Hoops 4 Health Academy and Training Centre

A qualitative study of First Nations-led sport for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in the Northern Territory

Discipline of Social Work, School of Allied Health Sciences, Faculty of Health, Charles Darwin University

March 2026

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

RE-EMPOWER · REGULATE · RESILIENCE · HEALING CENTRED SPORT · Hoops 4 Health · EST. 1995

NORTHERN TERRITORY MENTAL HEALTH COALITION



Acknowledgement of Country and recognition of Australian First Nations Traditional Owners and cultures

Charles Darwin University acknowledges and respects Australian First Nations peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our campuses and centres are located. They are the first educators, innovators, and holders of knowledge, and their continuing contributions strengthen our local, national, and global communities. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all First Nations people.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research partnership between Hoops 4 Health (H4H) and the Discipline of Social Work at Charles Darwin University. It explores the impact of the Hoops 4 Health Academy and Training Centre on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across the Northern Territory, while also drawing on anecdotes and program data from H4H's youth justice initiative, *Hoops on the Inside*.

The findings indicate that H4H's Healing-Centred Sport Model is a distinctive First Nations-developed and led approach to strengthening youth wellbeing. By bringing together cultural authority, relational safety, strengths-based coaching, and developmental neuroscience, the model supports sustained program engagement and positive developmental outcomes.

Participants consistently described young people as feeling proud, safe, connected, empowered, calmer, more confident, and more hopeful about their futures through involvement in H4H programs. These outcomes were also associated with broader system-level benefits, including improved help-seeking behaviours, diversion from youth justice pathways, stronger school engagement, and the development of First Nations youth leadership pathways.

The report also formalises H4H's Theory of Change and identifies the conditions necessary for sustained impact, including First Nations leadership, trauma-informed workforce capability, culturally grounded practice, predictable program delivery, and organisational sustainability.

Importantly, the research documents H4H's model of practice for the first time and establishes a foundational set of outcome indicators aligned with participant-identified domains of impact. Together, these strengthen H4H's capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and future scale-up.

Overall, the report shows that healing-centred, First Nations-led sport is a culturally grounded psychosocial response that strengthens identity, regulation, and wellbeing, while contributing to safer and more just systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Ellen Gray (formally Thomas) (she/her), Principal Investigator

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Partner Statements

Hoops 4 Health CEO and Founder

As the CEO and Founder of Hoops 4 Health (H4H), I am immensely proud to introduce this comprehensive report on our Training Centre and Academy programs, conducted in partnership with Charles Darwin University. For 25 years, H4H has been a beacon of hope, using basketball, boxing, and fitness to foster healthy lifestyles, combat racism and stigma, and support intergenerational healing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in the Northern Territory. While our broader mission has deep roots, this report shines a spotlight on these relatively new initiatives—the Academy, serving young people aged 10–16 in Darwin's northern suburbs and inner city, and the Training Centre in Pinelands, a hub for justice-involved youth, high-performance pathways, and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)-supported programs. I extend my deepest gratitude to Charles Darwin University, particularly the Discipline of Social Work and researchers like Ellen Gray, for their rigorous, culturally grounded analysis that validates our Healing-Centred Sport Model and highlights its profound impacts.

Reflecting on this report reveals the transformative power of our programs on Larrakia Country in Darwin, where structured sport becomes a vehicle for self-regulation, pride, belonging, and resilience. Stories from young people, families, staff, and partners illustrate how patterned, repetitive activities, guided by First Nations coaches, help youth shift from dysregulation to re-empowerment, building confidence, peer support, and pathways out of detention into leadership and employment. These spaces are more than courts and gyms; they are "third places" of safety and inclusion, where participants feel seen, valued, and connected to their culture, mob, and Country. The evidence of reduced conflict increased emotional literacy (like peers saying "just regulate, man"), and youth "coming out of their shells" underscores how our model addresses intergenerational trauma with First Nations solutions.

Both the Academy and Training Centre hold immense potential to grow into enduring places of healing for all youth on Larrakia Country and beyond, not just those facing adversity, but every young person seeking strength, identity, and community. As we address challenges like transport, facilities, and funding, this report equips us to scale our impact, ensuring H4H continues delivering "doses of resilience" for generations to come. I invite partners, funders, and communities to join us in this vital work.

Timmy Duggan, OAM (he/him)

CEO and Founder, Hoops 4 Health

Timmy is a proud Darwin local, born and raised, with family connections to the Warramungu people of Central Australia and the Nyikina people of the Kimberley. He holds a Diploma of Youth and Community Development from RMIT University, has completed formal training with Dr Bruce Perry in the Neurosequential Model of Sport, and was the first person from the Northern Territory to play in the National Basketball League (NBL). He was also the only First Nations Australian to play in the NBL during the 1990s. A pioneer on and off the court, Timmy is an innovative leader in healing-centred sport, and promoting healthy lifestyles—particularly in remote communities. In 2024, he was inducted into the NT Sport Hall of Champions.



Hoops 4 Health Acknowledgements

Hoops 4 Health acknowledges the important contributions of its partners and supporters:

- **Peter Lonergan**, Basketball Australia – for supporting the integration of Flightpath Coaching and other strength-based sporting practices across H4H programs.
- **Dr Bruce Perry**, The Neurosequential Network – for supporting H4H to deepen its understanding of developmental trauma and the evidence-based practices that promote the health and wellbeing of young people from marginalised and disadvantaged communities.
- **Centre for Healing and Justice Through Sport** – for advancing H4H's trauma-informed, healing-centred approach to sport through international best practice in addressing systemic injustice.



Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition CEO

This study provides compelling evidence that H4H is delivering meaningful and sustained impacts on the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals who have been consistently underserved or harmed by mainstream systems. The program engages cohorts experiencing significant complexity, trauma and entrenched distrust of services, often labelled as "hard to engage" within justice, child protection and health systems. In contrast, the study demonstrates strong engagement, increased help-seeking behaviours, and improved wellbeing outcomes, underpinned by culturally safe, relational and non-punitive practice. The model responds to trauma rather than solely criminogenic behaviour, rebuilding trust through sustained relationships and peer-informed approaches that reflect lived experience among both staff and participants.

The findings hold important implications for governments, policymakers and funding bodies, particularly in demonstrating the value of sport-led initiatives as effective psychosocial supports. While H4H may not align neatly with conventional program guidelines, the study shows it delivers outcomes that align squarely with policy objectives of diversion, prevention and recovery. By supporting participants to remain well and engaged, the model contributes to diversion from youth justice, child protection, hospital emergency departments, primary health care and the NDIS. The program's capacity to operate effectively in regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and within settings where engagement is notoriously difficult, including justice environments, highlights both its adaptability and its value for money.

Central to this impact is the leadership model, including the effective use of trusted relationships and social capital to engage at-risk young people and create access to otherwise closed systems and funding opportunities. The study also highlights the program's role in building workforce capability, both internally and across partner agencies, strengthening system responses beyond the program itself. These findings are particularly salient given the Coalition's ongoing advocacy for the estimated 500,000 Australians, including approximately 8,140 Territorians, living with severe and complex mental ill health who are missing out on the NDIS and receiving inadequate, inappropriate or inaccessible supports. Hoops 4 Health provides a demonstrable, evidence-based example of how culturally safe, community-led models can bridge this gap by reducing stigma and shame, strengthening connections to family, community and country, and facilitating pathways into broader health and social support systems that are essential to recovery.

Geoff Radford (he/him)

CEO, NT Mental Health Coalition Inc.

Geoff Radford, CEO of the NT Mental Health Coalition, has delivered programs in regional centres and remote Aboriginal communities, working closely with First Nations leaders to support culturally safe care. In 2016, Geoff managed support services for the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory. Much of his leadership experience has been in programs responding to mental health needs and complex trauma.



Acknowledgements

Research team



Ms. Ella Syvret

(she/her)

Research Assistant

Master of Social Work Alumni
Charles Darwin University

Former Master of Social Work student Ella volunteered as a Research Assistant on the H4H project from September 2024 to May 2025. Her work was instrumental in supporting the research team through key stages of the project, including contributing to the ethics application, assisting with protocol development, undertaking the literature review, and supporting the initial research design in collaboration with H4H. Ella also assisted with the initial interviews with interest holders, helping to strengthen the project's early engagement and data foundations. Ella's thoughtful engagement and commitment contributed meaningfully to the early development of this research.



Ms. Mengdie (Momo) Zhao

(she/her)

Health Hub Placement Student

Master of Social Work Student
Charles Darwin University

Master of Social Work student Momo completed her first social work industry placement as a Research Assistant under the Charles Darwin University Health Hub initiative from July 2025 to October 2025. Her role was instrumental in reviewing the evidence base underpinning H4H model of practice and conceptualising this work alongside the Principal Investigator. Momo's analytical insight and emerging research skills made a valuable contribution to articulating the theoretical and practice foundations of the model.



Ms. Nushrat Islam Bhuiyan

(she/her)

