



Jesse with participant Elijah and Elijah's mum, Susanna.

## Creative harmony

Artful Dodgers Studios' innovative model connects young people to supports and a sense of belonging.

Jesse Sullivan began volunteering with Jesuit Social Services' Artful Dodgers Studios a decade ago. He was drawn to the program's unique approach in engaging young individuals who experience disadvantage.

"Artful Dodgers is a welcoming space for young people to access art and music equipment and support from Community and Cultural Development workers who are practising artists and provide one-on-one mentoring. But it's also a place young people can re-engage with learning and build self-confidence, social connection, and a sense of belonging," said Jesse.

Jesse is now a Community and Cultural Development worker with Artful Dodgers Studios. He believes that because the program focuses on young people as artists, it's able to reach people who are disengaged or don't know where to find support.

"Young people who come here are often living under difficult circumstances and may never have seen a psychologist or connected with a support service before."

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## Restorative approaches support people to flourish



Relationships and connections have always been critical to Jesuit Social Services' action and advocacy over more than 45 years. We know that each person has their own web of relationships – from within themselves, to their families, the

broader community and the planet – and that when these relationships are fractured it can be very difficult for people to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Our way of working prioritises relationships and supports each individual to flourish. This is apparent in our long-standing restorative justice work, such as our Youth Justice Group Conferencing program, which brings a young person who has caused harm together with those impacted by their actions to enable the young person to take accountability and make amends.

It also applies to other areas of our work.

In this newsletter, you will read about how we use restorative practices to strengthen the web of relationships that will help program participants heal and thrive. This includes using music as a way of connecting with people through our Artful Dodgers Studios; with children in Alice Springs' Yipirinya School; and with participants bereaved by suicide.

You will also read about The Outdoor Experience, our program supporting young people battling substance abuse and mental health problems to strengthen their relationship with nature as part of their journey to heal.

These programs allow people to address some of the challenges they are experiencing in a safe, supportive way and give them the best opportunity to lead productive lives. They contribute to efforts to fulfil our vision of building a just society.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support of our work. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to stand in solidarity with those on the margins.

**Julie Edwards**  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## Creative harmony



Artful Dodgers Studios is a safe space where young people can explore music, visual and digital arts, and other crafts.

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“Dodgers has successfully connected some of these young people to the supports they need. I think that’s because when they come here, the primary focus isn’t on their trauma or circumstances. They’re here to make art and music.

“They feel seen as individuals, and that builds a sense of trust and confidence in the space, and us as workers.”

The space is home to a pottery studio, music recording studio and practice space, and equipment for multimedia and digital arts practice, and is open to young people aged 15-27.

Artful Dodgers Studios also hosts a regular public lunchtime gig called Megaphone – a chance for young people to present or perform their art and music, show up to support each other, and spend time together.

“We work with people, sometimes at the most difficult points of their lives. Some of their stories are very challenging. But I think this place has a calming effect – something about our 25 years of history, and a sense that Dodgers feels like family.

“For those young people who have mental health issues, and may be experiencing disconnection, isolation, or low self-esteem, Dodgers can provide a sense of social inclusion.

“The thing that’s kept me here for ten years is seeing the way young people progress over time – seeing the therapeutic impact of making art, and the impact on young people’s confidence and sense of community.”

## Music workshops encourage self-expression in Alice Springs school



ARIA Award-winning musician Adrian Eagle.

Students at Yipirinya School have workshopped songs and laid down beats with ARIA Award-winning musician Adrian Eagle, as part of a new relationship between the school and Jesuit Social Services that will provide opportunities for performance, self-expression, and new narratives for First Nations young people in Mparntwe/Alice Springs.

Through our Artful Dodgers Studios, Adrian has previously given talks and workshops at schools around Melbourne. We were then able to secure grant funding to bring the rapper to Alice Springs for a fortnight-long workshop series last September.

"We were so lucky and blessed to be able to talk with these bubs, to help them express themselves," he said.

"They came out the gate with these amazing poems. They're little bubs, five years old up to 13, all of them love music, love expressing themselves, dancing, coming out of their shells to share their stories. They were filled with lots to say. It was a privilege to be able to encourage them."

Over the first workshop series, Adrian guided students through structuring and recording songs, encouraging kids to overcome nervousness and build self-confidence.

"It could have been a one-off thing, but we're very big on relational working, developing good relationships with our partners, and we wanted to build on that," said Sally Gray, a convener on Jesuit Social Services' Youth Justice Group Conferencing program in the Northern Territory.

"We're making sure we're developing an integrated approach towards working with the school – extending and strengthening the relationship, working therapeutically and restoratively."

