

Breaking the cycle

Ceduna's bid to keep its Indigenous youth out of jail

Many Indigenous young people face an uphill battle to stay out of detention, but an outback town is trying to change the odds



by Melissa Davey
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Anthea Krieg scans the names on the court list. She frowns as she sees some she recognises – names of young Aboriginal people facing fines or juvenile detention for breaching bail conditions or driving without a licence.

“What’s he doing on the list?” she says to herself. “He’s a good kid.”

The list for Ceduna magistrates court comes out a few days before “court week”, a five-day period occurring every six weeks, when more than 80 cases may be heard each day by a magistrate who flies in from Adelaide. Those facing charges, many of them children, will be represented by lawyers who often have only met them minutes before. Almost all will be Indigenous.

Krieg is a doctor who has lived in and worked with remote and urban Indigenous communities for more than 25 years and who is widely respected and trusted by Aboriginal people. She has used this experience to carve out an unconventional role

for herself in South Australia's justice system. In the few days before court sits, she does all she can to find out more information about the young people facing court. Krieg will speak with officers from child protection services, housing or healthcare. Sometimes services hand over information, sometimes they don't.

Her aims are simple but vital: to give context to a young person's life and offending, and to keep them out of detention if at all possible by offering community support to the young person and their family.

She will try to tell the magistrate that a 16-year-old facing charges of theft is also the sole carer for his five siblings and has unstable housing, or that a 13-year-old is trying to manage a suicidal mother, an abusive and violent father, and suffers from various untreated health issues.

"It stuns me and distresses me that we have a system where often the prosecutor, the defence lawyer and the magistrate don't know the client," Krieg says. "These people can be in here for fairly minor events and yet major life-changing decisions are being made when no one is informed about their welfare."

Krieg is part of an intensive effort in Ceduna to change the cycle of youth offending, which leads to minors being placed in detention – and all the problems that creates. Her role fits in with the Ceduna Services Reform, a collaboration of community services that began in response to a coronial inquest into the deaths of six Aboriginal people in 2011. The inquest's recommendations challenged agencies in Ceduna to rethink their help to people who were homeless, away from home and heavy drinkers.

Krieg developed the role after securing funding from the state government for a job with the Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service. She works with a team of services known as inSYNC, an umbrella program for coordinating support for young people in the far west of South Australia.



Anthea Krieg, right, discusses a case with members of the Ceduna Street Beat community patrol team, which helps vulnerable people access health and other services. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

Just 2.4% of Australia's population are Indigenous but more than 28% of the country's prison population is Aboriginal. The work of Krieg and others in Ceduna is one of several piecemeal efforts occurring in towns and cities across Australia that are trying to address this disparity. What is happening in Ceduna is a model of how making a real effort to coordinate services can reduce the high levels of Indigenous incarceration.

It provides something difficult to measure but just as crucial for the town's young people – the hope that jail is not inevitable.

The main industries in Ceduna, a seaside outback town nearly 800km north-west of Adelaide, are agriculture and fishing. According to 2011 census data, the Ceduna and far-west population – which includes the communities of Koonibba, and the unincorporated lands of Yalata and Oak Valley – is about 4,000. A quarter identify as Aboriginal.

Many of the young people facing court are from Yalata, Koonibba and Oak Valley, where there are fewer support services and little transport in and out of town. Yalata and Oak Valley are dry communities, so when people come into Ceduna to drink they may not make it home.

Data shows that in 2014, 100% of those in prison from the region were Aboriginal. The far-west region frequently has between two and five young people in youth detention in Adelaide at any one time. All of them are Aboriginal.

"I haven't seen a non-Aboriginal youth at court in three years," Krieg says.

When she goes to court, she tries to convince the magistrate that juvenile detention is no place for these youths, all of whom have complex needs and many of whom have intellectual disabilities or mental health issues. Krieg has never come across a youth for whom she believed jail was appropriate.

Krieg will sometimes be heard, sharing her letters and information from service providers, and proposing a model of community care that can step in and monitor the child. At other times, the magistrate will frown and tell her to sit down.

Today a 19-year-old Indigenous man appears via video link from Adelaide. From his screen he can see Krieg sitting in the court. His face breaks into a smile and he waves at her. "Hi, Anthea," he says, as the magistrate, one Krieg hasn't met before, looks on bemused. It is over quickly. Another court date is set and the screen goes black.

