

Evaluation of the  
*'JTYouGotThis' Program*  
**Final Report**

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# Acknowledgement of Country

The project team at the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) acknowledge Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities, and pay respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

## Glossary

<b>Term or Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
JT	Johnathan Thurston
JT Academy	Johnathan Thurston Academy
<i>JTYGT</i>	JT YouGotThis
QPS	Queensland Police Service
UniSC	University of the Sunshine Coast

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# Background

The Johnathan Thurston Academy (JT Academy) was launched in 2018, encompassing a range of programs and workshops aimed at increasing young people's education and employment prospects and wellbeing. In early 2021, the JT Academy developed the '*JTYouGotThis*' (*JTYGT*) program. The *JTYGT* program focuses on building self-efficacy, life-skills, and school and employment opportunities for at-risk, disengaged, disadvantaged, and justice-involved young people (aged 9-16 years). Dr Susan Rayment-McHugh and Dr Emily Moir from the School of Law and Society at the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) were contracted by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in June 2021 to undertake a preliminary evaluation of the *JTYGT* Program.

## THE '*JTYOUGOTTHIS*' PROGRAM

The *JTYGT* program is a mixed-gender group-based program for young people, offered in varied geographic locations throughout Queensland. It is facilitated by JT Academy staff, with assistance from 'co-responders' (including police and youth workers), who attend the program, participate in program activities, and provide additional support to participants. The program is designed with in-built flexibility to respond to local conditions and participant and group characteristics. Young people are referred to the *JTYGT* program through agencies including police.

The *JTYGT* program is based on a theory of change centred on fostering self-efficacy. From this foundation, it also provides opportunities for success and builds skills and motivation for positive change. This program theory has largely been inspired by Johnathan Thurston's (JT) life experiences, including youth engagement in offending behaviours, and the role of 'confidence, courage, and self-belief', in his future success and achievements (Thurston, 2018).

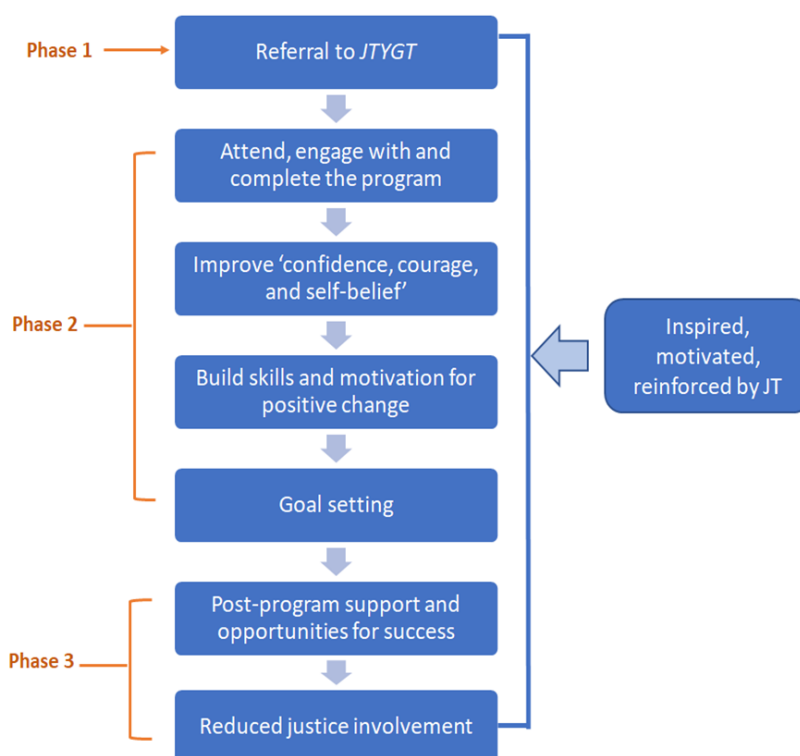
Program activities are largely experiential; undertaken to build a foundational skillset for making positive life changes, including increasing self-efficacy and skills in communication, perspective taking, behavioural regulation, problem solving, and goal setting. In program delivery, attention is given to creating a safe environment to promote program engagement and personal change, including strengths-based, non-judgemental, and responsive approaches. Importantly, JT's reputation and involvement in the program contributes to initial and ongoing program engagement, building self-efficacy, and motivating and rewarding positive behaviour.

The design and operation of the *JTYGT* program is underpinned by an integration of criminological and psychological theories, where young people build belief in themselves and their ability to succeed and reach goals, activities enable young people to learn and develop skills (e.g., communication, empathy), positive behaviour is reinforced, positive role modelling is observed (both through JT and JT Academy staff), prosocial relationships, attitudes and goals are enhanced, and there is a safe, supervised space for young people to

attend (please see Program Theory Report for more detail on each of the theories underpinning the *JTYGT* program).

Additionally, the program uses the celebrity status of JT to engage young people in the program. JT is a well-respected Australian sporting celebrity and plays an important role in the program. JT’s iconic status as a National Rugby League player inspires youth engagement in the program and provides a positive role model for influencing ‘confidence, courage, and self-belief’ in young people participating in the program.

Figure 1 outlines the process of a young person’s involvement in the *JTYGT* program across three phases: (1) referral to the program, (2) engagement in the program, and (3) post program support (that may be offered following completion of the *JTYGT* program, via the JT Academy, including the *JT Lionhearts* program). Throughout all phases, JT’s influence as a positive role model contributes to positive change. Overall, the program is theorised to lead to reduced involvement with the justice system.



**Figure 1. Program theory**

## Services Delivered

To date, 17 *JTYGT* programs have been delivered across Queensland, including in Logan, Zillmere, Brisbane City, Townsville, Cairns and Mareeba. These programs were facilitated by JT Academy staff, alongside ‘co-responders’ including police and youth work staff from other organisations. Program format has developed and changed over time, and now includes programs offered either in a 4-day intensive model, or in a 15-week program.

To date, a total of 107 young people have attended a *JTYGT* Program. Of these 107 young people, 73% were male and 27% were female. Approximately 80% of all young people who have attended the *JTYGT* Program identified as First Nations. Referrals to the program have been made by Queensland Police Service (QPS), the Logan New Directions Team, and Youth and Family Services in Logan.

## THE RESEARCH TEAM

Dr Susan Rayment-McHugh and Dr Emily Moir from the School of Law and Society at UniSC were contracted by the QPS in June 2021 to undertake a preliminary evaluation of the *JTYGT* Program.

This report has been prepared by the research team of Dr Susan Rayment-McHugh, Dr Emily Moir, and Ms. Stephanie Price.



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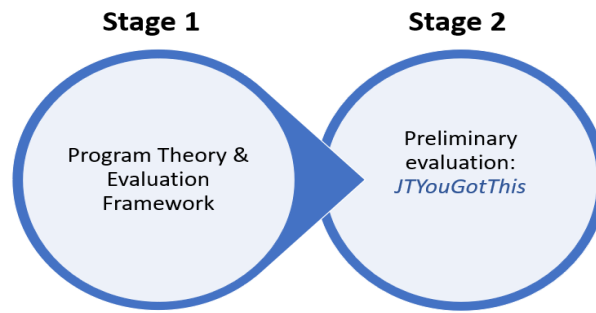
Emily is a Lecturer in Criminology and Justice and Program Coordinator for the Bachelor of Criminology and Justice (Honours) in the School of Law and Society at UniSC.

Ms Stephanie Price (*Project Manager*) is a PhD Candidate within the School of Law and Society at UniSC.

The UniSC team acknowledges the JT Academy for their support and invaluable assistance for this evaluation. Their care in facilitating young people's involvement was instrumental to this project and we could not have completed this evaluation without their enthusiasm and dedication. Our deep gratitude also goes to Senior Constable Laurie Bateman from the QPS, for his support and guidance offered as the cultural advisor for this project.

## PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report presents the findings of a time-limited preliminary evaluation of the *JTYGT* program. Informed by a realist evaluation framework (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), the evaluation of the *JTYGT* program aimed to examine "what worked, for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects, and how". The evaluation was split into two parts (see Figure 2). This report focuses on Stage 2.



**Figure 2. Evaluation stages**

# Research Methods

## Research Design

The evaluation used a realist approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), with a mixed-methods design, and reported findings using the ‘EMMIE’ Framework (Johnson et al, 2015). A realist approach is concerned with exploring how programs work, by acknowledging and considering the contextual factors that impact program implementation and outcomes. It is a theory driven approach, comprising an evaluation of theorised steps in the change process, and examining program effectiveness, in addition to how and why programs work in real-world settings. Reflecting the short period in which the *JTYGT* Program has been operational, the current evaluation comprised a pragmatic review of achievements and key lessons to date.

A mixed-methods research design was adopted and utilised three key data sources: program and clinical data; interviews and focus groups; and police data. This involved JT Academy staff obtaining young people’s consent to participate in the evaluation; collecting, collating, and forwarding deidentified program and clinical data to the UniSC research team for analysis; and coordinating youth interviews and focus groups. QPS provided data on young people’s interactions with police, pre- and post- their engagement in the *JTYGT* program. The UniSC Research Team were responsible for interview and focus group data collection, and led the overall data synthesis, interpretation, and report documentation.

Underpinned by realist evaluation principles, ‘EMMIE’ is an acronym for ‘Effects, Mechanisms, Moderators, Implementation, and Economic Value’ (Johnson et al, 2015). Developed originally to guide mixed-methods crime prevention research synthesis reviews, this framework is useful for condensing and reporting evaluation information in a practical and user-friendly manner for practitioners and policy professionals to use, so was suitable for this evaluation project. ‘Effects’ refers to the outcomes of the program; ‘Mechanisms’ are what components of the program produce expected outcomes; ‘Moderators’ are the contextual variables that effect the way a program functions; ‘Implementation’ refers to the actions and resources required to establish and maintain the intervention; and ‘Economic Value’ refers to



the direct and indirect costs and benefits of the program. Note that consideration of Economic Value was outside the scope of this evaluation.