Research Assistant

Master of Social Work Student
Charles Darwin University

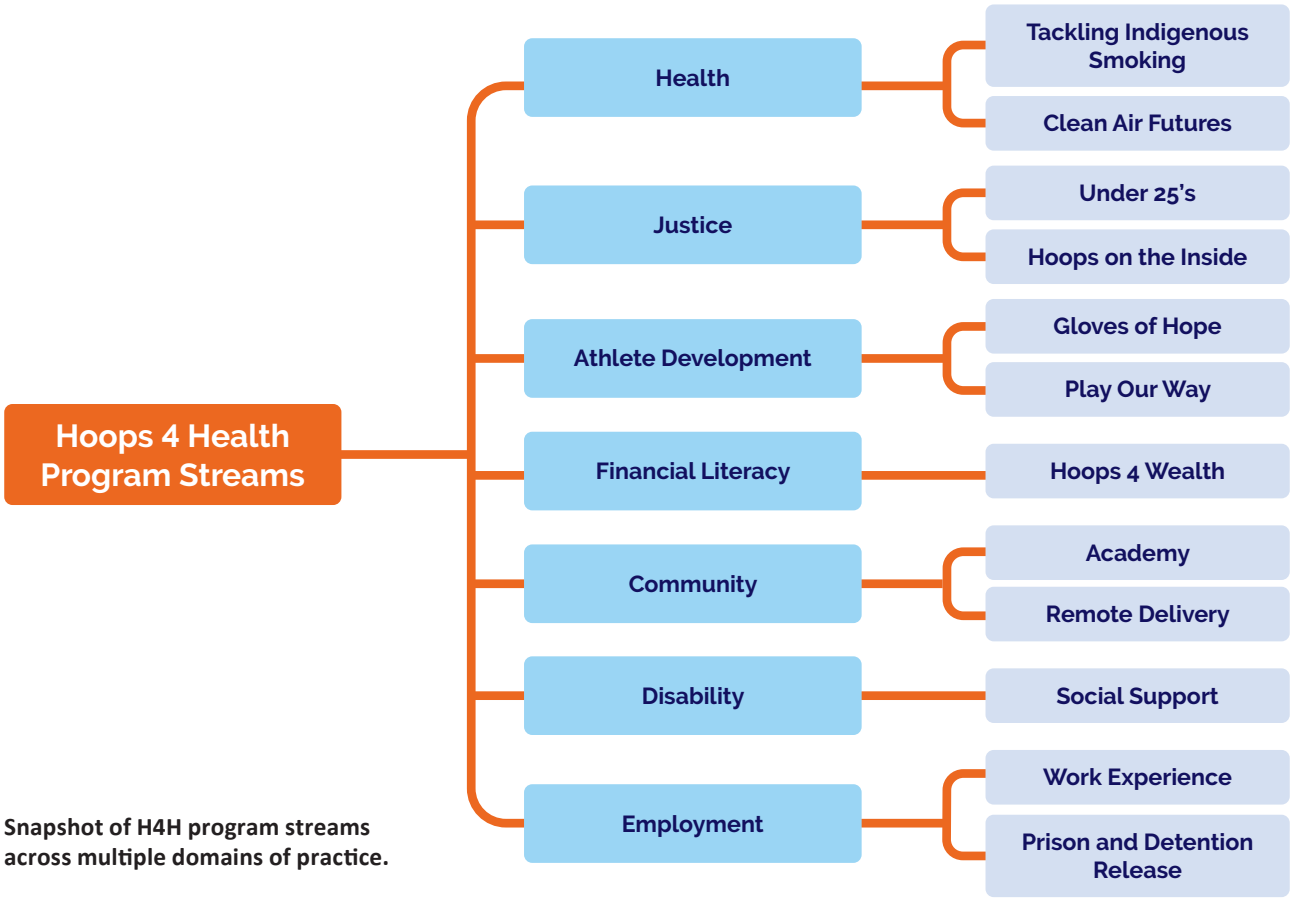
As a Research Assistant, Nushrat supported the project from November 2025 to March 2026, assisting with reviewing, refining, and contributing to the development of both the public-facing report and the manuscript prepared for publication. Her careful attention to clarity, structure, and coherence strengthened the final report and supported the dissemination of the project's findings to both community and academic audiences.

1. Hoops 4 Health Organisational Overview

Hoops 4 Health is a First Nations-led organisation that has worked alongside young people, families, and communities across the Northern Territory for more than 25 years. Based in Darwin, H4H brings together local cultural leadership and lived experience to strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people through programs spanning health, justice, athlete development, financial literacy, community access, and disability support.

Since 2010, Hoops 4 Health has engaged more than 10,000 participants and visited 33 remote communities across the Northern Territory. The organisation's work has been recognised through major awards, including:

- 2022 NT Communities in Action LiFE Award (Suicide Prevention Australia)
- Indigenous Health Awards – National Australian Men's Health Forum Award
- 2024 National Rural Health Pro Award for Dedication to Health in Remote Communities



Snapshot of H4H program streams across multiple domains of practice.

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR



From Garramilla (Darwin) to Gunbalanya, across Arnhem Land in Maningrida, Galiwin'ku, and Gapuwiyak; through Katherine, Barunga, and Ngukurr; across the Barkly in Ali Curung, Arlparra, and Ampilatwatja; into Central Australia including Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and Mutitjulu; and extending to the Tiwi Islands in Wurrumiyanga and Pirlangimpi, and the Torres Strait including Warraber and Badu Island – Hoops 4 Health's journey reflects sustained, community-led engagement across the Northern Territory and beyond.



H4H Myokines: The girls won the U/12 Eltham Dandenong Tournament, and most have been part of Hoops 4 Health since birth. They utilised the H4H Training Centre and Academy sessions in their preparation.



Valentine Vallejo May – H4H Training Centre Scholarship recipient 2025.



Gloves of Hope Session 2025.



Abby Cubillo – H4H Academy Coach since 2020.

Hoops 4 Health Academy

Proudly supported by Northern Territory Government and INPEX

The H4H Academy is a sport and recreation program for young people aged 10–16 in Darwin. Supported by the Northern Territory Government Department of Territory Families and INPEX, it delivers structured basketball and fitness sessions in safe, supervised environments. The Academy is led by a predominantly First Nations workforce, with more than 90% of coaches identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Sessions are delivered across the northern suburbs and inner Darwin at Holy Family School Courts and local community courts, including Minmarama, Knuckeys Lagoon, and The Shak. School holiday programs also engage more than 500 young people each year, maintaining continuity of support while expanding access during periods of peak demand. Between 2020 and 2025, approximately 3,858 young people participated, with totals expected to exceed 4,000 once final data are confirmed. Across this period, around 85–90% of participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The Academy also supports broader development pathways, including reintegration for young people transitioning from Holtze Youth Detention Centre (formerly Don Dale Youth Detention Centre), access to boarding school scholarship opportunities, youth ambassador roles, and progression into coaching and mentoring positions.

3,858

Young people participated between 2020 – 2025

85%-90%

of participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



Coach Abby Cubillo, Larrakia Women, and Former WNBL Player at Holy Family School, where the Academy Program has been conducted for 6 years.



Students from Holy family School working in teams to shoot hoops on the basketball court.

Hoops 4 Health Training Centre

Hoops 4 Health established the Training Centre in Pinelands in late 2023, providing a permanent, place-based facility to enable consistent program delivery and coordinated service access. The Centre delivers an integrated suite of sport, wellbeing, and community development activities, including justice diversion and recovery, high-performance athlete development pathways, disability inclusion programming, and education and employment pathways.



Within the first six months of operation, participation, exceeded 2,000 individuals, indicating substantial community uptake, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Training Centre Overview

Justice-involved youth support

- Structured programming for young people involved in the justice system, including those granted leave from detention
- Aims to strengthens leadership, social and cultural connection, and pro-social peer relationships
- Builds protective factors and supports reintegration on release

High-performance pathways

- Streetballerz Elite Basketball development initiative
- Gloves of Hope Boxing Program for young people with competitive aspirations
- Play our Way female basketball development program
- Specialist guest sessions with high-profile role models (e.g., Harlem Globetrotters, Anthony Mundine, Damon Lowry, and Lauren Jackson).

Community access and shared use

- Shared facility access for local football and basketball clubs
- Gym-access scholarships for young people and families experiencing financial hardship (in partnership with Cathara Consulting)

Disability inclusion and social supports

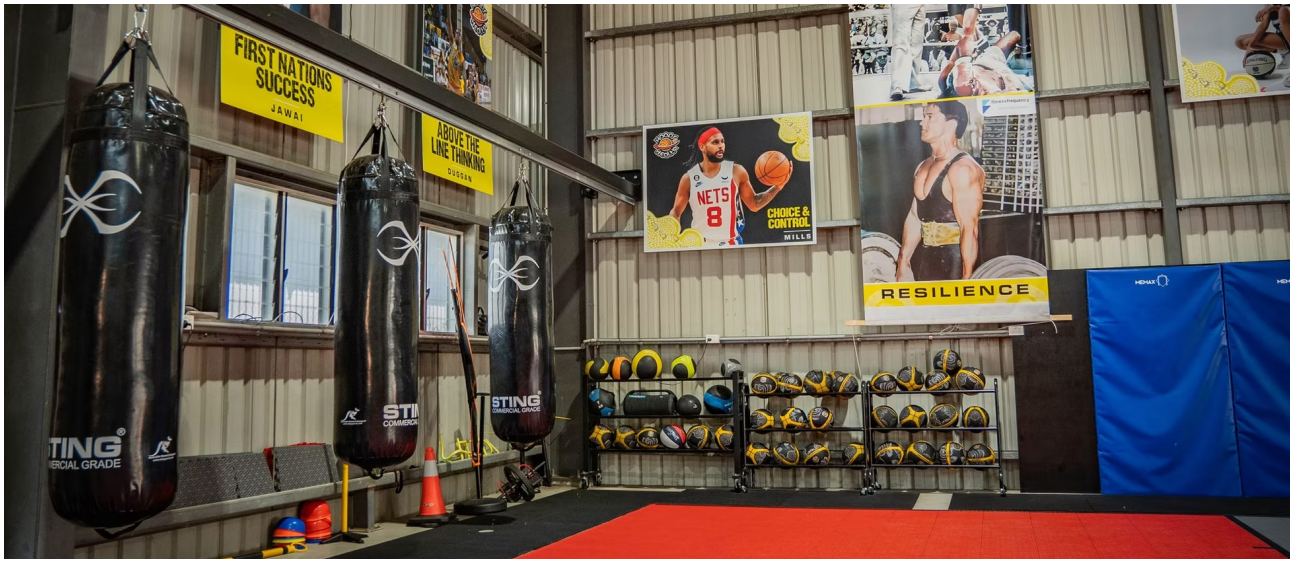
- One-to-one supports through NDIS plans
- Strengthened by relationships with elite sporting organisations, including the Australian Paralympic Team

Education, training, and employment pathways

- Onsite work experience for young people connected with the Centre (e.g., Palmerston Senior College)
- Prison-release workforce development opportunities
- Student placements (e.g., University of Newcastle Medical Program, CDU Master of Social Work)









The Hoops 4 Health Training Centre in Pinelands

Hoops 4 Health on the Inside

Program overview

Hoops on the Inside is a specialised program delivered within Alice Springs and Darwin Correctional Centres, as well as Holtze Youth Detention Centre. The program focuses on strengthening social and emotional wellbeing, using basketball as a practical pathway to build resilience, self-belief, and life skills, guided by the organisation's Healing-Centred Sport approach.

Delivery approach

- The program delivers regular sessions in custodial settings, with a strong emphasis on relationship-based, culturally safe engagement and First Nations leadership. It prioritises recognising and celebrating the strengths and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Leave-of-absence sessions

- Hoops on the Inside also includes leave-of-absence sessions at the Training Centre for young people involved in the youth justice system, providing a safe, supportive space to reset and rebuild.

Since 2016, the program has delivered more than

800 Sessions

at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and continues delivery in the Holtze adult prison facility.