Sally said initiatives like the music workshops are an opportunity to work pre-emptively and provide young people facing challenges with more language to express their strengths and experiences.

"A key part of restorative work is the importance of restoring relationships," she said.

"The things the kids were singing about – emphasising the importance of kinship relationships of brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers – show that strong relationships mean everything."



**"I close my eyes and the Dreaming begins... my culture, my Country, my family, my friends."**

There has been national attention on children in Alice Springs who have contact with the youth justice system, who are among the most marginalised children in our community. Sally said children rapped about feeling "like animals" and being looked down upon.

"They spoke so strongly. We're getting a sense of how they're feeling about that portrayal of themselves."

Adrian said students' eyes "lit up" when they heard their recordings back and received positive feedback, and that leading the workshops gives him purpose and makes him feel grateful.

"Music is always going to be in my life, and doing things like this is the ultimate contribution I can be making with my voice and my skills – helping the bubs to express themselves."

## Jesuit Social Services' commitment to Restorative Practice

Jesuit Social Services takes pride in delivering supports and services that recognise a person's individual needs, experiences and story. We develop strong relationships and connections with the people and communities we work alongside to help facilitate positive change and create better outcomes.

We adopt this holistic, restorative approach across several pillars of our work, including criminal justice. What leads a person to commit an offence is often complex, so to disrupt a person's trajectory into the justice system, we must better understand the drivers towards it.

Restorative practice principles and processes can be employed in a range of contexts but are most commonly applied in the criminal justice system, focusing on repairing the harm caused by an offence or wrongdoing, and the various ways people, relationships and communities are affected.

Restorative justice aims not only to address the offending behaviour but also to prevent any further harm or offending from occurring.

Our Youth Justice Group Conferencing program is an example of this – an evidence-based approach that:

- gives all parties a voice by preparing people to listen and communicate effectively
- prevents, manages, resolves or transforms conflict
- understands, addresses, repairs or prevents harm
- promotes wellbeing and pro-social behavior
- harnesses cooperation for problem solving
- promotes effective decision making
- provides leadership and mentoring
- strengthens connectedness and community

Our process guides participants through a sequence of recounting what has happened and how people have been affected, and then, together, determining what positive steps they can take to improve the circumstances of everyone involved.

By prioritising the wellbeing of all parties impacted and creating an opportunity for young people to listen, learn and make amends, restorative practices such as group conferencing help to create a system focused on healing, rather than on punishment.

In residential settings, including youth detention, restorative practices can help build a system that embeds a relationship focus. In doing so, they can help create opportunities for learning life skills, including effective self-regulation and social skills that build, maintain and repair relationships.

Supporting young people in an ongoing way to develop these skills has the potential to shift reactive and unhelpful responses to behaviour, toward a relational approach that supports young people.

In both Victoria and the Northern Territory, Jesuit Social Services has been meeting with government and departmental representatives, Judges, lawyers, and community organisations to help educate and provide advice on the benefits of applying restorative practices within our justice systems, including information on appropriate referral pathways to our Youth Justice Group Conferencing programs.

With the recent announcements on raising the age of criminal responsibility, we also believe restorative practices could play a role for children aged 10-12 years of age who will be impacted by these legislative changes.

Restorative practices work. They play a crucial role in helping to disrupt trajectories towards the justice system, and in helping to teach and ensure children and young people have the skills to thrive.

## Open Pantry helping provide food security and connection

Over the past year, the rising cost of living has created problems for many Australian households. The impact of this is felt acutely in areas such as Western Sydney, where price rises can exacerbate existing hardships including difficulties accessing and affording groceries, petrol, heating at home and more.

Open Pantry in Blackett, Mount Druitt, has provided low cost, fresh food to the community for years. Recently, when it looked like Open Pantry may be forced to shut its doors, Jesuit Social Services was asked to step in to keep it running.

Monique Perusco, Manager of our Western Sydney programs, said the importance of Open Pantry to the local community meant that it was essential to keep the store running.

"The Blackett community has been serviced by Open Pantry for a long time and the loss of this critical service would have been terrible."

When it reopens soon, Open Pantry will offer hampers of food and household items, nutritious, pre-prepared meals, and hopefully, a café and community space.



Chandelle coordinates Open Pantry.

The decision to take over Open Pantry strengthens Jesuit Social Services' existing food security work in Western Sydney. Existing programs in the area include the Ignite Food Store, and Currawong Kitchen, which provides healthy school lunches at two schools.

"There are fewer resources out here. There's not an abundance of affordable stores, and that means people's access to food is very limited.