Aligned with the EMMIE framework, primary research questions included:

1. Effects: Did the program achieve its intended outcomes?
2. Mechanisms: What program content, components, structures, or processes contributed to intended outcomes?
3. Moderators: What moderating or contextual factors impacted on program outcomes?
4. Implementation: What factors were important for successful implementation?

This project has Human Research Ethics Committee Approval from the University of the Sunshine Coast (A211634). The research team worked with a Cultural Advisor from QPS, Senior Constable Laurie Bateman, to ensure the evaluation was culturally relevant and appropriate.

## Data Sources

Consistent with a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive ethos, evaluation activities were designed to use materials routinely collected during *JTYGT* program implementation wherever possible, to reduce the research burden on the JT Academy and young people.

### *Program and Clinical Data*

Program and clinical data routinely collected by the JT Academy included:

- Demographic details of young people (age, gender, and ethnicity) who attended the program
- Referral and attendance records
- Program workbooks or worksheets (developed by JT Academy to support delivery of the *JTYGT* program)
- Change videos (video confessionals for each young person, recorded by JT Academy staff).

The research team worked with staff at JT Academy to collate program and clinical data for analysis. Data collection instructions and a data protocol were provided to support JT Academy staff through this process, including how to deidentify data prior to sharing with the research team. As a result, the research team were provided with an electronic dataset. JT Academy staff also provided hardcopy raw materials for some participants.

Program data (demographic details, referral, and attendance records) were provided for 39 young people who participated in five discrete *JTYGT* programs in Cairns, Logan, Mareeba, and Zillmere, from 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Of these 39 young people, 20 were female and 18 male (gender not reported for one participant) and 51% identified as First Nations. This evaluation thus includes a slightly different participant profile compared to the total cohort reported by JT Academy, with a higher number of female participants, and a lower number of First Nations youth. However, it is expected that participant profiles will vary across programs, locations, and over time.

Clinical data were provided for a much smaller participant group. Workbooks were made available for most young people who attended programs in North Queensland, although few worksheets were completed. This reflects a shift towards more narrative methods within the *JTYGT* program. Three discrete worksheets were provided for a small subset of youth participants including: five *Happiness Habit* worksheets, in which young people report on things that make them feel happy; five *Strengths* worksheets, in which young people reflect and report on their strengths and achievements; and three *Road Map* worksheets, in which young people report on their life story and what has led them to the JT Academy.

Videos of program participants were also provided to the research team from programs run in Logan and Zillmere. Young people in the videos introduce themselves and, in some weeks, identify a strength or goal of theirs, along with what they enjoy about the program. Although these videos provide an insight into how young people's 'confidence, courage, and self-belief' enhanced over the program, the videos were not able to be analysed in a systematic way for the purposes of this evaluation.

In addition to this program and clinical data, information about the *JTYGT* Program was also sourced from the *JT Academy* website, a *JTYouGotThis Program Summary* document provided by JT Academy staff, and the *Program Theory Report* (prepared by the UniSC Research Team, September 2021).

#### Self-efficacy questionnaire

A self-efficacy questionnaire was developed by the UniSC research team for JT Academy, to align with program goals to increase confidence, courage, and self-belief in young people. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to be implemented at the beginning and end of each program, to monitor and record changes in a young person's self-efficacy before and after program completion.

Self-efficacy questionnaires were provided for 27 young people. Unfortunately, these questionnaires could not be used in the evaluation, as they were only administered on one occasion within programs, thus change over time could not be meaningfully measured.

#### *Interviews and Focus Groups*

To extend the evaluation, six interviews and two focus groups were conducted with young people and JT Academy staff and stakeholders. In total 15 young people (10 girls and five boys) were interviewed. Youth participants had attended programs at either Logan or Zillmere, and they participated in focus groups based on program location. All young people who participated in interviews and focus groups had completed the *JTYGT* program. A total of seven JT Academy staff and stakeholders were also interviewed. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in person or via the video conferencing platform *Zoom*, where appropriate. They were conducted in May and June 2022.

Guided by realist philosophy, the research team focused on exploring the complexities of the *JTYGT* program, to identify:

- How the program worked to achieve intended outcomes

- What was working well and what could be improved
- What barriers or challenges may have impacted the program?

Semi-structured interview and focus group questions for young people included:

- What part [of the program] did you like best?
- What did you find most challenging?
- What has changed for you because of this program?
- What did you learn / achieve?

All interviews and focus groups with young people had an external stakeholder (police officer and/or youth worker) present at the request of those young people. The external stakeholders were not participants in those interviews/focus groups but acted in a supporting role for young people.

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed for analysis. In addition, the research team recorded notes and reflections, which were included alongside the transcripts for analysis.

### *Police Data*

The research team provided JT Academy and QPS with an administrative data protocol, providing guidance for the provision of police data to the research team for the purpose of this evaluation. Police data provided to the research team included pre- and post- program police involvement for 25 young people, all of whom had completed the *JTYGT* program. These 25 young people provided consent for their police records to be shared and were over 10 years of age. Offence counts were aggregated to gender, ethnicity, and program location.

Data pertained to interactions with police 12 months prior to program commencement and post- program completion to 28 July 2022. Data included street checks and charges with a breakdown into offences against the person, offences against property, and other offences. Offences against the person include homicide (murder), other homicide, assault, sexual offences, robbery, and other offences against the person. Offences against property include unlawful entry, arson, other property damage, unlawful use of a motor vehicle, other theft, fraud, and handling stolen goods. Other offences include drug offences, prostitution offences, liquor offences, gaming racing and betting offences, breach of domestic violence protection order, trespassing and vagrancy, weapons act offences, good order offences, stock related offences, traffic and related offences, and miscellaneous offences.

Across locations, programs commenced and finished at different times, therefore the pre-program data and follow-up periods differ for young people across each program, with a final date of July 28, 2022, for each location. For example, the Zillmere program includes pre-program data from 22 October 2020, while Logan data starts from 24 February 2021. The longest follow-up period was for young people in the Zillmere program, which ranged from 22 October 2021 to 28 July 2022 (279 days). In comparison, the shortest follow-up period was for young people in the Cairns program, ranging from 19 April 2022 to 28 July 2022 (100 days). This is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Police data sample**

Program location	Pre-program data	Program commencement date	Post-program data	Follow-up period
Cairns	19 April 2021 - 18 April 2022	19 April 2022	19 April 2022 – 28 July 2022	100 days
Logan	24 February 2021 - 23 February 2022	24 February 2022	24 February 2022 – 28 July 2022	154 days
Zillmere	22 October 2020 - 21 October 2022	22 October 2021	22 October 2021 – 28 July 2022	279 days

### *Data Limitations*

Data limitations are acknowledged and have constrained conclusions that can be drawn from this evaluation.

First, small sample sizes and the lack of a comparison group have limited this evaluation. It is noted that 107 young people to date have attended the *JTYGT* program, yet clinical data was only available for 39 young people, and police data only available for 25. Fifteen young people participated in interview and focus groups, representing 14% of the overall participant group. Further, no interviews or focus groups from young people who participated in programs in North Queensland (i.e., Cairns and Mareeba) or parents/caregivers of young people in the program could be conducted for this preliminary evaluation. As such, this evaluation is missing important aspects of young people’s voices from North Queensland and the perceptions of parents and caregivers on the impact of the *JTYGT* program. Data was also not available for young people who failed to complete the *JTYGT* program, meaning the UniSC team were not able to compare outcomes of those who completed the program to those who started but did not finish the *JTYGT* program. This limits data representativeness and impacts interpretation and evaluation conclusions.

Second, there is limited pre-post program change outcome measures included in this evaluation. Despite original plans to measure self-efficacy of young people participating in the program before and after program completion, this data was not available for the current analysis and evaluation. Whilst police data includes pre- and post- program charges, short and unequal post program follow-up periods, ranging from roughly three to nine months across different program locations, limit comparisons across programs.

Third, limitations associated with the selected evaluation measures are also acknowledged. To minimise research burden on JT Academy clients and staff, program and clinical data routinely administered during program implementation were utilised for evaluation purposes, namely program workbooks and worksheets. Whilst these tools likely met identified clinical purposes for guiding and reinforcing program learnings for young people, they were unable to provide expected insight into change over time. Further, a reduction over

time in reliance on workbooks and worksheets during program implementation, reflecting a shift to more narrative and experiential program activities, meant few workbooks and worksheets were completed and available for analysis. As such, for the purposes of this evaluation, the worksheets have been used to provide illustrations of key issues facing this cohort of youth, which provides important context to understanding this program.

Finally, the *JTYGT* Program is a foundational program for engaging at-risk youth to promote positive futures and outcomes and has been operational for a little over a year. Like many new programs, *JTYGT* is evolving and developing, particularly its post program support offered through *Lionhearts*. As such, this report should be read with an understanding that this is a preliminary evaluation of an emerging and evolving program for at-risk and justice involved young people.

## Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was applied to interview and focus group transcripts and researcher notes, with coding and analysis undertaken using NVivo software. The primary coder adopted a combined deductive and inductive approach, guided by the EMMIE framework, but allowing flexibility for key themes and ideas to emerge from the data. Transcripts and notes were read multiple times with relevant segments of text coded in line with the overarching EMMIE framework. The resulting code list was then cross-checked and revised by other members of the research team before the codes were interpreted further for inclusion in this report. These key themes are presented and discussed in the following sections of this report.

QPS data was provided in aggregate form, allowing basic pre- and post- program comparisons. This analysis centred on change in offending behaviour across program locations, given the place-based nature of the *JTYGT* program. Analysis of pre- and post- program charges based on gender and ethnicity were not possible due to the aggregated data form.