Continuity and pathways post-release

- Programs delivered inside custody are complemented by follow-up support outside, aimed at strengthening pathways and reducing the risk of re-entry into the justice system.



Young people on the court with Coach Emerson Pomfret at Lake Nash (Alpurrulum), 2024.



Coach Deba George is leading a Calmness Circle with young people in Daly River – Coaches uses basketball instruments to support connection and reflection

2. Research Context and Objectives

Research overview

This report presents a qualitative study of First Nations-led sport programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the Northern Territory. It explores two long-standing initiatives – the Hoops Academy and the Training Centre – to understand what is working well, what challenges exist, and what improvements could strengthen program delivery and organisational sustainability.

Research question and aims

Central research question: What impact have the Academy and Training Centre had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the Northern Territory?

The study aimed to:

- explore how trauma-informed, culturally safe sport engages young people
- contribute qualitative insights about perceived impacts on wellbeing
- generate practical insights to inform future program design, implementation, and long-term sustainability

Research design and methodology

- Conducted using a constructivist, participatory framework co-designed with H4H
- Informed by Ganma theory, supporting two-way learning and respectful dialogue across knowledge systems
- Treated participant perspectives as situated and meaningful, with analysis attentive to culture, relationships, language, and power
- Designed to produce findings that are directly useful for practice

Ethics

Ethics approval: Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee (H42110, approved 22 January 2025)

Data collection period: February-June 2025

Method: 18 semi structured recorded interviews via Microsoft Teams

Participants included:

- Hoops 4 Health staff, program partners, parents/carers, a young person, and a university student – including participants who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Participation was voluntary, with clear consent and withdrawal processes; data were securely stored and de-identified

Analysis approach:

- Interview transcripts analysed using reflexive thematic analysis through an iterative process of memoing, coding, mapping, and refinement (continuing to November 2025)
- Themes were reviewed and sense-checked with the research team and H4H staff



Hoops 4 Health deliver a health session in Galiwinku.

3. Hoops 4 Health's Healing-Centred Sport Model (HCSM)

Healing-Centred Sport Model Logic

Context and rationale

Hoops 4 Health works from the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families are living with the impacts of intergenerational trauma, racism, and exclusion, and that mainstream health and wellbeing services and recreational sporting environments are not consistently culturally safe or healing-centred. In response, the organisation centres First-Nations coaches and culturally responsive practice to support positive youth and community development across Darwin and the Northern Territory.

Reflecting on the organisation's evolution, Founder and CEO Timmy Duggan explained, *"when I go back to the early 2000s, it was just simple, healthy lifestyles and basketball… in the last three and a half, four years, it's really centred around that what we call healing-centred sport around the brain"* (14).

Duggan has framed the organisations approach as shifting narratives around the impacts of colonisation from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing, using the term *"post-traumatic wisdom"* to centre the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. *"We look at the whole community and the whole history – the intergenerational trauma that's happened to our people. It's weighed us down, but at the same time we're very resilient. There's a term that Dr Bruce uses, 'post-traumatic wisdom'. It's about taking what's happened to us and using it to propel us forward…"* (14).

Model description

With this context and rationale, H4H developed what they refer to as *"Healing-Centred Sport"*, a model of practice that guides their everyday work. Duggan describes the model as offering *"First Nations solutions to 21st century problems,"* positioning sport as a vehicle for improving the social emotional wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the Territory.

The model brings together First Nations leadership, culturally safe practice, strengths-based coaching, and developmental neuroscience that is both flexible in delivery and grounded in principles of decolonisation. Duggan describes this in detail *"The flexibility in delivery is not 'drift'; it's a decolonising approach. It recognises that communities, relationships, cultural authority, and local context should shape how the model is delivered, while the core outcomes and values remain consistent. In practice, this responsiveness is what enables trust, participation, and long-term impact – especially in remote or highly diverse settings where a rigid, one-size-fits-all program can reproduce deficit framing and undermine local leadership."* (14).

Conceptual foundation

Healing-centred sport is therefore framed through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on resilience. Within these worldviews, resilience is understood as social and ecological – held and expressed through story, relationships, and collective strength, rather than as an individual trait. As Bennett argues, resilience is nurtured through connection to culture, and healing is supported when cultural knowledge is centred and cultural practices are actively used in work with Aboriginal communities (Bennett, 2021).

Duggen links this understanding of resilience to healing intergenerational trauma. *"Our mentors were our Elders, or our parents or our grandparents – and for a lot of us, it was our grandmothers. They went through a lot of trauma. My grandmother was Stolen Generation – it was twenty years before she saw her mum again back in Tennant Creek. Stolen, taken to Darwin, then she went back. I used to hold that within me, and a lot of our mob hold that. My mum, she still holds it now. It's about using that trauma to propel us and go forward. So, you go from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing"* (14).

Staff also described how their work within remote Aboriginal communities crosses generations. *"I was just in Gapuwiyak, and there's a YouTube clip from 20 years ago where Timmy ran a session… now I went back and was in a session with his son, who's now 18–20 years old… it's like an intergenerational reach and healing"* (16).

"We can't thank Hoops 4 Health enough for everything they have done and are doing for the children. Having everyone together is part of the healing process." (program data).

"Thank you so much for this afternoon. It was the first time I had trained since Dad passed 10 years ago. It was such an emotional time to watch my son train for the first time and for me to join in. I'm very fussy with coaches, and you guys were amazing with similar principles to my dad's coaching." (program data).

Regulation-first sequencing

Another distinctive feature of H4H HCSM is its integration of Dr Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model for Sport (NMS). NMS explains how repeated adverse experiences – such as violence, racism, and poverty – can disrupt brain development and shape the neurological systems involved in arousal, regulation, and attachment (Perry, 2006; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006). This lens helps coaches make sense of trauma-related behaviours that may emerge when young people are under chronic stress, including heightened reactivity, reduced capacity for planning and follow-through, concentration difficulties, relational challenges, and difficulties with impulse control (Perry, 1999).

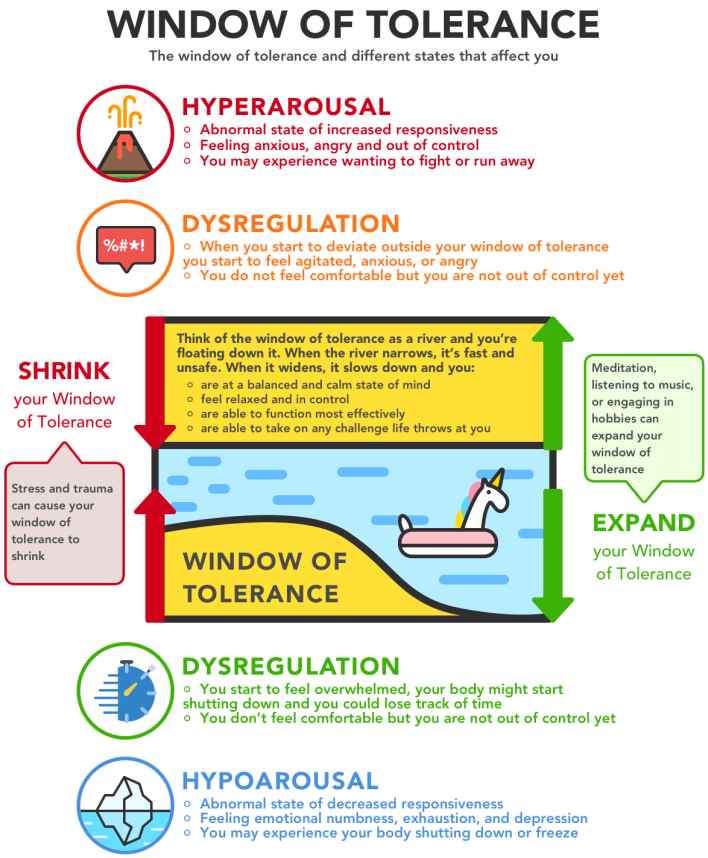
Duggan links the NSM to healing intergenerational trauma, *"Addressing and using a trauma and culturally informed approach in our engagement with young people is significant to us making an impact. The ability to reflect and regulate to make decisions and using stress to build resilience is a key component of our session delivery. It just so happens we also use a basketball to interact and give some life lessons"* (program data).

Coaches use the language of *"state-dependent functioning"* to monitor and respond to a young person's current capacity to participate in program activities. This supports coaches to adjust their practice so young people can engage safely, without being pushed beyond their window of tolerance for stress or inadvertently triggered or re-traumatised.

Window of Tolerance: Developed by Dan Siegel, a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, the Window of Tolerance describes the best state of 'arousal' or stimulation in which we are able to function and thrive in everyday life. When we exist within this window, we are able to learn effectively, play, and relate well to ourselves and others.

Programs are therefore intentionally sequenced using the NMS strategy: *regulate, relate, reason*. This approach recognises that patterned, repetitive, moderately activating activities can support nervous system regulation and, over time, strengthen stress tolerance, self-soothing, and decision-making. By prioritising regulation first, young people are better able to feel grounded in the present moment – creating the conditions for relationship-building and learning.

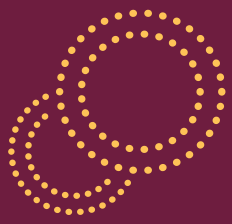
Nervous system regulation: Regulating the nervous system is about enhancing one's ability to manage stress and emotions effectively.



In practice, H4H sessions typically begin with physical activity – such as warm-up basketball, boxing, or fitness-based movement – to support regulation before progressing into the more relational and cognitive components of the program.

Coaches implement what they refer to as *"doses of resilience"*, offering manageable, predictable stress that stretches participants window of tolerance without overwhelming them, to build flexibility to manage stress over time. Industry partner Kate Thomas described this as, *"The pattern, repetitive, rhythmic activity helps regulate the lower parts of the brain… the last thing is moderate and predictable stress that leads towards resilience"* (13).

Coaches scaffold this process by helping young people notice their arousal states, tolerate moderate increases in stress, and return to regulation using movement, breathing, predictable routines and steady support. Duggan explains, *"that healing aspect comes with the patterns, the rhythms… I call them doses of resilience"* (14).



Resilience is therefore conceptualised as the ongoing development of capacity to manage stress and regulate emotions over time. Positioned alongside cultural knowledge, cultural practices, and collective strength, resilience is understood as both relational and embodied. It is this integrated framing – holding nervous system capacity together with culture and community – that defines Hoops 4 Health's distinct position on resilience.

