



RODNEY'S STORY

YALLUM
YALLUM
CASE
STUDY

ABOUT YALLUM YALLUM

Yallum Yallum Elders and Respected People (ERP) Council is a culturally led justice model, offering an alternative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in contact with the justice system. It operates in the Horsham region of Victoria.

Yallum Yallum focuses on breaking cycles of disadvantage and restoring justice through healing by:

- openly accepting accountability for harmful behaviour
- increasing connection with community and Culture
- addressing the underlying causes of offending
- acknowledging obligations to repair relationships and damage to harmed parties.

Yallum Yallum is a tougher justice requiring active remorse and undertaking agreed actions (e.g. mental health counselling) that must be accepted by the offending person's community, harmed parties and a council of Elders and Respected People. The participant attends conferences with the ERP Council where an agreement is determined, and progress monitored. Once the program is completed, there are no disclosable offences on the participant's criminal record.

Program outcomes are measured against four dimensions where healing aims to take place – within self, for community and Culture, for identified harmed parties and for the ERP Council members.

ABOUT RODNEY

Rodney is the first participant to complete the Yallum Yallum program. He is a 22-year-old Wotjobaluk man who was arrested for multiple charges related to fighting in a local park with his brother while drunk. The charges also included resisting arrest and assault of police which occurred during the arrest. These indictable offences carry a potential maximum sentence of five years in prison.

This is Rodney's story of the change he experienced as a result of the Yallum Yallum program. The story draws on the reflections of the four members of the ERP Council who were responsible for conducting the conferences with Rodney and setting his agreed actions.

Rodney was glad to be in the program, knowing if he could stay on track he could stay out of prison.

The initial conference with Rodney was held at the local courthouse. This location gave it gravitas, showing this alternative to the colonial justice system was a serious process, and reinforcing the opportunity to stay out of the criminal justice system. Subsequent conferences were held at the Angling Club near the river, providing a more relaxing setting close to nature. The diversity of locations for conferences is an important element of the program to ensure the setting is conducive to the messages that the ERP Council need to focus on.

HEALING OF SELF

I feel more comfortable in my own skin, more involved with the community. Rodney

This was Rodney's immediate response when asked about the most significant change he experienced from undertaking the Yallum Yallum program.

The ERP Council have also seen a significant positive change in Rodney since he started the program.

He is a young man who is different to when he began. He is learning every day. Not stuck in a rut. He's embracing change and moving on with his life. ERP Council member

Improved agency and self-respect

Increased confidence and being able to fully embrace the opportunity to create change for himself are two areas of significant personal growth for Rodney during the program. He actively engaged in the program and associated services, showing commitment and resilience.

Initially daunted by the ERP Council, over time Rodney became more open and willing to connect. He says he became more comfortable talking to the Council and his social anxiety decreased.

I was kind of nervous meeting everyone, but everyone when out of their way to make me feel comfortable. Rodney

He was scared to sit in front of a group of elders, but he stuck it out. It showed his determination to meet his needs ... he felt supported and able to do this. ERP Council member

He wouldn't look at you when he first started, he looked at the ground. Over the process I saw a change in his appearance, behaviour, openness to talk and look at you. He was very closed at the start. By the end very open, smiling, more talkative. ERP Council member

Rodney has taken many positive actions to create beneficial change. He has started looking after himself and has achieved his short-term goals. These included alcohol and other drug counselling and mental health counselling which he has continued beyond what was required in the agreement. He got rid of toxic people who were living with him, had his licence returned and transferred from interstate and joined the local football club.

I have done alcohol and drug counselling and which I still to this day am doing and going to. I do counselling for my anger management and mental health stuff. Rodney



I sorted my life out a bit more. Got my licence; back into footy. Still looking for a job. Rodney

Rodney is voluntarily doing alcohol and other drug counselling. He has transferred his licence to Victoria and is actively playing footy. He is also doing a painting for Yallum Yallum that he volunteered to do – he has previously been commissioned – he asked if he can do a painting for us. ERP Council member

He put some boundaries in place which he wouldn't have done without Yallum. ERP Council member

Accountability to community

The ERP Council identified that Rodney 'owned his stuff', taking responsibility for his actions when not many people do.

He could have blamed his brother or the coppers but didn't. ERP Council member

The fact that it was in a public place and I was pretty drunk. I take full accountability for that. Rodney

Rodney has increased his awareness of how his behaviours impacted the community. As his confidence increased and he started taking actions, he was able to grow his community connections and further understand the importance of his place within the community.

[I felt] pretty bad, because I'm classified as a TO [Traditional Owner] here and got to be a more positive role model for other generations. Rodney

He feels like he's a part of the community and it affects not just him – the community gets tarred with same brush. He used to think things he does just affect him, but now understands what he does, it's not just him that's affected, it's all of us. ERP Council member

Future aspirations

The future looks bright for Rodney. His medium and longer-term goals include continuing to play footy, getting a job and buying a car. He wants to continue to improve his community and family connections.