Interview/focus group data and police data provided the greatest insight into program operation and outcomes, and thus are used as the primary source for evaluation findings. Descriptive program and clinical data are used to support and contribute to these findings.

# Results & Discussion

The *JTYGT* program was launched in early 2021, and is therefore a new and still developing program. Given this, the current evaluation should be considered preliminary in nature. Findings provide a cautious early indicator of program success, along with learnings about program operation crucial to achieving positive outcomes. It is hoped this evaluation will guide ongoing program development, scaling up, and future implementation.

The *JT YouGotThis* program shows promise

Five key findings are presented in Table 2. Overall, findings suggest the *JTYGT* program shows promise in achieving positive outcomes as intended for young people who complete the program. Moreover, the program appears to create a safe, inclusive, supportive, and inspiring therapeutic

environment for young people, which likely contributes to the program’s apparent success with complex and at-risk youth.

Results are presented in accordance with the EMMIE framework and aligned with key research questions. Interview and focus group data provided throughout the results section include quotes (in blue font) identified as coming from a young person (YP) or JT Academy staff or stakeholders (S&SH). This was supplemented, where possible, with attendance and referral data and clinical worksheets.

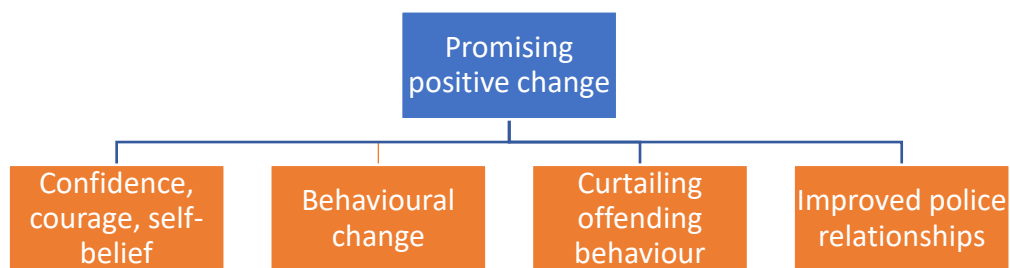
**Table 2. Key findings**

<b>[E]ffects</b>	Did the program achieve its intended outcomes?	<b>Key Finding 1:</b> <i>JTYGT</i> shows promise in promoting positive change for young people as intended
<b>[M]echanisms</b>	What program content, components, structures, or processes contributed to intended outcomes?	<b>Key Finding 2:</b> The creation of a safe, inclusive, and youth friendly program environment is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes <b>Key Finding 3:</b> The involvement of JT and use of relatable stories enhances engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation for change
<b>[M]oderators</b>	What moderating or contextual factors impacted on program outcomes?	<b>Key finding 4:</b> Attendance and post-program support moderate program success
<b>[I]mplementation</b>	What factors were important for successful implementation?	<b>Key finding 5:</b> Successful program implementation depends on program facilitators, responding to the local context, and interagency collaboration

## PROGRAM EFFECTS

### Key Finding 1: *JTYGT* shows promise in promoting positive change for young people as intended

Consistent with program aims, young people gained confidence, courage, and self-belief through the *JTYGT* program. This likely contributed to other positive outcomes, including positive behavioural change, and possible curtailment of offending behaviour. Improved relationships with police were also identified as an unintended benefit of the program. Collectively, these findings (see Figure 3) suggest the *JTYGT* program shows promise in building foundational skills and early success towards a positive future for program participants. This is consistent with the aims of the program.



**Figure 3. Promising positive change**

### Confidence, courage & self-belief

*“This program made us more confident”*

Building self-efficacy (a belief a person has in their ability to achieve or succeed) is a central aim of the *JTYGT* program, operationalised through ‘confidence, courage, and self-belief’. Findings reveal this intended outcome was achieved for youth participants who completed the *JTYGT* program. Indeed, young people, staff, and stakeholders all reported increases in ‘confidence, courage, and self-belief’, gained as a direct result of the program.

Young people overwhelmingly described improvements in their self-confidence and self-belief. Tangible examples include:

*It's changed my perspective on, you know, being in a room with people I don't know and you know, like putting yourself out there. (YP)*

*Well I know most of us when we started off we were too scared to ‘hi my name is [name]’. Well now we’re more confident and we talk up now. (YP)*

JT Academy staff and stakeholders also reported significant gains in young people’s confidence, courage, and self-belief:

*Like in the first session we go around and introduce themselves and most people like I, I'm [name]. That's it. And then by the third one, they're talking. They're looking at people in the eyes. They're sharing more information. (S&SH)*

*At the start when we asked what do you love about yourself they go “I don't know. Nothing.” And [now] they've got this appreciation for themselves, and they recognise their strengths and their qualities. (S&SH)*

Importantly, self-efficacy has been linked to positive behavioural change on a range of issues, including for justice-involved individuals (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999). Improved ‘confidence, courage, and self-belief’ amongst young people in the program thus represents an important foundation to develop skills for change.

## Behavioural change

Building on these foundations, findings also reveal how enhanced self-efficacy contributed to motivation and skills for positive behavioural change beyond the program environment. For example, young people shared multiple examples of positive change in the school setting with respect to engagement in learning activities, academic achievement, and school behaviour:

*“I didn’t want to speak but I used my confidence and I did it”*

*Before this program, I used to just sit there and never speak. I’ll be quiet and every time the teacher would ask me a question, I would just sit there and not answer but now I’ll answer. Now I’ll be like ‘I know’. (YP)*

*For most of last year’s English exams we had to do presentations. Yeah, I’m, I’m not a big public speaker. I definitely like talking to people, but I can’t like stand up in front of a crowd and like talk in front of them, but yeah, after the JT program I just felt like doing it...Turned out great ‘cause I got an A. (YP)*

*Me and my mates used to get in a little trouble at school because like we’d talk and not listen to the teacher and that. Doing our own stuff. Like we’d get buddied out and stuff, so I don’t get buddied out as much as I used to. (YP)*

Young people also attributed getting their driver’s licence and gaining employment to the JTYGT program and their increased confidence, courage, and self-belief.



As further evidence of these gains, young people identified and acknowledged their strengths and achievements throughout the program, documenting these in program workbooks. For example, in a written *Strengths Activity*, young people reported their greatest achievement so far included *“turning up to the JTYGT program”* and *“showing up to school”*. They reported the bravest things they had done included *“talking in front of the camera”*, and that the kindest things they did included *“helping my nan with housework”* and *“helping people when they need it”*.

Importantly, young people also shared examples of integrating and applying these changes into other aspects of their life, including to relationships, personal safety, and self-care. For example, one young person gave a powerful example of gaining the strength from the JTYGT program to leave her abusive boyfriend: *“Yeah, it was [a] pretty toxic relationship and I was strong enough to talk to [police stakeholder] about it and to put a DVO on him” (YP)*. Another young person described a situation in which a stranger had approached her while she was walking to school, asking for sex, and that because of this program she had the confidence to record the incident on her phone and report this to police.

Positive outcomes were also reported by program staff and stakeholders, for example:

*He’s making better choices now because of our program. (S&SH)*

*This boy just kept coming every week, kept coming back every week and now he’s at school and he stayed at school and he’s not smoking weed. He’s changed. (S&SH)*



*I had a young person say to me in our last program yesterday that I've learned to be more kind and that in itself is a massive win, you know, and learn to be kind themselves, learned to be kind. (S&SH)*

This extension of program benefits is consistent with theorised steps in the *JTYGT* program logic, building on foundational skills to bring about positive future change (see Program Theory Report, 2021).

### **Curtailing offending behaviour**

In addition to these positive behavioural changes, program staff and stakeholders also perceived a reduction in offending behaviours for young people who completed the *JTYGT* program.

*And yeah, we've had some great success stories where you know some kids I, I think it was one kid had 70 odd offences before our program and then I think it was six months after he only had two after he attended our program. (S&SH)*

*There was a stolen car that the kids were in. He was in that stolen car and then he had a moment. He asked the kids to pull over and he jumped out of that car 'cause he said he's got school tomorrow. (S&SH)*

These outcomes were largely attributed to “*keeping kids in a program, keeping them off the street*”, “*keeping them safe*” and youth “*making better choices now because of our program*”.

An analysis of pre- and post- program police data indicates that from the sample of 25 young people who completed the *JTYGT* program, there were reductions in offending behaviour post-program (see Table 3).

For young people in the Logan program, there were eight charges for property and other offences in the 12 months before the program. After the program (a period of just over five months), two charges were recorded (one property and one other offence). While the pre- and post- program comparison periods are different, this does indicate a reduction in property and other offences for young people who participated in the Logan program. Similar results were recorded in Zillmere, with five charges recorded pre-program, and no young person being charged with an offence in the nine months after the *JTYGT* program.

The profile for the Cairns program differs from the Logan and Zillmere programs. Indeed, young people in Cairns came to the attention of police at a much higher rate pre-program than young people in Logan or Zillmere, with 192 charges reported in the 12-month period prior to program commencement. Moreover, in the three-month period since beginning the program 41 further charges were recorded by police.

Pre-program police data alone suggests the Cairns youth cohort represent a different (higher) risk profile, compared to the South-East Queensland programs. Other sources of data used in this evaluation (including interview data and workbooks) support this, suggesting that young people in the Cairns program came from backgrounds with greater levels of disadvantage and trauma. The higher charge rates for this cohort are also largely consistent with reported crime

trends across Queensland, with crime rates in Cairns higher than the Queensland average, and higher than both Brisbane North and Logan districts (Queensland Treasury, 2022).

Despite these higher charge rates, when averages are used for the different pre- and post-program periods, this still represents a small reduction in the overall number of charges for young people in the Cairns program. Most importantly, the biggest average reduction was found in the number of violent offences against the person. Overall, while the reductions in property and other offences were modest, this data indicates that young people who completed the program in Cairns were less likely to perpetrate a violent offence following completion of the *JTYGT* program.