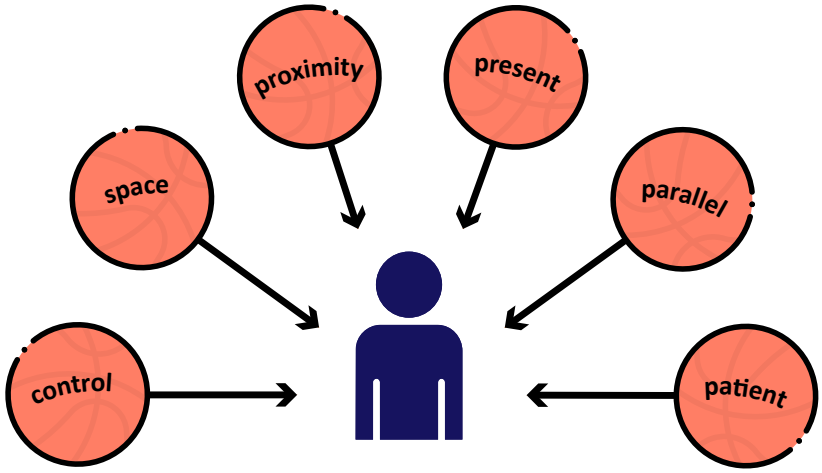
"She was pressured into stealing a car… we spoke about the brain and its development… everybody makes mistakes, it just depends on next steps" (16).

"The coaches teach us how to handle stress" (Program data).

"The regulating techniques used have had a positive impact" (Program data).

Relational and cultural safety

In keeping with the understanding that resilience is nurtured through connection to culture, H4H intentionally embeds cultural knowledge and cultural practices within its programs. Connection to family, Elders, language, Country, and community is therefore positioned as central to both program design and delivery.



Relational safety practice principles to support young people living with trauma to feel safe, supported and in control of their bodies and environment.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, cultural recognition and connection are critical to experiences of safety, belonging, and wellbeing (Ware & Meredith, 2013). Duggan describes how relational and cultural cues are used to build connection with young people, *"One of the things we say is, who's your mob, where you from? That's a big thing to get that connection and get the heart rate down"* (14). Practices such as asking "who's your mob?" enable coaches to identify kinship connections and strengthen a young person's sense of cultural location and community ties.

Coaches also emphasise the value of long-standing community as important for creating a sense of safety for program participants, *"I'm lucky because I was born and bred in Darwin, so a lot of these kids are my friends' kids, we have that connection already in built"* (18).

Programs further draw on music, language, and imagery of First Nations sporting excellence to reinforce identity, celebrate culture, and support young people to feel seen, valued, and connected. This approach aligns with evidence that culturally responsive mentoring can strengthen agency, pride, and belonging when programs reflect young people's culture, community context, and leadership potential (Sanchez et al., 2023).

"All the staff at Hoops 4 Health have an amazing ability to connect with young people. They have great knowledge and experience in dealing with young people from trauma backgrounds. So, they have been able to make really great progress" (10).

"You can go there. You feel connected because you see mob up on the walls and stuff... a lot of kids are just not participating in a lot of sports, which then leads into a negative pathway instead of a positive pathway" (11).

"The key messaging around the training centre... there's all the incredible First Nations athletes up on the walls... that sense of safety that environment creates is quite incredible" (13).

"This is a place I can come and be taught by Aboriginal coaches – not many places provide that" (program data).

Strengths-based coaching

Within the HCSM, coaching is enacted through Flightpath Coaching – a mentoring approach in which learning is embedded in movement and micro-feedback, rather than formal, sit-down instruction. Often described as *"coaching on the run,"* feedback on basketball and boxing skills is delivered side-by-side and *"in motion,"* supporting young people to deepen their understanding of drills while also building agency and a leadership mindset (St. Pierre et al., 2024).

As one coach explained, *"you're coaching someone without them knowing… giving encouragement while they're doing it"* (18).

Another staff member described a key feature of Flightpath Coaching as *"no lessons, lines, laps, or lectures."* This approach moves away from "traditional" coaching models that centre coach authority and use punishment as a learning tool. As they explained, *"We are using the model at Academy, but we do it through the flight path coaching… we keep things moving. People aren't given lectures; they're not punished for doing the wrong thing"* (17).

Duggan also links Flightpath Coaching to the NMS, *"Our whole approach has to be around moving and not too much talking… dosing of resilience in the flight path coaching… it's all based on connecting it to the brain"* (14).

Overall, this approach aligns with empowerment theory and strengths-based practice, which suggest well-being is enhanced when people experience greater control, and when support shifts attention from deficits to resources and capabilities (Wallerstein, 1992; Saleebey, 1996). First Nations strengths-based frameworks further reinforce this orientation by placing culture, identity, kinship, and connection to land at the centre of resilience and practice (Prehn, 2024).

"It's empowering for young people… everyone leaves feeling lighter, feeling better… in that culturally safe space all you see and all you feel and all you engage with is black excellence" (2).

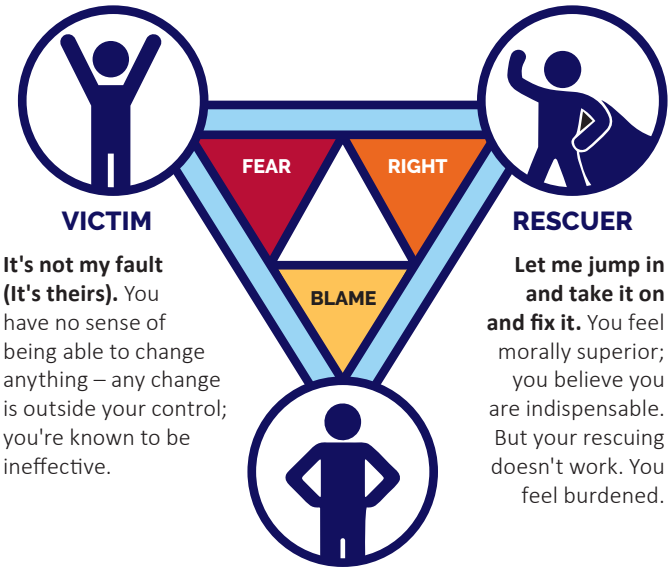
"The coaches actually motivated me to get moving and off the PlayStation" (program data).

Conflict literacy

Hoops 4 Health intentionally links state-dependent functioning with conflict by helping young people notice how their arousal states shape decision-making and relationships. Coaches embed conflict literacy through structured, in-the-moment conversations about behaviour and healthy relationships. Tools such as the Drama Triangle give young people a shared language for recognising how conflict escalates, how people can be pulled into reactive roles, and how to pause and choose different responses.

First proposed by psychiatrist Stephen Karpman (1968), the Drama Triangle describes a common pattern of social interaction in which people adopt one of three unhelpful roles during conflict: Victim, Rescuer, or Persecutor.

Drama Triangle



VICTIM

It's not my fault (It's theirs). You have no sense of being able to change anything – any change is outside your control; you're known to be ineffective.

RESCUER

Let me jump in and take it on and fix it. You feel morally superior; you believe you are indispensable. But your rescuing doesn't work. You feel burdened.

PERSECUTOR

It's not my fault (it's yours). You end up being responsible for everything. You create victims. You're known as a micromanager. You feel alone.

As one industry partner explained, they *"teach them around why sometimes they might feel dysregulated – and then what they can do about it"* (13). In this way, emotional literacy is not abstract; it is grounded in practical strategies young people can immediately apply.

Coaches also draw on stories of Aboriginal role models to make Drama Triangle concepts relatable and culturally meaningful. As Duggan noted, *"Archie Roach went to gaol – then the Marlion Pickett story – all those stories were relatable, and that's what made it really work"* (14). By linking accountability, growth, and role-shifting to well-known First Nations figures who have navigated adversity, the learning becomes both accessible and aspirational.

"There've been times when a group of kids from Academy have brought stuff in from school – like, 'There was a fight at school.' But we're not getting caught up in what other people are doing, or all that school drama. We're here to get a good workout in. We don't step into that drama triangle – above the line thinking." (18)

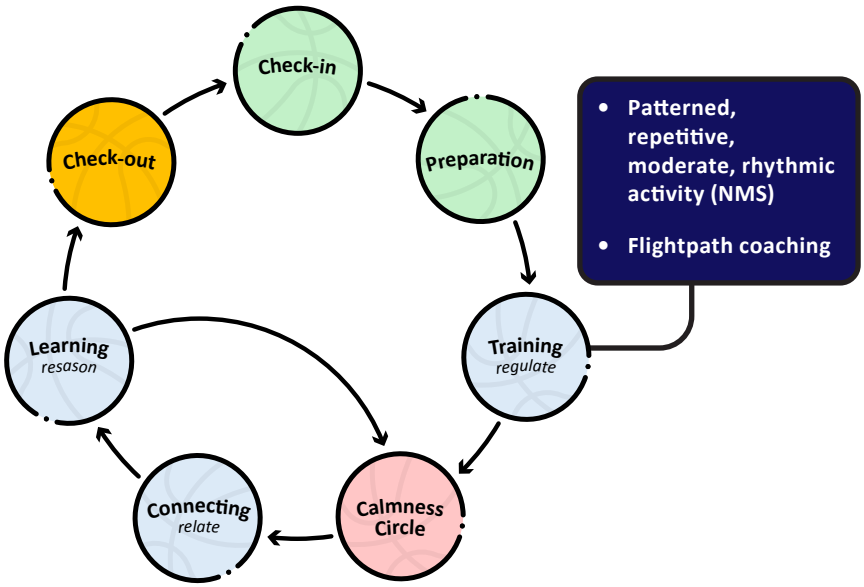
This approach – weaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytelling practices with Western concepts of relational health – further highlights how the organisation's HCSM is distinct in both its philosophy and its practical application.

"Timmy had this beautiful conversation… that it's OK to get frustrated, but we can't just pack up and live in frustration… it went on to about family violence and not treating people violently… this kid said he had a baby and wanted to be a good role model" (10).

"You talk about their role as custodians of the land… are you able to be effective in that position if you are using alcohol, using drugs, offending behaviour?" (17).

Emotional literacy

A key component of H4H programs is supporting young people to develop awareness of self through guided discussions about trauma, regulation, behaviour, and decision-making. These conversations are paired with practical, in-context strategies that build emotional literacy and equip participants with tangible tools to shift behaviour, strengthen relationships, and make more considered choices.



Hoops 4 Health Session Model.