I kinda just want a good life. Rodney

Rodney also has an aspiration to travel.

Travelling the world one day. First Australia, got to travel my own backyard before I go anywhere else. Rodney

He says he is happier and more positive since completing the program. Rodney feels he has changed for the better and for the long term.

[I'm] not as angry or drawn to going back to how I used to be. Rodney

[I'm] more positive, I think about things in a positive way, instead of thinking everything is bad. Rodney

Rodney also continues to engage with Yallum Yallum. The ERP Council members are excited and optimistic about his future too.

He's shown signs of someone who is in control of his own future. He knows it's up to him if he's successful in life. ERP Council member

He has determination to change and better his life for him and his partner; and wanting a career ... There is determination where there wasn't before. Self-determination. ERP Council member

I saw a lad who grew in confidence, able to take responsibility for his actions ... able to think that he's an important person ... that he has a role to play in the community. Finding a sense of belonging, discovering who he was he increased in maturity. ERP Council member

HEALING FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Connection with community and Culture

Rodney has engaged with community through football and connections with people through the Yallum Yallum program and associated services. Improving connections is something Rodney will continue to work on.

[Connections with community are] not too different ... I haven't really spent too much time with them ... But slowly trying to make a change on that. Rodney

The ERP Council have helped support and back him.

We found out he didn't have much connection to Community. We got him on a mailing list and attending social events ... Before he wasn't linked into anything. It helped that our service cares and wants to address those needs.

ERP Council member

Rodney sees there may also be a role for him as a future community leader.

Sometime down the line, yeah ... Someone asked me actually to be a mentor for younger people. Rodney

Rodney has done some work connecting to Culture with one of the ERP Council members and has learnt more about his mob. He is keen to continue this journey himself.

I like to do things on my own. I would rather go out and do that stuff by myself. I feel more at home with myself [on Country]. Rodney

Connection to family

ERP Councillors shared that as part of Rodney repairing relationships with his family, he initiated getting his family to come together for Christmas, including his siblings and Mum visiting from out of town.

He put on a Christmas feed for his family; invited them and prepped ... He wouldn't have done that earlier. His attitude and anger completely changed. He has repaired relationships. ERP Council member

He's taking a leadership role for his family, brother and sister and perhaps even the broader community ... He's continuing to kick goals.

ERP Council member



HEALING FOR IDENTIFIED HARMED PARTIES

The Yallum Yallum program has helped Rodney work on repairing and forming better relationships – with his brother and with police.

Initially his brother wouldn't talk to him, they were distant because of what happened. That has changed. He owned his stuff and they can now have a relationship. Without Yallum relationships with family wouldn't be so good. ERP Council member

Rodney hasn't reoffended. He's made different choices. He chose Yallum, to go this way and sit in front of a panel. To identify issues, repair relationships, look for employment and improve connections to Culture and family. He's stepping into the next level of adulthood as a man that has grown up and owns his stuff. ERP Council member

My main message to Rodney was not to see and treat police as the enemy. It's a negative cycle and he has the opportunity to break the cycle. He can break out of that. Keep off the police radar. ERP Council member

Rodney says his relationship with his brother is healed and they are close again.

I have my brother over every day basically. Rodney

The local police knew Rodney was taking part in Yallum Yallum and were interested and supportive. Rodney had a positive and respectful engagement with them when he was getting his licence returned and changed over.

EFFECT ON THE ERP COUNCIL

The ERP Council were able to use lived experience to provide positive role modelling for Rodney and fulfill their Cultural responsibilities. They felt immense satisfaction and gratitude for being involved and in the positive outcomes all round.

I have personally found it rewarding to be part of the Council. We were lucky to get someone like Rodney who was ready for change. It highlights the importance of bringing back traditional ways of doing things. It's easy to be disconnected from young people in these modern times ... I hope it can become a permanent thing across the state. This approach should be standard practice. Prison just doesn't work. ERP Council member

It was obvious, his confidence and his growth. His background and experiences were of poor welfare, damaging self-esteem and confidence. [His growth] demonstrated that Yallum Yallum can really help people beyond trying to take them away from the courts. It's about personal development and being part of Community. It's really rewarding to see. Good for me personally. I'm appreciative of the whole program. You can see how it's really going to benefit people. It's good to be a part of. ERP Council member

If we didn't intervene or have anything to do with Rodney he may have taken a different path. Instead, he's been able to make better choices. ERP Council member

Rodney has positive reflections on how the ERP Council supported him and is thankful he was able to participate in the program.

[The ERP] had a lot of good ideas, ways for me to go in, and led me on the right path. Rodney

FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about Yallum Yallum, contact **Insert Name** at Goolum Goolum, email reception@goolumgoolum.org.au goolumgoolum.org.au/justice