**Table 3. Charges by Police**

Program Location	Charged by Police Pre-Program (12 months)			Charged by Police Post-Program (3-9 months)		
	Person	Property	Other	Person	Property	Other
Cairns	10	78	104	1	16	24
Logan	0	3	5	0	1	1
Zillmere	0	2	3	0	0	0

Learning the true impact of the *JTYGT* program on future offending behaviour and engagement in the justice system will require consideration of longer follow-up periods and more comprehensive police data, once more young people have completed the program. Collectively, however, these are promising outcomes, supporting staff perceptions about the benefits of the program, and suggesting that the *JTYGT* program may contribute to curtailing offending behaviour amongst young people who complete the program.

### Improved police relationships

In addition to building self-efficacy and positive behaviour change, young people also shared that their perception of police had improved after completing the program. Although this was not an explicit intended outcome of the program, the *JTYGT* program helped break down the mistrust of police that was commonly experienced by young participants. As one young person explained: *“I wouldn’t have been able to be like in the same room as [officer], I don’t know. I had a big phobia of police officers from past experience. But it’s all good now, ‘cause [officer]’s cool”*. Program staff and stakeholders shared this opinion, stating *“they see the police in a different light, so that’s very positive”*, and *“It helps them [young people] in the future as well, ‘cause it changes their perspective on the police”*.

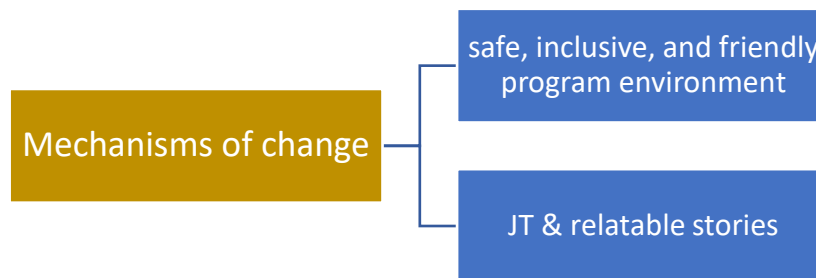
These changed perspectives of police were likely influenced by a positive, respectful, and engaging approach adopted by police involved in program delivery. Police attending in plain clothes contributed to the non-threatening nature of how young people viewed police. For example, a young person indicated that *“because she was in just her causal outfit and we could talk to her yeah, and that’s like another thing that helps with like police and stuff”*.

## KEY MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Change mechanisms are the processes through which programs like *JTYGT* produce desired outcomes. They form the basis of program design, so preliminary evaluation provides an important opportunity to examine change mechanisms to inform ongoing program development.

Mechanisms of change: program components that produce expected outcomes

The current evaluation reveals two primary change mechanisms within the *JTYGT* program including: i) the creation of a safe and youth friendly program environment; and ii) the involvement of JT and use of relatable stories. These two key mechanisms are represented in Figure 4. They were identified as key mechanisms for promoting engagement, self-efficacy, and skill building, including both the motivation and capacity for positive change necessary for desistance from crime (see Villeneuve, Dufour & Turcotte, 2019). Importantly, the change mechanisms identified through this evaluation are consistent with the reported program theory of change. Future evaluation should aim to explicitly test these theorised change mechanisms.



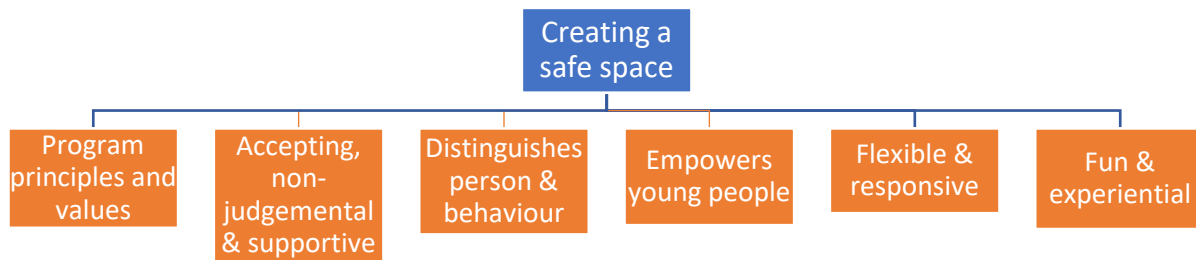
**Figure 4. Key mechanisms of change**

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### Key Finding 2: The creation of a safe, inclusive, and youth friendly program environment is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes

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Findings suggest the *JTYGT* program is an inclusive and safe program for young people, including First Nations youth. The creation of a safe, inclusive, and youth friendly program environment is considered fundamental to engagement and to achieving positive outcomes. This is consistent with research literature showing positive and supportive relationships with professionals as critical to program effectiveness with justice involved youth (Pooley, 2020), and that non-judgmental and supportive professionals are also likely to help facilitate desistance from crime (Barry, 2013). Six micro-mechanisms were identified which contributed to the safe and youth friendly *JTYGT* program environment (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Promising positive change**

### Program principles and values

The principles of the *JTYGT* program – confidence, courage, and self-belief – are interwoven into every program activity, as well as the interactions between staff and young people. These principles appear to serve as foundational mechanisms of change for program success.

*She [facilitator] said about the activities that we would be doing would be working on confidence and courage and self-belief. I think that's how it sort of came to us, and then when we would do an activity and someone wouldn't want to do it 'cause they were nervous, it would be brought up. And then after, she'd point out that this time when we did this, that was confidence and here that was courage and here that was self-belief. (YP)*

Young people appeared to connect well with the program principles, making statements such as:

*It's like self-belief. They would tell us not to talk down about ourselves in the program. Talk positive about ourselves, not negative. (YP)*

*I felt like having confidence has a lot to do with your self-esteem and like we did an activity in the program where we all had a piece of paper, and we wrote our names and we pass the pieces of paper in a circle and everyone wrote a nice message about you. And, I don't know, I feel like that just kind of carries on like it's hyping everyone up. (YP)*

These principles are supported by four guiding values that staff and stakeholders believe help young people achieve successful outcomes. As staff explained:

*So, the four values is number 1- Show up. Number 2 - when you wear the jerseys, we are a team, so we have to respect everyone on the team including myself or police officers that are involved. Number 3 is be kind to yourself. No negative self-talk. We're not about your behaviour here we're about who you are as a person. and Number 4 is keep moving forward. (S&SH)*

With an emphasis on self-efficacy, self-worth, and support, these principles and values contribute to safety within the group program, offering young people an accepting and non-judgemental therapeutic environment in which to learn about themselves and others, build motivation and skills for change, and to plan for their future. Building self-efficacy and positive

self-identify also aligns with current understanding of the processes associated with young people's desistance from crime (Villeneuve et al, 2019).

### Accepting, non-judgmental & supportive

*"don't talk down about yourself"*

Program staff and stakeholders deliberately engage an accepting, non-judgmental, and supportive facilitation style to create the conditions in which young people feel safe to participate, try new things and learn. As one young person described:

*One thing that was like really good about the program was that you could basically... say really anything and it was like, uh, no judgment for yourself. Like I don't know, it was very comforting. I don't know if that was just me who felt that way. But like you know. I could give it my all in the program and I wouldn't feel embarrassed in front of anyone else. That was really good. (YP)*

Similarly, program staff and stakeholders explained the importance of a safe and supportive environment for program participants:

*Well, for me I think it makes it really successful because it ends up being like a safe space for the kids. Like a lot of them they do come from a little bit like, you know, rough environments and having a place where they can just, you know, hang out and learn more about themselves without having their external like environment affect who they you know what they're saying and things like that. And I feel like it's just a nice place for them to be themselves. (S&SH)*

Additionally, young people, program staff and stakeholders reported that the program had been delivered by supportive program facilitators who promoted safety for all.

*She's [facilitator] a really good role model, like really good, and I feel like she makes everyone feel like they can just do what they feel like doing and not be embarrassed. (YP)*

*They're nice, they're positive, confident. Respectful. (YP)*

*They [young people] just need to hear a nice, they want just something nice, 'Tell me something nice about me', 'cause they're just having, yeah they're just getting yelled at 24/7. Whether it's police, whether it's child safety, whether it's parents, whether it's each other, it's just fight, fight. So, it's like we give them a big hug for four days, give them some coping, give them some tools, give them some things to think about, but also let them dream. (S&SH)*

*They knew that it was a safe environment, yet they could very much be themselves and it was very much, they could say what they wanted, and it wasn't going to be judged. And that I found was very important to all of them. (S&SH)*

The program also encouraged young people to support each other, further strengthening safety and support in the program environment. As staff and stakeholders explained:

*My aim is to make young people into a community, so they look after each other, rather than me looking after everyone else. (S&SH)*

*A lot of them didn't have that support system at home, so now they have an even bigger one, someone to lean on. You know like, 'I know your story. You know my story' and you know what? That's the best way to make friends like true friends, is sharing a story. (S&SH)*

It was also suggested that providing meals for young people was an important tool to foster the supportive environment.

*I do think when we bring food every time to help and I think that really relaxes them [young people] when they come in and they know that they're getting food because I know a few of them don't have breakfast at home, so it's something that they look forward to coming to do. (S&SH)*

### **Distinguishes person & behaviour**

Building on this accepting and non-judgmental approach, program staff and stakeholders reported that it was important to support young people to explore who they are separate to what they may have done in the past. As such, the *JTYGT* program focuses on individual strengths and goals, rather than past behaviour. It was suggested that this positive focus allows young people to realise their own potential for good. Moreover, connecting with the possibility of a positive future may play a key role in young people's desistance from crime (Villeneuve et al, 2019).

*This is your behaviour, and this is who you are as a person. (S&SH)*

*[In] our program we do not talk about behaviour. I don't even bring up why they're there. I don't want to know. It's not about your behaviour, it's about yourself. (S&SH)*

It was also suggested that this focus provided an opportunity to help young people build their self-esteem, by enabling them to feel good about themselves, that they are worthy, despite past involvement in the justice system or difficulties at school.

