



Creating Futures:

Weave's intensive support service for young people leaving custody or involved in the criminal justice system

Evaluation Report

April 2020

Melanie Schwartz
Mareese Terare



Image taken during Creating Futures
Cultural Camp, Wollombi 2018

Acknowledgements

Weave is situated on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. The researchers acknowledge and pay respect to the Gadigal people, to Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal people within these boundaries.

Mareese and I would like to thank all the Creating Futures clients and stakeholders who gave us their time and insights about the program. It was a privilege to hear clients' stories.

This work was completed with generous assistance from Daniel Daylight, Patty McCabe, Sam George, Melissa Merritt, Siobhan Bryson and Mardi Diles from Weave Youth and Community Services.

Caroline James spent the Dartmouth College 2020 winter term in Sydney working on this evaluation. I would like to thank her for her enthusiastic and willing research assistance, and particularly for her expertise in relation to the quantitative data used in this report. Thank you also to Alisa Wicks and William Jackson for their help with interview transcription.

Thank you to the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Committee for their review of this project and for providing ethics approval.

This evaluation was funded by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the Clover Moore Salary Trust.

The artwork used throughout this document is by Linda Jackson. The photographs featured were taken during the Creating Futures Cultural Camp by Ben Edwards.

Report authors:

Melanie Schwartz is Deputy Head of School at the Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales, where she specialises in criminal law and Indigenous justice issues.

Mareese Terare is a Lecturer in Social Work and Policy Studies, University of Sydney, and is a Bundjalung & Goenpul Woman.

Citation of this work:

This report can be cited as: Melanie Schwartz and Mareese Terare (2020) Creating Futures: Weave's intensive support service for young people leaving custody or involved in the criminal justice system, Evaluation report, Sydney.



Image taken during Creating Futures
Cultural Camp, Wollombi 2018

Executive Summary

Creating Futures is an intensive support service for young people leaving custody or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system on bail, community orders or court diversion. It provides court support and advocacy and wraparound casework tailored to the needs and goals of each client.

Weave invited independent researchers to evaluate Creating Futures over a three-year period beginning in 2017. The researchers worked with Weave, with oversight of Indigenous-controlled organisations, to develop an evaluation framework which combined interviews, client Yarning Circles and collection and analysis of client data, to assess whether the program meets its three key aims. Those aims are: reducing client contact with the criminal justice system; supporting clients to meet their goals, and increase their sense of purpose, self-worth, social inclusion and dignity via the use of an Aboriginal Healing Framework; and utilising processes which represent good practice in post-release support and align with the program's theory of change

While not a specific focus of this report, it is worth noting that alongside a focus on achieving client's self-identified goals, Creating Futures works to address the specific criminogenic risk factors associated with the Risk Needs Responsivity (RNR) model. For example, and as discussed in more detail below, the program's strengths-based approach focuses on client capacity to improve their circumstances. Personal and intergenerational complex trauma can lead to risky or impulsive behaviours, and lead to issues with anger-management or self-control. In response, the consistency, reliability and responsiveness of Creating Futures staff assists in building trust and helps clients to de-escalate problematic behaviours. The availability of in-house counselling assists in processing trauma, addressing substance dependency and the regulation of extreme emotions triggered by traumatic experiences. All Weave staff model pro-social behaviour and assist clients to learn new skills to more positively navigate and interact with their social environment and the community. Creating Futures creates opportunities for clients to engage in constructive, positive events and activities that allow them to create new, more positive networks and connections within community. Giving clients opportunities to show initiative and leadership allows them to experience themselves in new and different ways. In summary, this report presents an abundance of evidence that the program addresses the criminogenic risk factors which are the basis of assessment in the RNR model.