At the start of each session, coaches bring participants together for yarning in what the organisation calls Calmness Circles. This space sets expectations and builds predictability by walking the group through what will happen during the session. As one staff member explained, coaches begin by *"explaining what we're going to be doing, giving options… we take away the element of surprise"* (16). Young people are also invited to tune in to how they are feeling and share what is on their mind, using simple check-ins such as *"… on a scale… what's your energy levels like?"* (2). Duggan emphasised that Calmness Circles are a space for young people to contribute and take up space, rather than being led solely by the coach, *"we're listening to young people… the coach is not the only one talking. It should be the power of the group"* (14).

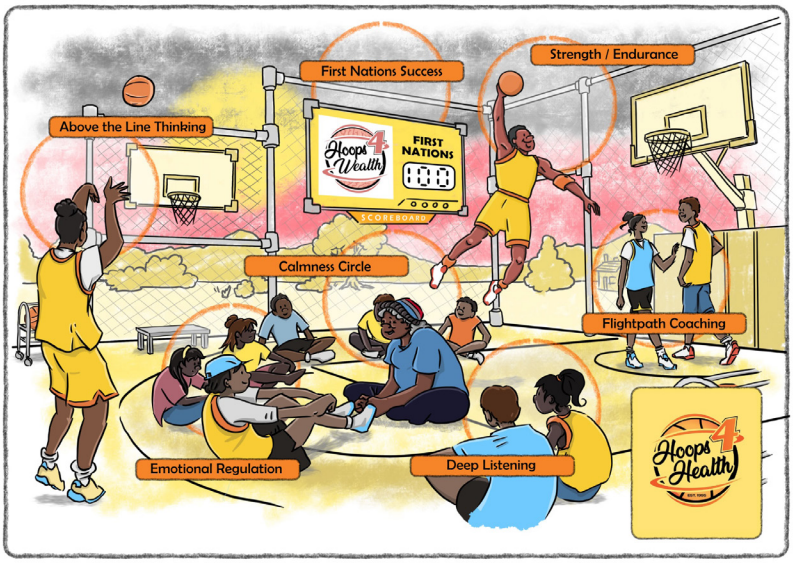
Emotional literacy is built through ongoing opportunities for reflection across programs. Coaches support young people to understand why they might feel dysregulated and what they can do about it, using simple, everyday regulation strategies such as bouncing a basketball, punching a bag, listening to music, or doing push-ups. Tools like breathing, calming activities, and visualisation are introduced in the circle and then reinforced through movement during training. As one staff member explained, *"We also use breathing techniques… calming activities… visualisation techniques if they feel comfortable"* (16).

One staff member explained that parts of the brain have been renamed using animals to make NMS concepts more culturally meaningful, *"they've put their cultural lens on the Neurosequential Model by renaming parts of the brain to represent animals… for example, like crocodile… the brainstem… the action part of the brain…"* (16). Over time, this approach can shift how young people make sense of their reactions – from *"what's wrong with them?"* to *"wow, what happened to me?"* (13). From there, they can *"work backwards" to identify triggers and build strategies to reduce "those big reactions"* (13).

Calmness Circles can be used at the start of each session, again at the end, or brought in when needed. This flexible way of applying the HCSM – adapting in the moment to what participants need – fits with the organisation's decolonising ethos.

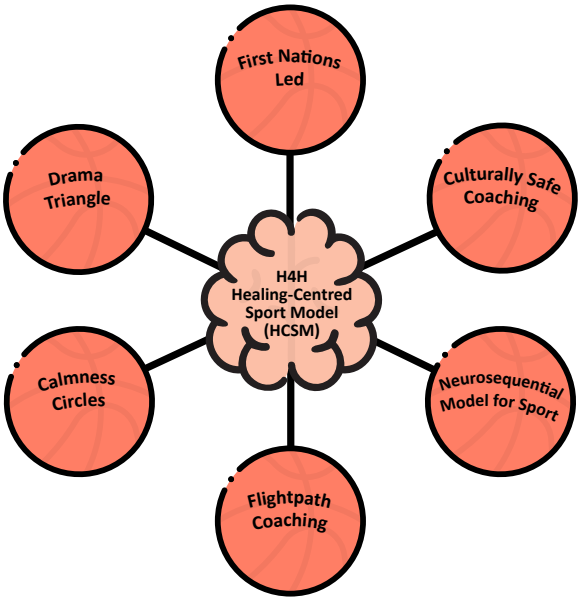
HCSM Summary

Hoops 4 Health developed the HCSM in response to the impacts of intergenerational trauma, racism, and exclusion experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, and to the limitations of mainstream services in consistently offering culturally safe, healing-centred environments. The model is underpinned by a decolonising framework that privileges First Nations leadership, cultural authority, and community-defined approaches to healing and wellbeing. It centres strengths-based practice and conceptualises resilience as collective, cultural, and relational, thereby shifting the focus from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing and post-traumatic wisdom.



Hoops 4 Health Concept Poster highlighting the Organisations Healing Centred Approach to Sport.

In practice, the model integrates cultural safety, relational mentoring, and brain-based approaches through the NMS. Sessions are intentionally sequenced around the principle of "regulation first" – regulate, relate, reason – using patterned movement and repeated "doses of resilience" to strengthen nervous system capacity over time before engaging relational and cognitive processes. Cultural connection is embedded through place, kinship, story, language, and imagery, alongside coaching practices such as Flightpath Coaching, conflict literacy tools, and Calmness Circles, which support reflection, emotional literacy, and safe participation. What makes the model distinctive is this deliberate synthesis of First Nations cultural knowledge, relational mentoring, and neurodevelopmentally informed sport practice, creating an environment in which regulation, connection, and learning are not treated as separate processes but as mutually reinforcing conditions for healing and growth.

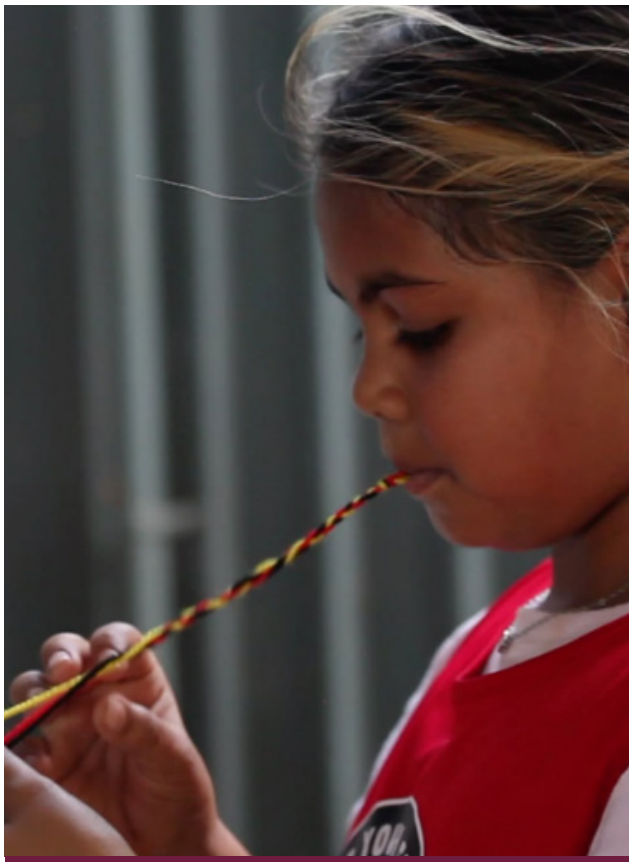


Hoops 4 Health's Healing Centred Sport Model.

Overall, the model is designed to create the conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to experience pride, safety, connection, and belonging, while being supported to imagine and pursue stronger futures. It seeks to foster empowerment, emotional regulation, confidence, enjoyment, and the gradual development of skills, resilience, and leadership over time. At a broader systems level, it is also intended to contribute to systems change by strengthening protective factors against criminalisation, supporting school engagement, reducing contact with the justice system, and opening up leadership and future pathways into sport and employement. In this way, the model aims not only to enhance individual and collective wellbeing, but also to strengthen a pipeline of First Nations youth leaders and coaches who can help shape safer, more just, and more culturally grounded systems.

Model conditions for sustained impact

- **First Nations leadership held at the centre of delivery and decision-making**, including employing and elevating First Nations coaches and positioning "First Nations solutions" as the organising frame for practice.
- **A clearly held narrative and cultural purpose** that consistently shifts the story from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing and "post-traumatic wisdom," so the model remains strengths-based and future-oriented.
- **A shared understanding of the model's core outcomes and values**, so flexibility remains responsiveness i.e., communities and cultural authority shape delivery, while the core intent stays consistent.
- **Workforce capability to deliver "regulation first" practice**, including coaches who can read state-dependent functioning, adjust activities within a young person's window of tolerance, and consistently sequence sessions as regulate–relate–reason.
- **Program design that maintains repetition and predictable rhythms over time** ("doses of resilience"), so regulation capacity and stress tolerance can build gradually through patterned movement, routine, and scaffolding.
- **Relational and culturally safe coaching conditions**, where trust, connection, and belonging are actively produced through kinship-based practices ("who's your mob?"), place, language, story, music and culturally affirming imagery.
- **A coaching culture aligned with strengths-based practice**, including Flightpath Coaching ("no lessons, lines, laps, or lectures") so learning happens through movement, micro-feedback, encouragement, and agency-building rather than punishment or deficit framing.
- **Embedded spaces for yarning, predictability, and reflection** (Calmness Circles) that support emotional literacy, reduce surprise, share power with young people, and provide an adaptable structure when participants need it.
- **A shared language and practical tools for conflict literacy and emotional regulation** (Drama Triangle), so young people can notice arousal, understand escalation patterns, and practise alternative responses in real time.



A young person weaving strands of wool together at the Blakdoll Role Models and Hoops 4 Health co-delivered, which has engaged more than 70 children across the Elliott and Tennant Creek locations, 2025.