*We care, but care for yourself – and you're worthy. (S&SH)*

*So I guess we like to say you have your behaviour over here and you have yourself here, and they're not the same thing, like we want you to know what an amazing person you are. So I guess we don't want to concentrate on the bad things they've done. We want them to recognise the good things that they have inside themselves and the good qualities that they have. 'cause I feel like they haven't got, not everyone, but there's a lot of people who haven't got someone saying 'I'm proud of you. You're doing a good job. You're very kind person,' that sort of thing, so I think it's just, yeah, lifting them up I guess. (S&SH)*

### **Empowers young people**

Program staff and stakeholders described the *JTYGT* program adopting a youth-led approach, which served to empower young people. This included young people making simple decisions

about which activities to do or what food to eat, as well as more complex and challenging decisions about what they want to achieve in their lives and how to get there – with program facilitators acting as allies to support young people and promote growth; *“this is your program, your streets, your community, so you be the leader of that” (S&SH).*

Providing an opportunity for young people to make choices and to participate without judgement was appreciated by young people: *“she’ll let you make the decisions” (YP).*

The JTYGT program also encouraged young people to set goals for their future, using their improved self-esteem to imagine a life beyond the adversity they may currently be experiencing.

*We want to get to know who you are as a person, what you like, what you want to be seen as by your family or your friends, and if you want to go back to school. (S&SH)*

Young people shared some of these goals including going back to school, going on to university or finding a job, with specific examples including becoming a carpenter or a youth worker:

*I really wanna work with young people or in like helping people in general, like being a nurse or police officer. (YP)*

Program staff also engaged in positive reinforcement and encouragement to build motivation for change. As one staff member explained:

*Instead of saying oh that was the wrong thing to do, that's bad saying, ‘oh wow, you've done such a good job this morning’, so I guess it's using positive reinforcement. And when somebody says, ‘Oh, you, you were so kind today. You're so helpful today,’ it makes you feel good and it makes you want to do more of that. So yeah, some of the young people get a lot of attention by doing crime or getting into trouble, and so when we're giving them that recognition and added attention with their good qualities, they want to work towards more of that. (S&SH)*

### **Flexible and responsive**

Program staff and stakeholders also suggested that program delivery had to be flexible to meet young people’s needs on any given day; suggesting that program flexibility and responsiveness were also key to creating a safe environment for young people. *“The program outline has to be flexible to accommodate who's in the room” (S&SH).* Several examples were provided by staff and stakeholders to illustrate this point, such as aligning activities to participant presentation, or giving young people space (e.g., not to participate in certain activities or on certain days).

*Let's say you see a need, let's say for instance you have a bunch of young people who are quite angry. Alright, well let's come up with something to have a yarn about that and we could pick something from the session like Red Zone and Blue Zone and things like that. (S&SH)*

## Fun & experiential

Overall, the *JYGYT* program adopts an experiential learning design. This is about learning through doing; it is a hands-on approach, facilitating active participation and learning through experience (Kolb, 2014). Getting young people involved enhances opportunities for learning, especially for young people who have struggled in a formal school classroom environment.

*“We played a lot of games”*

Within the *JTYGT* program active learning is achieved through a range of game-like activities (e.g., ‘*Question Pong*’ and *trivia*), public outings (e.g., restaurants or shops), storytelling (e.g., *JT’s* life story); as well as verbal instructional lessons (e.g., *Road Maps*, *Strengths Activity*). Young people identified that the focus on fun was a key reason they enjoyed the program, found the experience positive, and why they would like to come back. For example, young people explained *“we play like games, that’s fun”*, *“this is how we became friends, through playing Uno together”*, and *“the way they run the programs makes you want to come back”*. ‘*Question Pong*’ was described by young people, staff, and stakeholders as one example of a ‘fun’ learning activity:

*We have cups with questions in them. They get the ball in the cup and they answer the question. It's things like who's someone you look up to, so it's getting them to do those activities in a way that they don't feel like they're sitting there writing answering questions. (S&SH)*

Exposing young people to new experiences through games and activities, was also seen as an opportunity for young people to practice new skills including confidence, courage, and self-belief. *“We go into a different environment, and it pushes them outside of their comfort zone a little bit more, and so their confidence grows there” (S&SH).*

Importantly, the young people who participated in evaluation activities, and who successfully completed the program, reported how much they enjoyed their experience in the program, seeing it as both beneficial and fun. Indeed, many reported wishing the program had been longer or that they could repeat the program and indicated they would recommend it to others. Ensuring the program is fun and youth friendly likely contributes to overall enjoyment, attendance, and engagement.

*Not like do it once a year. Do it more than that. Yeah, probably for it to go longer. Although, I love school, but I would definitely like to do that for like two weeks or something. (YP)*

*I just thought it was like, well, I mean, I didn't really want to go ‘cause I didn't want to miss out on school, like I'm sort of a nerd at high school, but then I went and I don't regret it. (YP)*

## A NOTE ON CULTURAL SAFETY FOR FIRST NATIONS YOUNG PEOPLE

Culturally safe and responsive programming is important for achieving good outcomes for First Nations young people. This is crucial for the *JTYGT* program, as to date, approximately



80% of all young people who have attended the program have identified as First Nations. Importantly, cultural sensitivity is identified as a key characteristic of effective programs for justice-involved youth (Pooley, 2020).

The role of culture in this program was not explicitly raised during the evaluation, and there were a limited number of specific statements made in that regard during evaluation interviews. This likely reflects the integration of principles of cultural safety with those of personal worth and potential, within the broader *JTYGT* program design. Together this appears to create a program environment in which all the young people we interviewed reported feeling safe, respected, and valued. It seems likely this inclusive environment creates a healthy learning and mentoring environment for all youth.

There are other reasons to believe the *JTYGT* program is culturally safe and responsive. For example, the JT Academy website acknowledges their commitment to services that are “welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate, and inclusive”. Moreover, the strengths-based, inclusive, and holistic approach adopted in the *JTYGT* program, including the creation of a safe and supportive program environment, the integration of active and creative methods for knowledge and skills acquisition, the use of narrative approaches utilising relatable stories, and responsiveness to local context, are consistent with best practice programming principles for First Nations peoples (e.g., Price-Robertson & McDonald, 2011; McKendrick et al, undated). Further, JT provides a strong role model to First Nations young people in the *JTYGT* program, likely strengthening this positive influence in their program experience and learning. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews was also evident throughout communication with JT Academy staff.

Program staff and stakeholders perceived the *JTYGT* program as appropriate for young people of diverse cultural backgrounds, including First Nations youth; promoting, supporting, and reinforcing cultural identity and connection with culture and country. Links to culture were also promoted in program activities where appropriate, for example, identifying people of culture they look up to.

*One of the things we always identify, in every program [at JT Academy], is that connection to their [young people] family and learning about their culture. And that's on the back of JT's passion for kids to want to do that. (S&SH)*

Young people interviewed for this evaluation who identified as First Nations were unanimously positive about the program, experiencing it as safe, supportive, respectful of, and relevant to, their life experiences. Together with promising outcomes achieved to date, this gives tentative support to the program being culturally safe and responsive, and effective for First Nations youth.

Despite this, staff and stakeholders identified further ways that cultural safety and responsiveness could be enhanced within the program, including through the inclusion of cultural Elders in program delivery.

*I guess it would always be beautiful to have an Elder present. Whether that's in the fourth week or, there's certainly something I've been trying to implement as well. (S&SH)*

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### Key Finding 3: The involvement of JT and use of relatable stories enhances engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation for change

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JT's celebrity status provides considerable social influence, drawing the interest of young people and increasing their attendance and engagement in the JTYGT program. Indeed, young people reported being excited to meet JT, as many had grown up seeing him on TV and hearing about him in their homes. This 'hook' into the program is especially important given justice-involved and other marginalised young people can be difficult to engage. Instead, young people explained that JT's involvement in this program was a key reason for their initial interest. Young people explained *"Yeah, I was already interested 'cause it had JT's name and stuff so I was interested about what it would be about"*, *"Yeah, sounded good...cos it said Johnathan Thurston"*, and *"It was cool meeting like basically a celebrity"*.

*"Like what he [JT] says"*

Staff and stakeholders agreed that JT's involvement in the program enhanced youth engagement:

*You wouldn't get half the kids there if it wasn't the JT program. (S&SH)*

*I'm really good at building rapport with young people quickly anyway, but the added bonus of working for Jonathan Thurston, they're like, oh, JT is your boss adds a different element that I've never seen before. (S&SH)*

*Some of my young people didn't grow up with Jonathan Thurston, but they know who he is because of their parents and people they look up to. So I think when they have that connection instantly, it's obviously there's a little light there from the get go. (S&SH)*

JT's influence, however, extended beyond initial engagement in the program. Indeed, the JTYGT program itself has been inspired by JT's life experiences, and the role of confidence, courage, and self-belief in his success and achievements. JT sharing personal stories and modelling self-efficacy, personal drive, and success, provides an important opportunity for young people to learn vicariously and connect with their potential to achieve. Indeed, program staff and stakeholders perceived that using relatable stories to deliver messaging around the program's principles and values was a key mechanism of change.

*We do a few activities that are quite, I guess, vulnerable and one of them is the road maps. I personally also use my story as well as Johnathan's and I feel like that's really been empowering for my young people. (S&SH)*

*I'll say, 'Hey look guys, Johnathan Thurston was just like you. He openly admits it. You know, he can go on and do great things you can too.' And I say to them, 'You don't have to be a rocket scientist. We know that, but just you've just got to back yourself and that's all anyone can ever ask. (S&SH)*

*I love this program because I was one of those kids, you know. So like I said, those three characteristics [courage, confidence and self-belief] are at display as a 15 year old to*

*move and change my behaviours, and that's what I did, and I tell them my story as well. (S&SH)*

These stories were used to help young people realise that they are not alone in facing challenging circumstances, which allowed young people to imagine themselves also achieving new goals for personal success.

