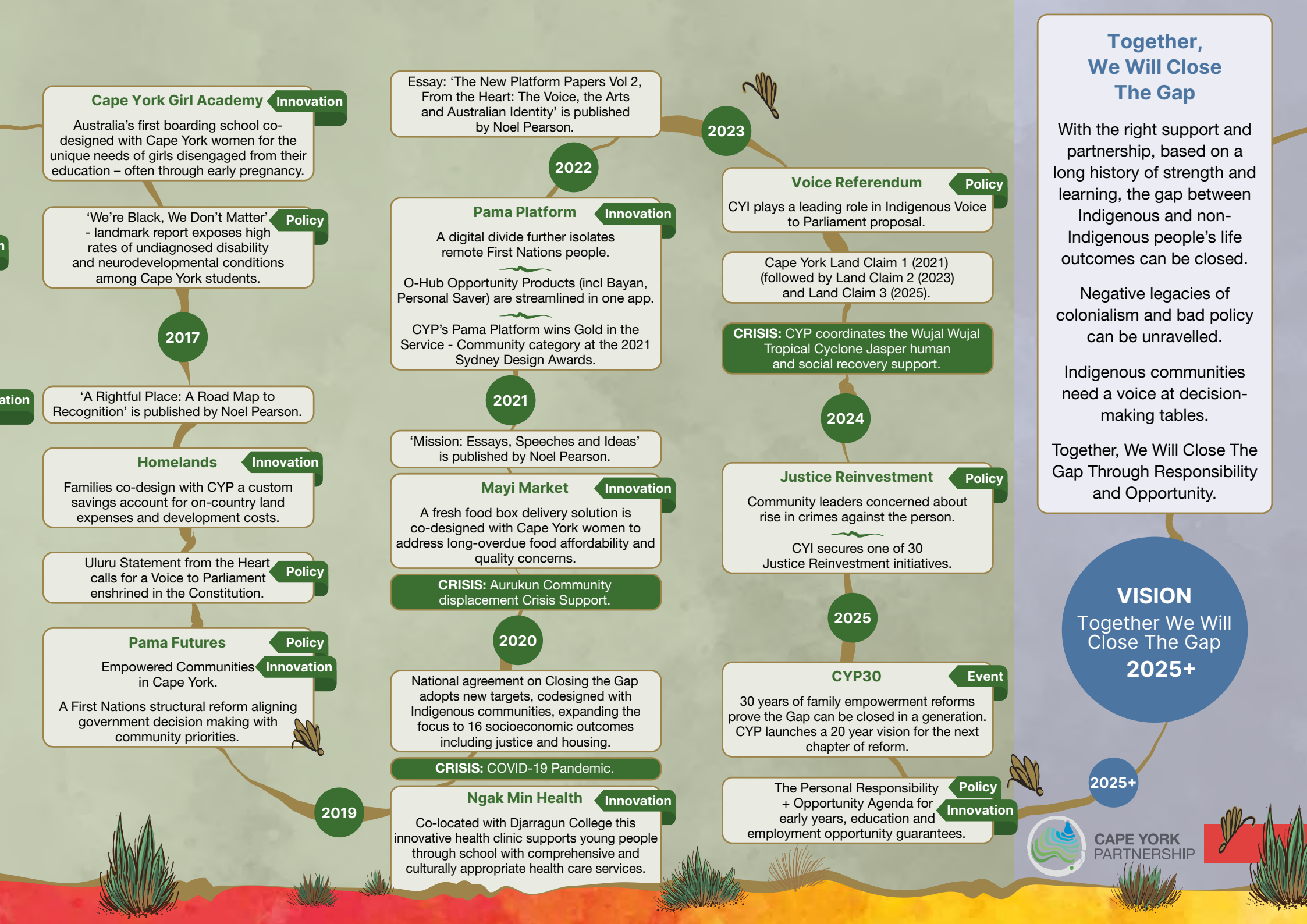
The Recognise campaign promotes constitutional reform to recognise Indigenous Australians.

'War of the Worlds' on genocide and colonialism is published by Noel Pearson.

2015

INNOVATION, INSPIRATION

Consolidating and making our Agenda national
2015-2024



Cape York Girl Academy **Innovation**

Australia's first boarding school co-designed with Cape York women for the unique needs of girls disengaged from their education – often through early pregnancy.

'We're Black, We Don't Matter' **Policy**

- landmark report exposes high rates of undiagnosed disability and neurodevelopmental conditions among Cape York students.

2017

'A Rightful Place: A Road Map to Recognition' is published by Noel Pearson.

Homelands **Innovation**

Families co-design with CYP a custom savings account for on-country land expenses and development costs.

Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. **Policy**

Pama Futures **Policy**

Empowered Communities in Cape York. **Innovation**

A First Nations structural reform aligning government decision making with community priorities.

2019

Essay: 'The New Platform Papers Vol 2, From the Heart: The Voice, the Arts and Australian Identity' is published by Noel Pearson.

2022

Pama Platform **Innovation**

A digital divide further isolates remote First Nations people.

O-Hub Opportunity Products (incl Bayan, Personal Saver) are streamlined in one app.

CYP's Pama Platform wins Gold in the Service - Community category at the 2021 Sydney Design Awards.

2021

'Mission: Essays, Speeches and Ideas' is published by Noel Pearson.

Mayi Market **Innovation**

A fresh food box delivery solution is co-designed with Cape York women to address long-overdue food affordability and quality concerns.

CRISIS: Aurukun Community displacement Crisis Support.

2020

National agreement on Closing the Gap adopts new targets, codesigned with Indigenous communities, expanding the focus to 16 socioeconomic outcomes including justice and housing.

CRISIS: COVID-19 Pandemic.

Ngak Min Health **Innovation**

Co-located with Djarragun College this innovative health clinic supports young people through school with comprehensive and culturally appropriate health care services.

2023

Voice Referendum **Policy**

CYI plays a leading role in Indigenous Voice to Parliament proposal.

Cape York Land Claim 1 (2021) (followed by Land Claim 2 (2023) and Land Claim 3 (2025).

CRISIS: CYP coordinates the Wujal Wujal Tropical Cyclone Jasper human and social recovery support.

2024

Justice Reinvestment **Policy**

Community leaders concerned about rise in crimes against the person.

CYI secures one of 30 Justice Reinvestment initiatives.

2025

CYP30 **Event**

30 years of family empowerment reforms prove the Gap can be closed in a generation. CYP launches a 20 year vision for the next chapter of reform.

The Personal Responsibility + Opportunity Agenda for early years, education and employment opportunity guarantees. **Policy** **Innovation**

Together, We Will Close The Gap

With the right support and partnership, based on a long history of strength and learning, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's life outcomes can be closed.

Negative legacies of colonialism and bad policy can be unravelled.

Indigenous communities need a voice at decision-making tables.

Together, We Will Close The Gap Through Responsibility and Opportunity.

VISION

Together We Will Close The Gap **2025+**

2025+



CAPE YORK PARTNERSHIP



**OUR
FUTURE**



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