4. Hoops 4 Health's HCSM Theory of Change

Context / Problem	Program Goals	Inputs / Enablers	Core Activities / Mechanisms →	
Intergenerational trauma, racism and exclusion contribute to poor social, emotional wellbeing, school disengagement and criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Mainstream services and sport are often not culturally safe or healing centred.	To strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people – across body, mind, spirit, culture, relationships and future pathways – by using First Nations–led, culturally grounded sport as a vehicle for intergenerational healing, connection and leadership.	• First Nations leadership, governance and role models • Culturally safe spaces (Training Centre, Academy, place-based programs) • Coaches trained in trauma-informed, NSM, Flightpath Coaching and the Drama Triangle • Strong relationships with families, schools, community and justice partners	**First Nations–led** • Basketball, boxing and fitness as vehicles for healing • Yarning, Dadirri, storytelling, ceremony, imagery, music and language embedded **Culturally Safe Coaching** • Steady, predictable coaches; side-by-side engagement • Cultural recognition ("Who's your mob? Where you from?") • Choice over proximity/touch to work safely with trauma **Neurosequential Model for Sport** • Patterned, repetitive, moderate, rhythmic movement to regulate the nervous system • Then relate (connection) → reason (reflection/learning) **Flightpath Coaching** • Micro-moments of positive, specific feedback in motion • Builds agency, confidence, leadership and empowerment (not control/deficit) **Calmness Circles** • Structured yarning on culture, brain, trauma and regulation skills **The Drama Triangle** • Tools like the Drama Triangle for reflection, accountability and a leaders' mindset	**Participant Outcomes** • Young people feel proud and recognised for their effort. (Proud) • Young people feel safe and protected in the program space. (Safe) • Young people feel they belong and can be themselves in a positive mob. (Belonging/Connected) • Young people believe in bigger futures for themselves. (Empowered) • Young people build skills, resilience and leadership over time. (Mastery) • Young people feel calmer and more emotionally steady. (Regulated) • Young people enjoy the program and look forward to it. (Happy) • Young people grow in confidence and speak up more. (Confident) **System Outcomes** • Young people reduced their contact with the justice system. • Young people strengthened their participation and engagement at school. • Young people stepped into leadership and pursued meaningful future pathways. • Young people built stronger protective factors against criminalisation, including inclusion, emotional literacy, positive identity, and access to leadership pathways. • Young people contributed to a growing pipeline of First Nations youth leaders and coaches, helping to shape safer, more just systems.

↑

Organisational Outputs				
Multi-year funding base secured and diversified, enabling long-term planning and protecting community trust.	Program continuity safeguarded, with delivery commitments and transition plans that reduce start/stop harm and re-traumatisation risk.	Leadership distributed across a strengthened core team, reducing CEO bottlenecks and single-point-of-failure risk.	Workforce sustainability systems operating, including workload controls, supervision, wellbeing supports and retention pathways.	Partner delivery agreements and coordination embedded, improving reliability and reducing cancellations/disruptions.



Coach Murray Bradbury supporting young people to coordinate their feet and arms through patterns, rhythm, and repetition.



Coach Alyce Drum at the training centre, supporting young people to find rhythm through patterned vertical movwements with the battle ropes as part of the Gloves of Hope Program.



Coach Aaron Hyde and Michele Krauer with a brain model. Used to support young people's understanding of trauma, arousal, and brain development





Founder Timmy Duggan is leading a Calmness Circle at the Training Centre.

5. Hoops 4 Health's HCSM Impact Stories

The stories below are drawn from program and interview data across parents, industry partners, staff, and program participants. Anecdotes describing outcomes from Hoops on the Inside are also included to illustrate impact across both Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and Alice Springs Prison.

Impact Stories from the Academy and Training Centre

Pride and identity (Proud)

Parents reported that their children felt proud of themselves as a result of participating in H4H programs. Opportunities such as interstate competitions, scholarships, engagement in specialised programs like Gloves of Hope, and wearing culturally reflective clothing all contribute to fostering a strong sense of *"Black belonging"* and pride among young people.

Interstate competitions

"They were able to go away and compete against other kids in Australia... and for our little group of NT kids to go away and do really well—that's stuck with her. She was able to get herself a medal, you know, which she was very proud [of]." (12)

"She came back to Darwin, brought that stuff back to school and, you know, did a show and tell... that was her moment to shine. Her brother's going away soon... and, you know, she will always say, 'But I've been to Melbourne first, and I've done this first.' So, for her, that's like her little bragging moment." (12)

Scholarship holders

"It was the first sort of scholarship she ever had. I think she felt very proud, you know, to be acknowledged for her efforts. And, yeah, it was something really positive for her—like, affirming." (8)

Culturally reflective clothing

"You know, you often see young people walking around in their yellow Hoops 4 Health shirt—you know, basketball singlet and things like that. So, I think that they have a way of developing that sense of black belonging and pride for young people as well, which I think is really helpful, because there's a whole lot of young people." (4)

Empowerment and possibility (Empowered)

Across industry partners and parents, the Training Centre was described as a space that empowers young people to be the best versions of themselves while striving for excellence. The imagery of elite Aboriginal athletes and access to sporting icons, alongside consistent messaging about respect for self and others, helps create an environment where young people feel motivated and hopeful about their future.

Inspiring environments

"Having that culturally safe space enables young Aboriginal people to thrive. They see other Aboriginal people working there, that there's posters around of inspirational Aboriginal people... it empowers them to think, 'Oh well, I could be up there in one of these posters, too...'" (2)

Motivational language

"As soon as you walk in, you can see it on the walls. Discipline and respect... looking after your mind, looking after your body, being the best version of yourself. It's really encouraging and teaches kids to really think about what they want to achieve." (8)

Coaching excellence

"The coaches that they have are obviously really, you know, high class. One's a former NBA player—Nate Jawia—who's done some training sessions, and there's, like, Debbie George, and they just relate. My son's been able to relate to them and, you know, obviously learn a lot from them." (6)



Anthony Mundine OAM- Australian former boxer and one of the country's most accomplished fighters- supporting local fighters Kenny Ormand (left) and Paul Fleming (right) at the H4H Resilience Rumble (2025)



Coach Jamie-Lee Peris at the H4H Training Centre with program participant

Safety and inclusion (Safe)

Industry partners and parents describe H4H as providing a safe and inclusive space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The organisations healing-centred ethos is reflected in the space itself, where families report a strong sense of positivity, safety, and trust in both the environment and the coaches.

Positive environment

"Walking into those spaces, it sort of diminishes all the outside noise. Of the disadvantages and the negatives and stereotypes. You walk into Hoops 4 Health and that's no longer the focus anymore because you're in a positive environment surrounded by positive people, positive influences." (2)

A safe space

"[The Training Centres is] a safe space. It's somewhere where, you know, our mob can go. I love that space." (11)

"[Hoops 4 Health is] a place that they can go and speak what's on their mind or tell stories, they're not going to get in trouble, they're not going to get judged." (16).

Trusted coaches

"I feel safe that she's there. I have trust in the trainers. They've got my daughter's best interests at heart" (12)



Young people standing with pride in the Hoops 4 Health Myokines uniform range. Featured is the "Campfire Resilience" design by Natalie Quall (left), a proud Larrakia woman and the artist behind the artwork now displayed across the new uniforms as a symbol of healing and resilience. Natalie is pictured with her sister, Gocky Ahmat (centre), and Coach Alyce Drum (right)

"They would put lots of time into this one kid and then they would tell all the other kids about how great this other kid was – identifying that this kid is struggling because of all of his special needs and rather than excluding him and giving him special treatment" (10). Don Dale Youth Detention Story

"By the end, this kid who used to be teased and excluded was like the most popular person. When he was able to do things like shoot five goals in a row, everyone would cheer like he'd won the lottery. It taught the other kids that just because someone's different or disabled doesn't mean you exclude them". "And that really built his self-esteem" (10). Don Dale Youth Detention Story

Belonging and connection (Belonging, Connected)

Parents, industry partners, and staff describe how both the Academy and Training Centre provide young people with opportunities to build friendships and feel part of a group. Where identity is celebrated and strengthened through shared activities, spending time with people from similar backgrounds, the situatedness of programs, cultural imagery, and the intergenerational reach of H4H.

Forming friendships

"The kids love coming together, because when they come together, it's an opportunity for them to build friendships and be able to confide in their special circumstances." (2).

"She's made friendships that, she hangs out with these girls outside of training... it's created friendships for her." (12)

Togetherness

"Just going down to Holy Family and you're just shooting a ball around, they finish with the hoops on three, I think makes them all feel like they're part of a group, you know, a positive group." (12).

"So being part of the Hoops team allows them to have that sense of belonging to, like, to a sport and to a team, where that might not be available to those young people otherwise." (4).

"I think, you know, it's a sense of belonging, you know, an identity with those who have a similar background." (6)

Cultural significance

"They see this as their favorite space because they can be exactly who they are. They don't need to be or pretend to be anybody else, which is really positive." (2)

"I think one of the strengths is that it is a place-based programme." (13)

"You feel connected because you see mob up on the walls and stuff." (11).

Intergenerational reach

"People will come back and see their photos on the wall as younger versions of themselves, they'll see family members from different places." (16)

"People's siblings have gone through that and then their kids have gone through that. People feel connected to the space or to the organisation because they can see the reach that Hoops has had across the NT and beyond." (16).

"A lot of the fellas that were learning stuff in the course that we're doing were then getting out and taking it back and trying to teach their family." (Aaron Hyde, Alice Springs Prison Story)

Skill development and leadership (Mastery)

Across parents, industry partners, staff, and young people, H4H programs were described as supporting sporting skill development, teamwork, and leadership. Fitness, confidence, resilience, decision-making, and helping one another were all identified as key outcomes of participating in Academy and Training Centre programs.

Skill development

"Sometimes I'm tired but it's good because it gets me fitter." (1)

"She's more confident shooting, and her games are evolving as well, so that's really cool." (18)

Teamwork

"To see the children smiling and laughing and releasing, you know, some energy and working up a sweat, and using good team-work and decision making, that's what we want for our young people to grow and thrive." (2)

"To be a great sportsman overall, you've got to have resilience, you've got to know how to support your teammates when you're sitting on a bench." (11)

Leadership development

"I often get comments about her taking on leadership roles. Especially her out on a basketball court now she is very much taking that leadership role in trying to help those who have either just joined the team or aren't as confident" (12)

"One individual showed particular leadership qualities to help co-run the programme in prison and was subsequently employed as a worker on the outside. He spent about a year and a half being a facilitator, doing different levels of leadership training. It's the first time I've come across that kind of model, employing a prisoner to co-run the programme under supervision." (3). Alice Springs Prison Story.

"Helping other young 'uns that have been down the same path that I've been down in my life, and trying to keep them in a safe place, mentally and physically — this program helped me do that." Aaron Hyde, Alice Springs Prison Story.

"We would give the information, they would mentor that with other inmates, use it in language, get it interpreted, and started mentoring each other" (14). Alice Springs Prison Story.

Regulation and wellbeing (Regulated)

Industry partners, parents, and staff described how H4H programs support young people to burn off excess energy, improve mental clarity, and build regulatory capacity over time.