"Open Pantry is a fantastic place and we are really excited to have a community space where we invite people in. But we don't want to just operate a pantry. We want to operate something that is a part of the community.

"In doing that, we'll invite people in and have bigger conversations. We'll offer coffee and friendship, and we will keep talking to people about the support they want," said Monique.

The addition of Open Pantry to our work in Western Sydney means we have more ways to make an impact and support more people in the community.



Open Pantry is a welcoming space where people can feel a sense of community.

## Empowering young people on the path to recovery through connection to nature

Nestled in the heart of Yarra Bend in Kew, lies the heritage-listed Bush Hut, home to The Outdoor Experience. The program is Jesuit Social Services' long-standing Bush Adventure Therapy program, which supports young people aged 15-25 who are struggling with substance abuse and mental health.

Program Coordinator Jenny Vran said The Outdoor Experience is unique, "combining adventure-based activities with a therapeutic approach, which provides more engaging and memorable experiences than more traditional avenues".

The innovative program gives young people the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature, engaging in outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, creative team-building, canoeing, and more.

Young people are presented with the opportunity to overcome their fears, work together as a team, and make new social connections. Through action and reflection, participants build respectful relationships, develop self-confidence, and learn new skills and strategies that they can apply to their lives more generally and support their overall wellbeing.

Tara\*, a young participant in the program experiencing addiction, told Jenny that the program has been such an incredible experience for her in many ways.

"From the first day, when I arrived and my nerves were through the roof, but the staff were so warm and inviting, to the last week, where I have found confidence in my abilities and the courage to try new things."

Tara added that, "being able to have a space that is safe and free of judgement to just have fun or to open up and learn more about myself and others has been so rewarding".

The Outdoor Experience works with other organisations: support workers from participants' primary support service and participants actively participate side by side, in all aspects of the program. This approach allows for continuous feedback between program staff and primary support workers, and continuity of service on completion of the program.

For Jenny, the power of The Outdoor Experience lies in its ability to help young people connect with their environment and discover what they are truly capable of.



The Outdoor Experience allows participants to explore nature and participate in outdoor activities.

"When a young person feels comfortable and confident enough to try something new and out of their comfort zone, it can have a broader impact on how they see themselves and the world. It can be very empowering.

"This newfound self-awareness and connection has a positive impact on their overall health and wellbeing, equipping them with tools and strategies to move confidently forward on their recovery journey and empowering them to make a meaningful difference in their lives."

Jenny said the program has been remarkable in helping young people overcome problematic substance use and poor mental health. "Participants report feeling more connected to nature and other people, more confident in their abilities, and more hopeful for the future."

*\*Name changed to protect their identity.*

## How music connects hearts in grief and helps in healing



Glenn McDonald, musician, anthropologist, and Support After Suicide participant and volunteer.

When musician and anthropologist Glenn McDonald's mum passed away from suicide in 2011, music played an important part in his recovery.

His mum encouraged a love of music from an early age, and since her loss, Glenn has used music to help connect with her, through songs she used to play.

Music has also been something Glenn can turn to in challenging and tough times.

Connecting with Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program, which provides counselling, group

sessions and other resources to people bereaved by suicide, also made a critical difference.

"During my bereavement, I was grateful for any small thing that made it easier. Through Support After Suicide, I met others who had also lost loved ones to suicide, and I found that music, often used in different ways, was a common thread during people's bereavement," said Glenn.

This led Glenn to delve further into music therapy. In bereavement, he said it's a tool that can be used in mental health and wellbeing, particularly after a traumatic and life-changing event.

The combination of his love of music and his anthropological studies led Glenn to develop the Connecting Music and Emotions music workshop, which he facilitates with Support After Suicide.

In the workshop, participants learn about music history, how musicians use musical 'tools' to evoke different emotional responses and share the role that music has played during their own bereavement. Participants learn practical strategies like choosing when to engage certain types of music, creating playlists, and taking a more conscious and mindful approach to music.

One of the powerful motivators for Glenn in creating and facilitating this workshop is the ability to give back to the Support After Suicide program and, he said, "share my music knowledge that could potentially help others who have also lost loved ones to suicide".

"I remember back to how I felt when I first made that phone call to Support After Suicide. I would be in a very different place today if it wasn't for them.

"It's an organisation I will be forever grateful for."



Programs like our Artful Dodgers Studios offer a safe and welcoming space where young people can find connection, express themselves and learn new skills.

Our trained, passionate staff celebrate these young people for what makes them unique and embrace their needs.



Help us create a second home for the young people who need it most.

### Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

I would like to make an ongoing monthly gift of:

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