*She [facilitator] was able to sort of relate with us about some of our like her childhood and upbringing sort of thing, which I think made it like a bit easier because they sort of understand. (YP)*

*It also makes us confident by how [facilitator] tells us what Johnathan Thurston said when he was by himself before games ... Like when he's ready to go out to talk ... Like what he says. (YP)*

*"You can put like JT like being in this program on your resume"*

The opportunity to engage with JT also serves to maintain and reward engagement and achievement; *"they'll have that awesome opportunity at the end to be able to have a yarn to JT" (S&SH)*. Program staff and stakeholders were encouraged by JT's passion and level of involvement in program development and delivery, stating that JT was *"very hands on"* and heavily involved and keen to meet or speak with all young people.

Young people were appreciative of JT's intentions for the program and the opportunity to chat with him via video conferencing tools.

*We got to go on a FaceTime with him and have a short talk with him. (YP)*

*I was really nervous to talk to him [JT]. I didn't want to do it without [facilitator]. But then it was it was pretty fun, like it was good, but like it was good, being able to speak one on one. (YP)*

Although, young people acknowledged and accepted that JT has many commitments that require his time and attention, some had hoped to have the opportunity to meet him in person. Indeed, when asked if there was anything they would change about the program, young people responded *"If possible, try to get personal meet and greets with JT. That'd be great, that's what I was hoping for to be honest. Yeah, that would be cool. Hey 'cause it's nice to meet them over FaceTime but in person, yeah."*

Program staff and stakeholders also suggested that JT's celebrity status had directly contributed to program delivery by providing opportunities and resources to conduct activities. *"I've done things that were able to be done in this program because of Johnathan, that I didn't get to achieve when I was doing these things on my own."*

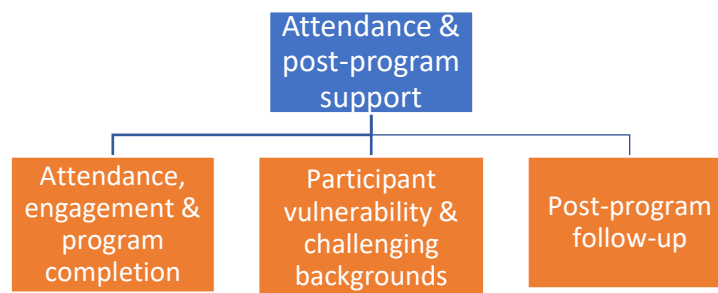
## MODERATORS OF PROGRAM SUCCESS

Moderators of program success are those factors (internal or external to the program) that may facilitate or serve as a barrier to program success and achieving intended outcomes. This evaluation revealed attendance, participant backgrounds, and post-program support as key moderators of success.

Moderators of program success: the factors that affect the way programs achieve their intended outcomes

### Key Finding 4: Attendance and post-program support moderate program success

Three micro-moderators were identified which impacted the way the program achieves success (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Program moderators**

#### Attendance, engagement, and program completion

Program staff and stakeholders perceived that attendance and program completion rates directly impacted program outcomes, with those young people who had attended most sessions and completed the program having more successful outcomes than others. Moreover, in North Queensland they perceived young people 'showing up' as a valuable achievement largely because the program targets marginalised and at-risk young people, including those struggling with positive engagement with other programs and systems.

*"It works better if they're willing to try"*

*It's a win when the kids turn up and they go, 'We're not even stoned today'. (S&SH)*

*And the ones who do want to be here, you can see the change that they've gone through, like they have consistently come, the ones who actually wanted to be there and you can you know you see how they've changed from the beginning from the end and [from] those who didn't want to come. (S&SH)*

Linked to attendance and program completion, program staff and stakeholders acknowledged the importance of engagement, active learning, and readiness for change, in

achieving positive outcomes. Attendance, engagement, and readiness for change expose young people to the learning opportunities in programs. They are thus crucial steps in the change process. It was suggested that a high level of attendance and engagement was necessary to ensure key program messaging was received by young people.

*It works better if they're willing to try. (S&SH)*

*I think most of it for it to be successful is just for them to show up..... If you show up, there's another opportunity, you won't miss anything. You might if you don't show up today, you might miss something. (S&SH)*



High attendance rates have been achieved in recent JTYGT programs in both South-East and North Queensland. For example, recent programs facilitated in Zillmere, Cairns and Mareeba (4 session program design) achieved an average attendance of 96%. Average attendance in the longer running program (15 sessions) at Logan was only 58%, although this ranged from 13-100% attendance. Moreover, First Nations young people in the Logan program achieved an average attendance of 90%. While this may lend support to the 4-day intensive program design, 90% average attendance for First Nations youth in the longer 15-week program design is also very encouraging, suggesting that program format on its own, may not influence overall program attendance.

Given the importance of program attendance to outcomes, support for attendance should be an important program component. Program accessibility is one such consideration. Young people, program staff and stakeholders perceived the chosen location of program delivery to be beneficial, being central to public transport and close-by to cafes and restaurants for public outing activities. For example:

*I feel like Zillmere PCYC was also a really good place to do it because there was buses and train stations there, and there's like an outside spot for us to go to. (YP)*

Transport was identified as a possible barrier to attendance. Program staff reported that transport assistance was provided for most young people to attend, but that some young people lived too far from the location to be included on the bus route in Logan.

*I think sometimes that can be tricky, but the police have been amazing and, you know, picking them up from school or their house. (S&SH)*

*Transport, definitely a barrier. We had an LND bus though, which was beneficial for Logan. But there was one particular young person who was engaged but just couldn't get there. Where he lived, the bus couldn't get him. (S&SH)*

Staff and stakeholders acknowledged that they did not engage all young people referred to the program: “no, it's not gonna reach all of them” and that “some kids are not ready”. This raises challenges for program facilitators, in balancing their time and attention to the needs of young people already motivated and ready for change, with those of young people who need additional support or who remain disengaged. Program staff adopted an understanding and tolerant approach to enhance engagement, which invited youth participation, without pressure.

*This particular one [young person], I didn't think he'd come back. I thought, 'No, we have lost him for sure.' But he did. He came back and he was one of the ones that came up to me and said, 'Thank you so much, like when can I do the next one?' (S&SH)*

Staff, however, acknowledged that despite their support, some young people simply may not engage with the program. Indeed, staff deliberately prioritise young people who are motivated for change, but welcome and encourage those who don't engage, to attend a future program. Moreover, they ensure that young people who attend the program are genuinely participating, as opposed to distracting others or using the program as an opportunity to negatively influence younger people.

*If there was someone who wasn't maybe engaging and was maybe, what's the right word? Not distracting, but just if they just really didn't want to be there and would make jokes about the activities. I think for the rest of the young people it would be best to not have them. (S&SH)*

Young people also mentioned that on occasion participants friends were allowed to attend, but that they felt this challenged the strong and supportive group dynamic they had created and disrupted those who were engaged and motivated to learn. While this reflects an inclusive program design, it reinforces the need to protect a safe and effective learning environment for those young people who are actively engaged and motivated to achieve.

### Participant vulnerability & challenging backgrounds

*"really harsh, tough backgrounds"*

It was acknowledged, however, that attendance and completion rates could also be impacted by personal factors. Program staff and stakeholders reported that the young people attending the *JTYGT* program were likely to be experiencing hardships and adversity in their lives, including challenges with comprehension, drug and/or alcohol misuse, and domestic and family violence. This was particularly notable in program staff descriptions of differences in the cohorts between locations (i.e., Cairns or Logan).

While several examples were provided, they are not reported here to protect the anonymity of all young people, program staff and stakeholders. More generally, some statements made by program staff included:

*Really high level, really traumatic backgrounds and, in fact.... the conditions in which they live – next level. (S&SH)*

*I think you know half the problem is these [young] people don't have support. (S&SH)*



These perceptions were supported by young people's statements in a written workbook activity called '*Roadmap*'. Young people reported facing challenges such as "*dad using DV against me and siblings*", "*homeless for a while*", "*lost my dad*", "*got bullied*" and "*basically she [mum] became an alcoholic*".

Program staff and stakeholders acknowledged the impacts of broader social disadvantages, including inadequate housing and parental drug and/or alcohol abuse, and the impacts of these experiences on young people and program participation.

*So there was one boy who was coming at the start and his parents were divorced. But I think he then went to stay with his dad and I remember the police saying that when he's with his dad, we can't ever contact him, so yeah, I think it's it sometimes that can be tricky. (S&SH)*

*We lower the expectation for outcome right down .... So, I think it's really, slower. It's so much patience. (S&SH)*

*We often need more support for the YouGotThis, 'cause they've often gone through a lot more trauma and that sort of stuff. (S&SH)*

*I was talking to one of the participants 'cause we have this thing 'You know you are strong, you're confident, you're amazing,' and he's like 'My mum has never said that to me before.' (S&SH)*

Attending to these personal vulnerabilities and challenges thus requires the program to operate a safe and supportive environment, to adjust teaching modalities, including reduced reliance on a written workbook, and to take time to teach and reinforce core lessons.

*A lot of the young people they're not going to school 'cause they're, not, everyone is made for school. Not everyone can just sit there and write notes. (S&SH)*

In light of these personal challenges, staff and stakeholders also reflected on the value of JTYGT as an early intervention program, noting differences in outcomes for young people who engaged with the program before they were entrenched in offending behaviours and the justice system.