"Some of our children are medicated throughout the day, so they lose their appetite. So having an opportunity in the afternoon after school to burn off some of that energy, build up that appetite and then have a really nice sleep. Carers say they were so exhausted when they got home, had a big feed and then off to bed, so, we had a really calm night." (2)

"If you're able to have a space where you can go and just work out, you get that mental clarity. That's something that we need to work on for our mob." (11)

"He said, 'I went to do a runner from (redacted) the other day,' 'But I went out the door and then I took some deep breaths and then I came back in,' and that was like, the craziest. Without that regulation, and without the ability to communicate his emotions, and where his frustrations are coming from, and things like that, I think that maybe he wouldn't have made that decision, and that could have ended in being locked up again." (16)

"I was really getting amped up and I thought, I'm going to fight this person. Then I remembered what I had to do. So, I went off and did 15 push ups and star jumps, and I started to feel regulated again" (13). Don Dale Youth Detention Story

"There was going to be a brawl in the Alice Springs Prison. One of the participants said, 'Hey, I'm not regulated, I got to walk away.' And it actually stopped a big brawl in there" (14). Alice Springs Prison Story.

"One of the other guys just pulled him aside and said, 'Just regulate man, remember, just regulate.' And he went for a walk and came back and kept playing footy" (3). Alice Springs Prison Story.

"Before they would stare him up to the point where he would snap and fight. In the end, they stopped doing that because they saw all these positive things about this kid. They excluded him before because he was different" (10). Don Dale Youth Detention Story

Enjoyment and motivation (Happy)

Across interviews, H4H was described as a space young people genuinely look forward to. Parents and staff spoke about kids coming back happier, enjoying being around coaches and teammates, and feeling proud when they complete sessions and challenges.

"She'd probably tell you how much she loves going to training and being around Timmy and her teammates and her coaches, and she really does look forward to Thursdays and Saturdays." (12)

"Hoops 4 Health is one of their favorite spaces 'when are we going back there again? Can we do that again? It's a great space and we really enjoy going down there." (2)

"A lot of the girls come out of that resilience session and just say that was really deadly. I really like that session." (11)

"The kids come back happier. They've got good, like positive stories to tell, you know, and it's something that they look forward to a week as well." (10)

"When they've completed a session or task, or a game, or whatever, they feel really good about themselves getting the prize." (18)

Confidence (Confident)

Across interviews, H4H was described as supporting young people to build confidence over time.

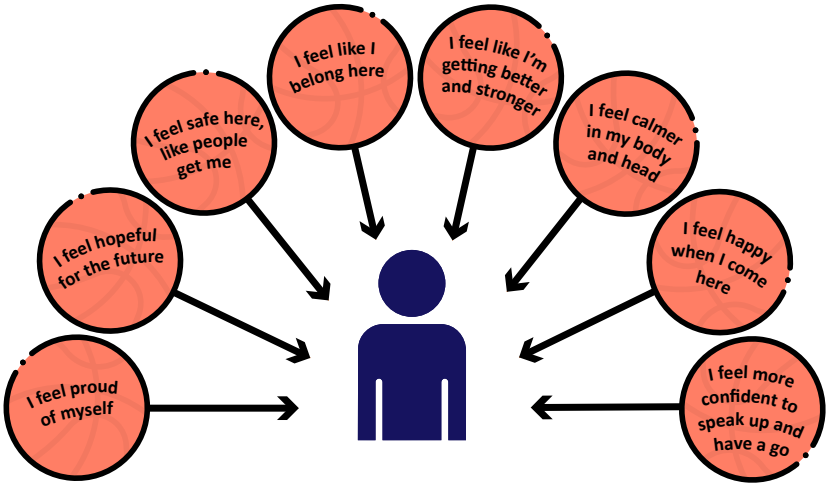
"(He) was really shy and, like, when these programmes would come up—like over the holidays—I'll be like, 'Hey, Hoops 4 Health's running a session, let's go do it,' and unless someone he knew was doing it, he'd be like, 'Oh, I don't want to do it by myself.' Shame job and stuff. Whereas, you know, as long as he knows someone, he's a bit more comfortable in that. Fortunately for him, he's starting to get that little bit more confidence now that he's getting a little bit older." (6)

"So, I think just building their confidence. I've seen a couple of the Academy people just sort of thrive a little bit more on their next season" (11).

"They come out of their shell, they're a bit more confident, they're communicating a bit more on the court, which I guess links into that leadership role for them as well." (11)

6. Hoops 4 Health's HCSM Outcome Indicators

The HCSM impact stories indicate a set of participant outcomes that align with the organisation's Theory of Change. Third-party accounts describe young people feeling proud, safe, connected, empowered, regulated, happy, and confident, with leadership and sporting skills developing over time. Anecdotes and stories from Hoops on the Inside also demonstrate these HCSM outcomes in prison and detention settings.



HCSM Participant Outcome Indicators.



Coach Aaron Hyde (left) with Timmy Duggan. From Prison to Employment – Aaron now facilitates H4H programs in Alice Springs Prison.



Young people in the training centre boxing ring, smiling as they learn new skills with Coach Murray Bradley.



Founder Timmy Duggan and Coach Aaron Hyde delivered a session for the Strengbela Men's Program in partnership with Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service

7. Hoops 4 Health's HCSM Challenges

Across the interview data, staff, industry partners, parents, and one program participant reported a range of challenges across multiple domains, including organisational systems development, program accessibility, and facility structure and functionality. These challenges are presented below at both the program level and the broader organisational systems level. Organisational systems-level challenges are framed in terms of how they may pose potential threats to the HCSM conditions required for sustained impact.

Program level challenges

Facility infrastructure
Practical constraints within the Training Centre were highlighted. The size of the facility limits its program delivery capacity, and heat in the space can make training uncomfortable for participants.

Program disruptions
Wet season disruptions affect Academy delivery in community settings, and cancelled sessions reduce continuity of support for young people.

Program accessibility
Transport barriers limit access to both the Training Centre and the Academy, while location barriers further restrict access, particularly for financially disadvantaged families.

Employment pathways
A lack of clear employment pathways following detention release was identified as limiting opportunities for young people reintegrating into community.

Model application
Staff and industry partners raised concerns about model "drift" and inconsistencies in delivery, alongside uncertainty around program requirements.

Organisational systems level challenges

Systems and accountability
There is a need for stronger systems for reporting and to consistently capture program data, alongside clearer program documentation so staff understand the model of practice and how to implement it.

Model understanding
Staff raised concerns about model "drift" and inconsistencies in delivery, while leadership emphasised the importance of flexibility and adapting the model to different contexts to ensure cultural responsiveness.

Workforce sustainability
Remote delivery without workforce sustainability was described as impacting staff well-being and retention.

Workforce development
Training in the NMS and trauma was identified as a need across staff.

Multi-source funding
Multi-source funding across programs makes reporting difficult, reinforcing the need to strengthen systems and accountability.

Funding instability
Funding instability limits long-term planning and expansion, which has created concern among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families about program continuity.

Concentrated leadership
A concentrated leadership load can create an information bottleneck that affects program coordination and delivery.

"From a delivery and community-engagement perspective, I think it's important we reframe that: the model is intentionally flexible because that's what makes it culturally safe, effective, and sustainable across different communities."
Timmy Duggan, CEO and Founder

"We're lucky we have a car. But how many Indigenous families don't have a car or don't have money for fuel to get them out to these centres." (12).

"When we're training, we need a full court. Make it bigger" (1).

"Sometimes we feel as Aboriginal people when things work too well, they get taken away. I don't want that for Hoops 4 Health. I want my grandchildren in years to come saying, 'Yeah, we went to Hoops 4 Health, and I can say, I knew the founder of that'" (2).

"He's trying to do the strategy work, he's trying to do the funding work, he's also doing the operational management work" (13).

"He was really keen [to work at Hoops 4 Health], and when he got out, he was in a really good space. But unfortunately, it [financial support] stopped. He's now in adult custody. That employment opportunity was gone" (10).

8. Hoops 4 Health's HCSM SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis below provides a concise overview of the interview insights relating to the Academy and Training Centre programs, as well as the organisational systems-level challenges described across the interviews.

Strengths

- Model flexibility enables adaptation across diverse contexts, supporting culturally responsive, community-led practice.
- Safe, inclusive delivery is consistently reflected in program accounts.
- Regulation sequencing has improved decision-making, including for young people in detention.
- Positive youth development outcomes were described across multiple social and emotional wellbeing domains.
- Strong community trust is evident among families, young people, and industry partners.

Weaknesses

- Stronger systems and accountability are needed to consistently capture and use program data.
- Clear program documentation is required so staff understand the HCSM and how to implement it in practice.
- A more unified understanding of the model is needed, including how it is applied across different contexts (e.g., community versus justice settings).
- The size of the Training Centre limits delivery capacity.
- Heat in the Training Centre can make training uncomfortable for participants.
- Limited and unclear employment pathways post-release can restrict opportunities for young people reintegrating into community.

Opportunities

- Strengthen how impact is captured across Training Centre programs by aligning data collection methods with outcomes for different participant groups.
- Utilise the participant outcome indicators developed through this research to support consistent data capture across the Academy and applicable Training Centre programs.
- Include program participant voice in future research and evaluation to strengthen impact, accountability, and relevance.
- Invest in transport (e.g., a "H4H bus") to improve young people's access to programs and services.
- Expand the Training Centre to better meet community demand.
- Invest in workforce training in the NMS.

Threats

- Wet season disruptions can affect Academy delivery in community settings.
- Cancelled sessions reduce continuity of support for young people.
- Transport barriers limit access to both the Training Centre and the Academy.
- The Training Centre location can restrict access, with greater impact on financially disadvantaged families.
- Remote delivery without a sustainable workforce model can affect staff wellbeing and retention.
- Multi-source funding arrangements increase reporting complexity, reinforcing the need to strengthen systems and accountability.
- Funding instability limits long-term planning and expansion.
- A concentrated leadership load can create information bottlenecks that affect program delivery.



9. Discussion and Considerations

Research discussion

Healing-Centred Sport Model

Hoops 4 Health has developed a HCSM in response to the impacts of intergenerational trauma, racism, and exclusion experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, and the limits of mainstream services to consistently provide culturally safe, healing-centred environments. The model centres First Nations leadership and strengths-based practice, and frames resilience as collective and cultural – shifting the narrative from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing and "post-traumatic wisdom".