Image taken during Creating Futures
Cultural Camp, Wollombi 2018



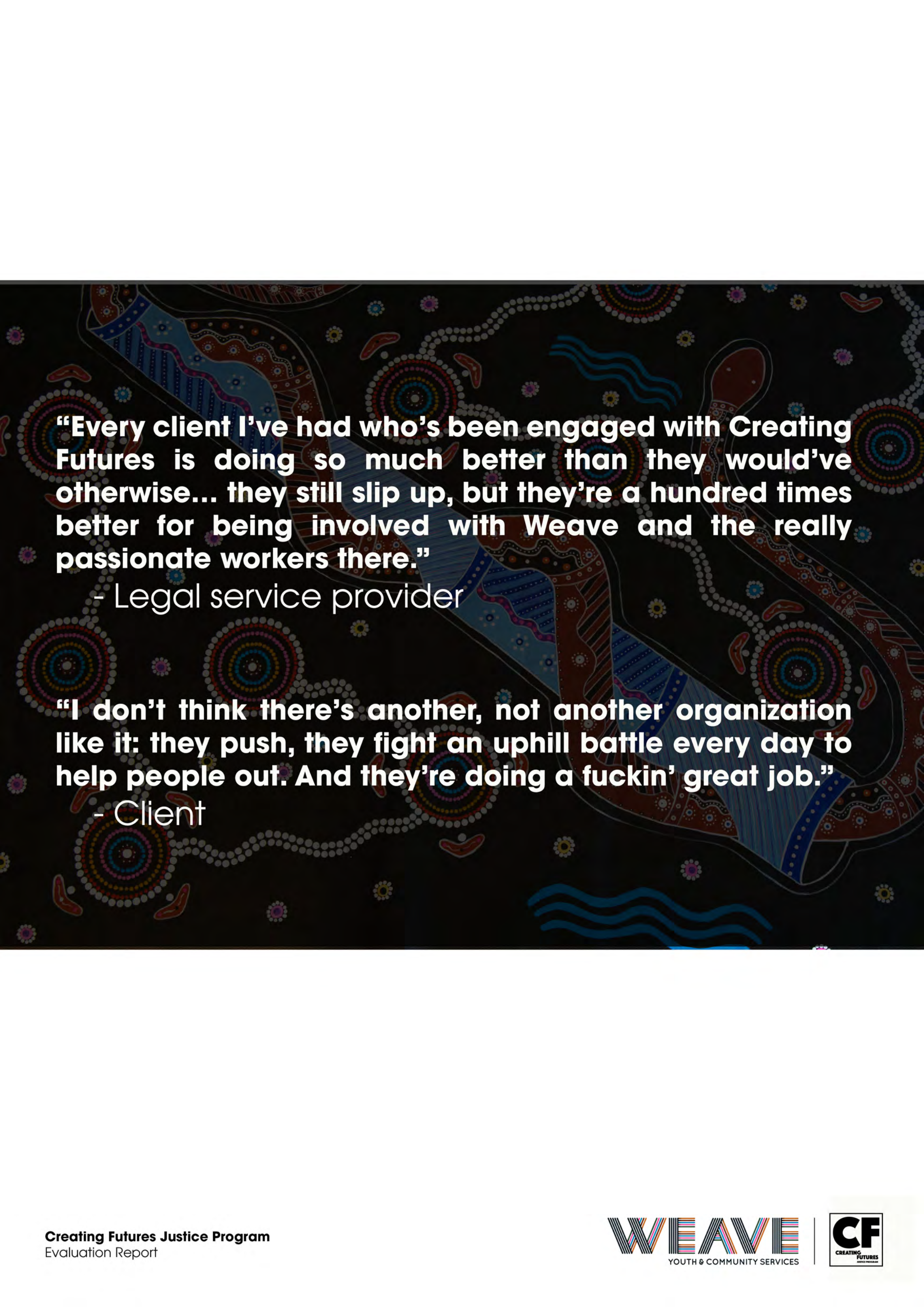
Key findings

Client demographics

- Creating Futures has had 93 active clients over the evaluation period 2017-19, with an average caseload of approximately 15 clients per caseworker at any time.
- As the program shifts more towards community-based referrals (as distinct from referrals from Corrections), the average age of clients has lowered. In 2019, 50% of clients were aged 21 years or younger.
- 82% of clients had been imprisoned in the past, and a further 17% had been in police custody. Combined, this represents 99% of all Creating Futures clients.
- As the program matures, the potential caseload increases along with the number of people who have been engaged as clients. This is because as the number of 'closed' clients grows, so do the number of people who may re-emerge needing support. Thus, while the active caseload might remain standardized, there is an increasingly long tail of people who can resurface. As cultural and other outreach initiatives increase in number and popularity, the potential reach of the program also grows.