*I have found this program works best for those that have definitely been up to no good, but we've reached them early. (S&SH)*

*We just need to get them earlier and I'm not saying not be on police watch but certainly leading to that (S&SH)*

*The recidivist ones just a few of them have gone OK. (S&SH)*

Despite this, it was evident from further conversation and examples that the JT Academy promoted an inclusionary agenda; seeking to include young people with a wide range of needs, including varied risk levels (i.e., low to high risk). In this way the program did not restrict eligibility and worked with a diverse youth cohort – anyone willing to participate. Program staff and stakeholders provided examples of young people already engaged in the justice system and others who were suggested to be on the periphery, although details are not included here to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

## Post-program follow-up

*“There needs to be ongoing contact”*

Program staff and stakeholders reported that the JT Academy provided some level of follow-up for young people who complete the *JTYGT* program. This follow-up varied between locations and young people depending on the capability of staff and interest and/or needs of young people.

*In July, we'll be catching up with them [young people] again and they're having their Zoom with JT, so that's something that they're looking forward to. There are also, we have the Lionhearts program afterwards. So, if we see that there are people who just have engaged so much and you can just know that they want to make a change and they're trying their absolute best, we can then, they can come on to our Lionhearts program. So, there's room for them to come into the office once a week ... and then hopefully from that sometimes they might get traineeships with us, so we can help them find work. So, yeah, we don't want to just do the program, leave it at that. We want to help them further with jobs or traineeships, that sort of thing. (S&SH)*

Some young people were also aware of opportunities for post-program support; *“Well, sometimes some of us get to work with them” (YP)*. However, many young people reported that they felt the level of follow-up was limited, and that the *Lionhearts* program specifically was not widely accessible:

*Oh, the only person I stayed in contact with was [young person] 'cause he goes to school, so I see him every now and again. (YP)*

*I think another thing was like I think [facilitator] really struggled to keep in contact with everyone. I might be completely wrong, but like I think maybe getting more contact information would be good. (YP)*

Staff and stakeholders also acknowledged this as an area needing ongoing development:

*As to, we need a little bit more structure in not just letting the kids go like and this is probably what was what disappointed me is that we've really got them, and then it was almost like, 'What what's happening now?', like we've done so well...we have potential to really impact some kids here. (S&SH)*

*I think it has failed a few kids because and I know that for a fact have gone on to actually offend. Uhm, because I know for a fact they don't have structure and I have not been able to coordinate it and I really think that post this course if there was ongoing follow up, they wouldn't have probably gone on to do it. (S&SH)*

*We don't stay connected to all of them. We're not perfect ..... We aim for, you know, it's consistent out of every 10, I reckon we're getting four to five. (S&SH)*

Designing, developing, and implementing extensions to the existing program, however, takes times. Staff and stakeholders acknowledged that extending post-program follow-up and support was planned.



In the meantime, program staff and stakeholders suggested building a positive peer community through *JTYGT*, providing opportunities for ongoing peer support.

*Even though I might not be around as much as they [young people] would like, they've still got those people they've made connections with throughout that program. (S&SH)*

Online opportunities to remain connected were also acknowledged.

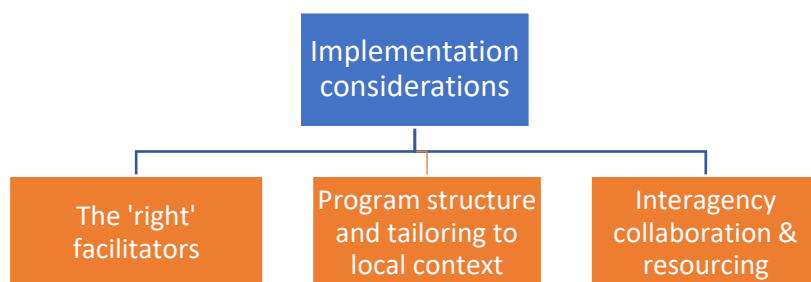
*Hopefully, they're [young people] staying connected with us online. (S&SH)*

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Program outcomes are also impacted by the way programs are implemented. Understanding key implementation considerations are thus critical for informing future program delivery. This evaluation revealed that successful program implementation depended on facilitators, responding to local context, and interagency collaboration.

### Key Finding 5: Successful program implementation depends on program facilitators, responding to the local context, and interagency collaboration

Three micro-factors were identified which are important implementation considerations (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Implementation considerations**

#### The 'right' facilitators

*"their passion is so evident"*

Program outcomes are impacted by the way programs are implemented, highlighting the importance of program facilitators in creating the program environment and culture. Youth, staff, and stakeholders identified key characteristics of the 'right' facilitators for the *JTYGT* program including people who were engaging, supportive, passionate, role models to youth.

Indeed, when young people were asked what kept them coming back to the program each week, many indicated this was because of their facilitators.

*Yeah, I love [facilitator]. [Facilitator] is really cool, she's so outgoing, yeah she puts herself out there and also so supportive. (YP)*

*Facilitators, like the people running it they were great, yeah. (YP)*

Other staff and stakeholders also identified the importance and influence of the ‘right’ program facilitators: “[Facilitators] I cannot, I cannot talk highly enough of them. I’m a massive fan. They did so well in engaging, their passion is so evident” (S&SH). Indeed, it was suggested that the facilitator needed to have knowledge and experience working with at-risk young people, the ability to relate to young people, and to build a therapeutic alliance, for successful program implementation.

*I’m young, but I’m very qualified and not only got the knowledge, I’ve got the life experience to cope with it. (S&SH)*

The JTYGT program is mostly delivered by two JT Academy staff – a program facilitator and support officer, suggesting the ‘right’ support person is also an important implementation consideration. Program staff and stakeholders perceived the support officer to be an essential role to enable the program facilitator to deliver the program effectively.

*A support officer is the one who does the running around for me, so for instance they organise the food. They help me organise. So, they do the food, they get all the young people to sign in, they’re just to support. Print this for me, do that, because I have to design the session. My job is to come up with a session that fits the needs of those young people in that group. (S&SH)*

*I’m a support officer, so I would actually go and I’d help [facilitator] run the programs and stuff like that, interact with the kids and support some of the kids who needed more support. You know ‘cause some of them were a little bit introverted. So, I’d hang out with them, you know, get them to open up little by little. (S&SH).*

### **Program structure and tailoring to local context**

Importantly, responsivity appears central to the JTYGT approach, with each program tailored to the local context, to the participant group, and to needs expressed by referring organisations. This level of program tailoring is important for ensuring program relevance across different contexts, and with different participant groups.

The structure of the JTYGT program, for example, has varied over time, including a four-day intensive program, and 10- and 15- week courses. These changes in structure reflect different funding guidelines and local contextual requirements.

*The delivery of the program, so it depends how, what the needs of that community is, who the stakeholder is, and who’s funding it. So for instance [Location A] ...they saw the need for a four day intensive workshop..... [Location B]... you know a lot of young people in detention are from that region, hence why they saw the need of the ten week program. (S&SH)*

*“we read the room”*

Changes to therapeutic approaches and program activities are also evident across programs and over time. This reflects responsivity to program participants, for example attending to literacy levels which may otherwise be a barrier for some young people.

*We'll run things differently depending on the young people in the room (S&SH).*

Shifts from workbook-facilitated learning to a more narrative (storytelling approach) are also evident, as the program continues to evolve and adapt to local contexts.

*So, the activities we try to do are hands on, we try to not really do worksheet-based kind of things, but we can [use] the work booklet which is there to utilize if needed. Depending on the room. (S&SH)*

Despite this responsiveness, a level of consistency is also promoted across programs, through the underlying program principles and values. Narrative and experiential activities also appear to be guided by the *JTYGT* workbook, further promoting a level of consistency across programs.

*But it's still the same confidence, courage, and self-belief they need to align with those three key things. (S&SH)*

### **Interagency collaboration & resourcing**

Program staff and stakeholders also perceived that interagency collaboration was essential for long-term successful program implementation. It was reported that the JT Academy has developed strong working partnerships with the QPS and local schools:

*"It was a really positive team effort"*

*The police are working very closely with us [JT Academy] and they love this. (S&SH)*

Although, it was acknowledged that other agencies or services, such as Youth Justice, could have greater involvement, to expand the program and increase accessibility for young people.

*As we [the program and Academy] grow and building those networks, it's only gonna get better. (S&SH)*

Importantly, police officers play a co-responder role within the program, assisting with referrals, transport and supporting young people throughout their program experience. This provides further support to JT Academy program staff and contributes to improved relationships between young people and police. There was, however, some suggestion that a consistent police officer for each program would optimise this benefit.

*But I think it could be improved by having .... the same police officer each week come to the program. Or even the same two 'cause it was sort of a new person each week. (S&SH)*

Program staff and stakeholders perceived funding and resources to be another important implementation consideration. It was suggested that the *JTYGT* program had sufficient funding and resources for the current implementation:

*We've got the funds to take young people out for coffees and spoil them, and build bikes and, you know, there's never a case of "we can't do that", it's like "let's do that." (S&SH)*

Resources are also used to reward evidence of confidence, courage, and self-belief, in order to support and reinforce positive behaviour change.

*Yeah, because if they show some courage ... which is a really hard thing to do, especially when they've been, you know, either traumatized, consistently rejected. And they finally have the ability to be proud of their story. It's like, OK, next week, let's go out for lunch. Let's do something fun, like you've done really well, ... you deserve to go out for a treat. That was hard but we did it together. And yeah, let's go do something fun. So I think the reason why it can be so successful is 'cause we can follow up with that kind of stuff too. (S&SH)*

However, it was noted that increased funding and support was required to expand the program and implement a comprehensive follow-up program (i.e., *Lionhearts*) to reinforce and extend the success of the *JTYGT* program.