In practice, the HCSM brings together cultural safety, relational mentoring, and brain-based approaches through the NMS. Sessions are intentionally sequenced around "regulation first" (regulate, relate, reason), using patterned movement and "doses of resilience" to build nervous system capacity over time before moving into relational and cognitive learning. Cultural connection is embedded through place, kinship, story, language, and imagery, alongside coaching approaches such as Flightpath Coaching, conflict literacy tools, and Calmness Circles that support reflection, emotional literacy, and safe participation.

Academy and Training Centre Impacts

Across the interview data, the impact of the H4H model was consistently described in ways that go beyond sport. Parents spoke about their children feeling proud of themselves through participation, particularly when young people were given access to opportunities such as interstate competitions, scholarships, specialised programs like Gloves of Hope, and culturally reflective clothing. These experiences were linked to a sense of "Black belonging" and strengthened identity.

Industry partners and parents also described the Training Centre as a space that builds empowerment and possibility. The consistent messaging around respect for self and others, alongside imagery of elite Aboriginal athletes, was seen as creating an environment where young people feel motivated to strive for excellence and more hopeful about their future.

Safety and inclusion was another strong theme. Hoops 4 Health was described as a safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, where the healing-centred ethos is felt in the environment itself. Families spoke about positivity, trust, and confidence in the coaches, which supports ongoing engagement.

Belonging and connection came through across both the Academy and Training Centre. Interviews described young people building friendships and feeling part of a group, with identity celebrated through shared activities, cultural imagery, and the place-based and intergenerational reach of programs. Alongside this, participants reported growth in sporting skills, teamwork, and leadership, with outcomes described in terms of fitness, resilience, decision-making, confidence, and helping one another.

Finally, the programs were described as supporting regulation and overall wellbeing. Staff, parents, and partners spoke about young people using training to burn off energy, improve mental clarity, and build regulatory capacity over time. Importantly, H4H was also described as something young people genuinely look forward to – kids coming back happier, enjoying being around coaches and teammates, and feeling proud when they complete sessions and challenges. Across interviews, this sense of enjoyment and motivation sat alongside a gradual increase in confidence, with young people coming out of their shell, communicating more, and stepping into leadership as their participation continued.

Hoops on the Inside Impacts

The application of the HCSM within youth detention and prison settings was described as having tangible behavioural and relational impacts. Participants and staff reported that regulation strategies were being recalled and enacted in moments of escalation, with young people choosing to step away from conflict, use movement-based strategies to manage overwhelm, and return in a more regulated state. In some accounts, this helped interrupt potential fights and reduce the likelihood of wider conflict in custodial environments.

A strong theme was the role of peer influence and culture-shift inside detention. Staff described young people beginning to use shared regulation language with one another, prompting peers to pause and re-engage safely. In Don Dale, interviewees also described how coaches intentionally shifted group dynamics by investing in a young person with additional needs and then actively shaping the peer narrative around him – naming his strengths, explaining his struggles in a non-stigmatising way, and modelling inclusion rather than "special treatment." Over time, this reportedly changed how other young people responded to difference and disability, with the young person moving from being teased and excluded to being affirmed and celebrated by peers. These changes were described as directly strengthening self-esteem and belonging, while also teaching the broader group about inclusion, respect, and relational responsibility.

In Alice Springs, the model was also described as creating pathways for leadership and reintegration. Interviewees noted examples where a participant took on co-facilitation responsibilities under supervision and later gained employment after release, supported by ongoing leadership training. Peer-to-peer learning was also described as a mechanism of impact, with participants mentoring others, translating concepts into everyday language, and reinforcing the program's principles across the prison units.

Importantly, the interview data suggests these impacts can extend beyond the custodial setting. Participants described taking what they learned through the program back to family and community after release. Taken together, these accounts position the youth justice application of the model as more than behaviour management in custody; it was described as supporting regulation, inclusion, leadership, and relational change that can carry into life beyond incarceration.

Challenges and Risks

Across the interview data, staff, industry partners, and parents also identified a set of ongoing challenges that shape delivery and sustainability. A consistent theme was the need to strengthen systems and accountability, so program data is captured in a more reliable way, alongside clearer documentation that supports staff to understand the model and implement it consistently. This connected to broader conversations about model delivery, where some staff raised concerns about model drift and inconsistency, while leadership emphasised that flexibility and adaptation are central to the approach – creating a tension between fidelity (drift) and responsiveness.

Practical constraints were also raised, particularly in relation to the Training Centre infrastructure. The size of the facility was described as limiting capacity, and heat in the space as impacting comfort for participants during training. Beyond the Centre, program continuity was seen as vulnerable to disruption, with wet season impacts affecting Academy delivery in community settings and cancelled sessions reducing the consistency of support available to young people.

Access was another major issue. Transport barriers and location constraints were described as limiting who can attend programs, with the greatest impact on financially disadvantaged families. Workforce sustainability also emerged as a concern, particularly

where remote delivery is required without adequate resourcing, which can affect staff wellbeing and retention. Related to this, interview participants identified a need for ongoing workforce development, including training in the NMS and trauma-informed practice.

Funding conditions were described as a further pressure point. Multi-source funding arrangements can make reporting difficult and reinforce the need for stronger systems, while funding instability limits long-term planning and expansion. This was reported as creating concern among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families about program continuity. Finally, interviews highlighted that a concentrated leadership load can create an information bottleneck, which can affect coordination, consistency, and day-to-day program delivery.

Organisational Opportunities

Looking forward, the interview data points to several clear opportunities for strengthening and growing H4H. A key priority is strengthening how impact is evidenced across Training Centre programs, particularly by developing a clear set of participant impact indicators that can support consistent data capture across both the Academy and Training Centre and better demonstrate outcomes across different participant groups. Including participant voice in future research and evaluation was also raised as an important next step, both to strengthen accountability and to ensure the model continues to reflect what young people experience as most meaningful.

Access and capacity were also identified as areas for investment. Interviews highlighted the potential value of dedicated transport – such as a "Hoops 4 Health bus" – to reduce barriers and support young people to reach programs and linked services. Expanding the Training Centre was also positioned as a way to better meet community demand and reduce constraints on delivery. Finally, workforce development was framed as an opportunity to strengthen the model over time, with further training in the NSM identified as a practical step to build shared understanding and consistency across the team.

Considerations

- Clarify and document the core (non-negotiable) components of the HCSM alongside areas of flexibility, to ensure consistent implementation while maintaining contextual responsiveness.
- Strengthen shared understanding of the HCSM to support consistent implementation across programs, clearly outlining which components are adaptable and which are essential to achieving program objectives.
- Validate the foundational set of participant impact indicators with young people accessing H4H programs to ensure they reflect what young people experience as meaningful and align with community priorities.
- Develop practical outcome measures for monitoring and evaluation, including simple pre and post program measures to track outcomes overtime.
- Evaluate Training Centre activities at the program-stream level, assessing each stream against its objectives and desired outcomes.
- Strengthen workforce systems through structure induction, ongoing training, and regular supervision to build a shared understanding of the model and support consistent practice.
- Address access and infrastructure constraints that affect participant and delivery consistency, including transport, wet season disruption alternatives, space limited, heat management, and Training Centre capacity.
- Reduce key delivery barries such as strengthening post-custody employment transition support with key partners.
- Improve workforce sustainability by increasing resourcing and support to reduce burnout risk and retain staff.

Conclusion

Hoops 4 Health's HCSM represents a powerful example of community-led innovation in the Northern Territory. Grounded in First Nations leadership, cultural strength, and brain-based practice, the model moves beyond deficit framings of trauma and instead centres collective resilience, identity, belonging, and intergenerational healing. Across community, Training Centre, detention and prison settings, the findings indicate that the model is doing more than delivering sport – it is building regulation, confidence, leadership, peer accountability, and hope.

The findings indicate that when young people are supported through culturally safe, relational, and intentionally sequenced activity, meaningful shifts occur in behaviour, in self-concept, in group culture, and in future pathways. Inside custodial settings, the model supports regulation and inclusion in environments that have historically struggled to provide both. In community contexts, it strengthens pride, connection, and aspiration. Across settings, H4H fosters enjoyment, motivation, and sustained engagement – critical foundations for long-term wellbeing.

At the same time, the research highlights that sustaining and scaling this impact requires strengthened systems, infrastructure, workforce support, and consistent evaluation processes. Addressing these challenges does not diminish the strength of the model; rather, it provides a roadmap for consolidation and growth.

With clearer articulation of non-negotiable components, strengthened outcome measurement, investment in workforce development, and improved access and infrastructure, H4H is well positioned to deepen its impact and expand its reach. The foundational systems now in place – including a research-informed practice model, program logic, theory of change, and outcome measures – provide a strong platform for sustainable growth.

Ultimately, this research affirms that healing-centred sport, when culturally grounded and relationally delivered, can create conditions for regulation, inclusion, leadership, and intergenerational healing. Therefore, H4H stands as a compelling example of what is possible when Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations are resourced, trusted, and supported to lead.





Ellen Gray (left) with Murray Bradbury (centre) working the pads with program participant Erin in the Training Centre boxing ring.

Research limitations and constraints

- **This study offers rich qualitative insight into how the HCSM operates in practice**, but the findings should be read as indicative rather than generalisable or causal.
- **Based on 18 purposive interviews**, with limited direct youth voice (one young person). Disengaged participants and remote community perspectives are under-represented.
- **Findings rely mainly on self-report and narrative accounts**, with no quantitative outcome tracking at the time. Impacts cannot be generalised to whole cohorts or causally attributed in the way experimental designs allow.
- **A cross-sectional snapshot during a period of organisational growth and model articulation**. No longitudinal follow-up to assess whether changes are sustained over time or across transitions.
- **The partnership context and researcher positioning** may have introduced social desirability or positive bias, despite reflexive practice and consultation.
- **Context specific to the greater Darwin region and Alice Springs**. Transfer to other regions should be cautious and consider cultural, geographic and systems differences.
- **A planned mixed-methods Photovoice component** was adapted into a simpler *"picture voice"* check-in tool (1–10 scale), but it was not implemented due to cultural/measurement concerns and organisational constraints. The study therefore proceeded as qualitative, informing future measurement development.

Future research directions

- **Expand direct youth voice and youth-led, culturally responsive methods** (including creative storytelling approaches).
- **Use mixed-methods and longitudinal designs** to assess sustained outcomes and align with government metrics.
- **Develop a simple, culturally responsive outcome measure** linked to the model outcomes.

References

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References and Supporting Literature

This report draws on an extensive body of literature.

A full list of references and supporting literature is available on request.





Kayle Gordon gets an autograph from Australia's greatest basketballer Lauren Jackson AO OLY.

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