Reducing contact with the criminal justice system

- The recidivism figures for Creating Futures clients compare very favourably with the recidivism rates of Aboriginal people of the same age range in NSW. According to BOCSAR data, in 2016, 55.7% of Aboriginal people aged 18-30 reoffended within 12 months of being released from custody. In 2017, the rate was 57.3%. The average rate of reoffending among Creating Futures clients across the evaluation period is 4.11%. While these figures are descriptive only (due to the absence of relevant control factors in the comparison group), they are still compelling.
- Of clients who did reoffend, the offences were often more minor compared with their previous history of contact with the criminal justice system.
- In the view of stakeholders, involvement in Creating Futures improves client outcomes in bail, sentencing and other legal matters by facilitating better relationships with lawyers; better experiences of legal service provision for clients; and procures better justice outcomes for clients by assisting lawyers with various tasks associated with the legal process.



“Every client I’ve had who’s been engaged with Creating Futures is doing so much better than they would’ve otherwise... they still slip up, but they’re a hundred times better for being involved with Weave and the really passionate workers there.”

- Legal service provider

“I don’t think there’s another, not another organization like it: they push, they fight an uphill battle every day to help people out. And they’re doing a fuckin’ great job.”

- Client



Key findings

Supporting clients to meet their goals and to increase their sense of purpose, self-worth, social inclusion and dignity

- Creating Futures staff successfully uses an Aboriginal Healing Framework to support clients, which involves providing a service which is trauma informed, strengths-based, culturally safe and client-led.
- The top three areas of need for clients were for brokerage, court support and housing. More than 50% of clients were assisted in each one of these three areas.
- The program draws integrity from being housed within Weave, being an organisation with deep roots in community. The long association of many Creating Futures clients with Weave allows trust relationships to be more quickly established with caseworkers.
- Creating Futures connects clients to culture and community in ways that are both strengthening to their personal identity, and which provides a protective factor against re-offending.

Good practice processes in post-release support

- Client processes: Creating Futures provides holistic, wraparound support which fosters stable trust relationships between caseworkers and client. This client-centred process forms the backbone of the success of the program. It is further bolstered by the degree of outreach that the Creating Futures team engages in – both in terms of providing support out of the office, and in processes such as pre-release contact (throughcare) offered to clients nearing the end of their term of imprisonment.
- Stakeholder processes: An important finding of the evaluation is that, apart from the work that they do with clients, Creating Futures processes are highly valued by stakeholders and contribute to positive outcomes for clients, particularly in relation to legal processes. They also increase the capacity of organisations like Legal Aid and the Aboriginal Legal Service by doing some of the client-centred work that these legal service providers don't have resources to do themselves.



Image taken during Creating Futures Cultural Camp, Wollombi 2018

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the capacity of Creating Futures be increased by:

- a. Lowering the eligibility age to 14 or 16, and adding a further worker to specialise in that demographic.
- b. Increasing the upper limit of the age eligibility to 35, and adding a further worker to specialise in the older client (25-35) demographic.
- c. Adding two more caseworkers for the current Creating Futures demographic, to increase the number of clients that the program is able to support to meet current demand.

Recommendation 2:

That attention to accurate collection of client data be continued, and that this is entrenched as part of Creating Futures processes.

Recommendation 3:

That funding be sought to provide brokerage support for Creating Futures clients over the age of 25 years.

Recommendation 4:

That funding be sought for cultural activities and support for Creating Futures clients, including the partial funding of a salary for a cultural support worker to ensure dedicated time towards the Creating Futures program.