*What's really needed is just that, you know, the resources to facilitate that next step for them [young people]. (S&SH)*

*More funding so we can do the *Lionheart*. JT and I talk all the time to the point of we're frustrated because we know we can see it and it's just that missing link... The bit that really is needed is just that you know the resources to facilitate that next step for them. (S&SH)*

## Summary & Recommendations

The *JTYGT* program is an early intervention program for at-risk youth. The program develops foundational skills for change, with a primary focus on self-efficacy (confidence, courage, and self-belief). It has been designed as the first of a series of programs, with the aim of building and then extending foundational skills, supporting personal prosocial goals, and reducing involvement in the justice system. The program adopts an inclusive, strengths-based, and narrative approach, creating a safe therapeutic environment for all young people, to enable change. The integral role played by JT, as a celebrity role model, is a unique feature of the program.

Key findings from this preliminary evaluation of the *JTYGT* program are outlined in this report. These findings reveal that the *JTYGT* program shows promise in achieving intended goals for young people who complete the program, producing genuine benefits, including building confidence, courage, and self-belief (self-efficacy). In turn, this appears to contribute to other positive behavioural changes, including curtailing offending behaviour. Findings are therefore consistent with the *JTYGT* program theory. Evaluation findings also reveal overwhelming support for the program from young people, staff, and external stakeholders.

Together, these findings provisionally endorse the design of the *JTYGT* program, including: i) the importance of self-efficacy as a foundational skill for change including desistance from crime; ii) the need to create an inclusive, safe, supportive, and youth-friendly environment to promote engagement and enable change; iii) the importance of positive role modelling and influence of JT and learning through relatable storytelling; and iv) the value of a strengths-based approach focusing on the young person and not their prior behaviour. Indeed, findings

suggest these factors played a crucial role in the program’s success, creating the necessary conditions for attendance, engagement, personal growth, and change.

Limitations to the evaluation, however, must be acknowledged. Programs of this nature are complex to evaluate as they change and develop over time, target diverse individuals, comprise multiple components, and operate in vastly different settings which are difficult to control. This evaluation was limited by available data, including small sample sizes, lack of comparison groups (including young people who did not complete the *JTYGT* program) and pre- and post- program data, and short follow-up time frames, restricting conclusions that can be drawn at this time. Moreover, the *JTYGT* program is a new program, only established in 2021, and thus is still evolving and developing, as are the post-program support opportunities available through the JT Academy.

These limitations warrant caution in interpreting these findings; this evaluation should be considered provisional only. It is not possible at this time to determine longer term outcomes, why some young people were less successful, nor how different aspects of the program might impact outcomes. Despite this, the current evaluation suggests program outcomes overall are promising, and that the *JTYGT* program is working as intended to produce desired outcomes. These findings should therefore provide some confidence for resourcing, extending and scaling up the program.

The current evaluation suggests program outcomes are promising and the *JTYGT* program is working as intended

Also importantly, the evaluation revealed a few factors that warrant consideration as the program grows and develops.

#### **a) Secure police involvement in this program**

Police co-responders were identified as playing an important role in the *JTYGT* program. Although this was not an explicit intention of the original design of the program, police support included providing referrals for young people, facilitating program attendance, contributions to in-program learning activities, and breaking down barriers between young people and police. When young people feel supported and have consistent and direct contact with police officers, positive perceptions of police can be enhanced along with feeling more able to access police when needing safety and protection (Norman, 2009). Suggestions were made, however, about the need for a consistent police officer/s in this role, to build on established relationships and experience, and thus enhance potential benefits. This might also ensure co-responders are passionate about the program and involved by choice.

#### **b) Communicate culturally safe and responsive practices**

While *JTYGT* is an inclusive program designed to promote safety and respect for all young people, a majority (80%) of young people who have engaged with the *JTYGT* program identify as First Nations, placing culture at the forefront of program design and delivery. The JT Academy acknowledges the importance of culture, with a stated aim to provide a

“welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive” service. Aligned with this aim, the *JTYGT* program approach reflects best practice principles for working with First Nations peoples (e.g., Price-Robertson & McDonald, 2011), and JT provides a strong role model to First Nations (and other) young people. Indeed, the inclusive and strengths-based approach of the *JTYGT* program, where young people and staff listen to each other, help each other (and their community), and show respect for themselves and each other, are core values that contribute to a culturally safe environment (Georg & Manning, 2022). High rates of attendance and engagement, and positive experiences expressed by First Nations youth, further evidence cultural safety in the *JTYGT* program. We believe, therefore, that the *JTYGT* program is culturally safe and inclusive of First Nations youth.

Despite this, the cultural framework for this program is not explicitly addressed on the JT Academy website, or in summary documents made available to the research team. Of course, ‘doing’ culturally safe practice is more important than documenting this. However, program documentation that attends to culture can be worthwhile, particularly as programs scale up, guiding future practice and clearly communicating program expectations. We have been advised that the JT Academy have an internal policy and procedures manual that explicitly outlines their cultural framework. Ideally, this document should address the program’s commitment to culture, and how Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being are integrated in their work, cementing this practice into program theory and organisational procedures. For the JT Academy, this could also include explicit discussion of the relationship between cultural identity and ‘confidence, courage, and self-belief’, including for those First Nations young people who may have not grown up with strong cultural role models or connection to culture. Greater articulation of the approach to trauma in the program may also be beneficial. Sharing this information publicly, in addition to documenting this in a policy and procedures manual, may also help to showcase the strengths of this program, and reassure prospective First Nations participants of cultural safety within the program.

Program staff also spoke about opportunities to extend cultural safety and responsiveness within the *JTYGT* program, including by promoting the involvement of local community Elders in program delivery. In addition to building connection to culture, this may also be an opportunity to promote knowledge of local cultural artifacts and sites, tailoring the program to local context, and thus encouraging young people to learn more about their story. Future evaluation should also focus explicitly on cultural safety, including specific outcomes for First Nations youth participants, as well as young people of other cultures.

### **c) Strengthen post-program support**

Young people, staff, and stakeholders all identified a need for greater post-program support for young people who complete the *JTYGT* program. Moreover, young people expressed uncertainty about the extent of post-program support available, and about the pathways into subsequent JT Academy (or other) programs, such as the *JT Lionhearts* program. Program dosage is recognised as a critical factor in effective crime prevention programs (e.g., Nation et al, 2003), including for youth (Pooley, 2020) and post-program support is likely to enhance the maintenance of change, optimising the benefits of the

*JTYGT* program and opportunities for success. For these reasons post program support is a core feature in the *JTYGT* program theory, ensuring support and opportunities are available to extend foundational skills and promote goal achievement.

Strengthening post program support is a priority

Strengthening post- *JTYGT* program support is therefore a priority recommendation. This could include further development of the *JT Lionhearts* program, establishing clearer links and pathways from *JTYGT* into other JT Academy programs, periodic ‘program reunions’, and/or the use of social media, youth focused newsletters, or other communication opportunities to keep young people connected to the programs values and principles. It is understood that JT Academy are committed to building the *JT Lionhearts* program and are currently working with stakeholders to advance its development. However, it is acknowledged that development of *JT Lionhearts* and enhancement of post- program support may be dependent on available funding and resources.

Finally, further evaluation of the *JTYGT* program is recommended, to enhance and extend learnings from the current evaluation. Interviewing young people who did not engage with the *JTYGT* program should provide important insight into the barriers they faced and optimal approaches to engagement, and/or assist to define the cohort of youth most likely to benefit from this program. Longer post-program follow-up periods will also answer ongoing questions about longer term program impacts, and the maintenance of positive changes observed in this evaluation. Ideally, integrating future evaluation of the *JTYGT* program with an evaluation of the *Lionhearts* program would better test collective program theory linked to extending and applying the foundational skills for change achieved in the *JTYGT* program.

While efforts to minimise evaluation impact on program participants must remain a priority, in future evaluation activities the inclusion of additional clinical measures, designed to better align with the program theory, is recommended. This raises one additional issue for consideration by the JT Academy team.

#### **d) Develop and implement clinical measures to enhance future evaluation**

Designing-in clinical evaluation measures into routine program delivery will help to facilitate more rigorous future evaluation. The following suggestions are offered for consideration. This does not comprise an exhaustive evaluation review or plan; rather it is provided to prompt thinking and discussion.

- The *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire* developed by the UniSC research team for the *JTYGT* program should be administered prior to- and post- each program. This will allow measurement of self-belief (self-efficacy) including any change in self-efficacy as a direct result of the program. An additional clinical measure could also be developed to measure confidence levels pre- and post- program. It will be important that these measures are administered at two time-points, to enable measurement of change. Ideally, measures of this nature should be designed for written or verbal completion.

- Consider the development and adoption of *Session Rating Scales* to capture young people's experiences, reflections, and learnings at the end of each program session. Again, these could be developed in a narrative or pictorial form, in addition to written options.
- *Post-program interviews* remain an important source of evaluation information. Ideally, immediate post-program interviews, in addition to follow-up interviews 6-12 months post-program attendance, could be considered. This would help to determine what learning and other positive changes are retained, and the role of any post-program support in change maintenance.






Overall, this initial and preliminary evaluation of the *JTYGT* program suggests the program helps to build confidence, courage, and self-belief, and in turn, helps to build prosocial skills, attitudes, and goals in young people who complete the program. Young people were overwhelming supportive of the program, which prioritised a safe and inclusive environment. Recommendations for future directions include formalising the police role, communicating culturally safe practices, strengthening post-program support, and implementing clinical measures to enhance future evaluations.



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# Appendix

JT YouGotThis Self-Efficacy Survey						
How likely are you to .....						
		Not at all 	Not very 	Maybe 	Likely 	Very likely 
1	Successfully complete your education?					
2	Find a job?					
3	Have a successful career?					
4	Be respected and admired by others?					
5	Achieve your goals?					
6	Speak up for yourself?					
7	Make poor decisions?					
8	Be a leader?					
9	Be important to other people?					
10	Give in to peer pressure?					
11	Be worthy of respect from JT?					
12	Be self-confident?					
13	Be courageous?					
14	Communicate well with other people?					
15	Support other people?					
16	Achieve great things?					
17	Know about and understand your culture?					
18	Be a strong person of culture?					