

# KEEP YOUR SPIRIT STRONG

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## The healing power of horses

### CASE STUDY: **YAWARDANI JAN-GA**

Using the innate healing power of horses, Yawardani Jan-ga helps young Aboriginal people to build awareness and become more confident. The program relies on the wisdom of these magnificent animals who support people with their calming and accepting nature by providing non-verbal insights by mirroring participants vibrations and behaviours.

**Yawardani Jan-ga** or the 'Helping Horses' program based in Broome is an innovative equine assisted learning program that was previously piloted in the mid-west region of Western Australia. Led by Professor Juli Coffin, head of Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Young People at the Telethon Kids Institute, the program has taken years of research to try and fill a gap by providing an evidence-based approach to the long-term healing of young Aboriginal people.

The horses utilised throughout the program have helped kids and youth in the Kimberley region to develop valuable insights and life skills and manage obstacles in a non-judgemental, safe and exciting environment that is naturally appealing to young people. From the training that is carried out to the program itself, Yawardani Jan-ga revolves around coordinated care, ensuring a 'wrap-around' style service is offered. With around 200 'active' kids, the program supports positive relationship building through awareness, positive self-thought and self-regulation – all things that equine-assisted learning can teach.

"The non-inclusive conversation around young Aboriginal people's wellbeing and particularly suicide, made me want to take action. There's always lots of talk but no action towards building programs and facilitating and maintaining support. I wanted to do something practical," said Professor Coffin.



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## CASE STUDY: YAWARDANI JAN-GA *(continued)*

“When training to run equine-assisted learning, I found it wasn’t very Aboriginal friendly. The training process was very clinical and although I have a background in psychology and teaching, I believed it was not tailored appropriately to Aboriginal ways of working in the social and emotional wellbeing space. This program delivers support from the perspective of the Aboriginal world view, and run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.”

In 2019, Professor Coffin and a colleague had the Yawardai Jan-ga curriculum was endorsed by the founder Meggin Kirby, from Equine Institute Australia to rewrite the training manual which was then put into action with this year’s group of local Aboriginal trainees. The training was delivered successfully, with the inclusion of language and a framework which was culturally-sensitive. Sixteen local Aboriginal people were taken through the training process and now deliver the program alongside Professor Coffin as ‘Equine Assisted Learning Practitioners’.

Everyone is encouraged to enter the program no matter where they have come from or what has happened to them in the past. Kids participating in the program aren’t asked to fill out ‘clinical’ personal forms or ‘tick boxes’ in regard to their circumstances. Instead, they agree to be videoed and photographed which are then resources that can assist to evaluate their progress. This highlights the experiential form of healing that the program promotes.

After 5 and then 10 sessions, Prof Coffin and the project delivery team liaise with each person’s referrers, which may include Headspace, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Local Aboriginal Medical Service, and involve parents and carers in discussions about their progress and future requirements.

The program is an evidence-based official clinical trial which is important in ensuring that it isn’t looked past as a legitimate tool in helping young Aboriginal people heal and continue to heal.

“The community support and acceptance of Yawardani Jan-ga is fantastic. It’s amazing how many people have simply heard of it and then go and ask health practitioners for their children or grandchildren to be referred, or are interested in training to deliver the program. This community engagement proves that the program has the ability to make a genuine change in these participants’ lives,” said Prof Coffin.



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