"He looks too comfortable in there," Krieg mutters. The young man has a charge sheet ranging from smoking cannabis to theft. His behaviour always escalates when his dad, a man who physically abuses the family, returns home, forcing him to flee. Many of his friends are also on the inside.

Coordination makes a difference

One of the first cases Krieg and inSYNC took on was Jared (not his real name). Krieg first saw Jared in court via videolink from detention when he was 17, crying because

he was told he would not be released. She discovered that he had spent every birthday since the age of 11 in juvenile detention in Adelaide, 750km from his home. Last month he celebrated his 20th birthday at home.

Jared had been to court more than 50 times since 2009, with charges relating mostly to stolen property, trespass and property damage. As a child he never spent more than about eight weeks out of custody. Missed court dates, unpaid fines and multiple charges for minor offences built up to time spent in detention.

Overseas studies have found that between 30% and 60% of juvenile delinquents apprehended by police or brought before children's court later come into contact with the adult criminal justice system. NSW Bureau Of Crime Statistics and Research data shows nine out of 10 Indigenous youth who appeared in a children's court went on to appear in an adult court within eight years.

Jared has managed almost two years without incarceration as an adult.

"I'm proud of myself," he tells Guardian Australia from his home town of Koonibba, a Lutheran mission established in 1901 and handed back to Aboriginal control in 1988. It is a dusty town with a population of about 200.



Jared turned 20 in November – only the second birthday since he was 11 that he spent out of detention. 'I'd rather do things with my life,' he says. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

"I feel happy because I go to school and learn a lot at school," he says. "I love it when I go to school. I'm still learning all my times tables and I'm learning a lot about maths and reading."

By school, Jared means the Flexible Learning Centre, which caters for the most vulnerable young people in the Ceduna community who have missed too much of their education to ever slip back into a mainstream school system.

Jared has been assessed as having a moderate intellectual disability and is a registered Disability South Australia client. He has a comprehension age of about a six-year-old, though has made significant improvements in the learning centre. He has minimal contact with his parents, having been in and out of the foster care system. He has more family members and friends in prison than outside it.

I was thinking of being a criminal for the rest of my life but I chose to be a good young man

Jared

Krieg believes children as vulnerable as Jared was should never be sent to jail. Instead, an intensive and coordinated range of services, including mental healthcare and education, should step in to help. While Jared never had this support as a child, Krieg and inSYNC worked with Aboriginal legal Rights Movement lawyers to make sure it was in place for him from the moment he left the Port Augusta adult prison. In all, about 17 services had come into contact with Jared in the prior year, Krieg found, but had not been coordinating with each other. inSYNC worked to get about eight services cooperatively involved in his care.

They worked with the prison to make sure Jared had a bus ticket back to Ceduna and a transfer to the bus station. The bus service runs two days a week, so his release was timed to coincide with public transport to eliminate the risk that he would be sidetracked by bad influences in Port Augusta and never make it home.

'I learnt a lot in juvie' : Jared, the Aboriginal boy who grew up in detention

Arrangements were made for him to meet with a Centrelink worker upon his release to assist him to fill out paperwork and access payments. Places were made for him in the Flexible Learning Centre and the Ceduna Youth Hub, a drop-in centre.

Disability and youth workers also helped, and police were contacted to develop a risk-management plan for him under the terms of the Disability SA memorandum of understanding.

“What we want is for him being able to focus on his life,” Krieg says. “What we’ve had to do is clear the way for him, get services out of the way and working for him in the background invisible to him. We get on with that so he can just focus on rebuilding his life and just feeling good about himself.”

The inSYNC team also worked hard with the Aboriginal Legal rights lawyer in the team to have the charges that landed him in adult jail – breaching bail conditions – wiped on grounds of mental impairment. The process took nine months while psychiatrists were consulted and information gathered. In the meantime, Jared turned 18 in jail.

To date, inSYNC has provided support to about 20 youths. A review of its first 15 clients found that 14 were Aboriginal, ranging in age from 15 to 22. None had stable accommodation or lived in a two-parent family. Six had spent time in youth detention and all but two had involvement with the police and courts.

A third were classified as functionally illiterate and innumerate. All had significant mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Of the six youths who moved unexpectedly away from Ceduna for a period of time, five suffered serious negative consequences such as imprisonment, hospitalisation, youth detention and psychosis.

Jared says having access to services such as the Flexible Learning Centre and a mental health counsellor has led to his anger dissipating and he has lost any interest in crime.

“I was thinking of being a criminal for the rest of my life but I chose to be a good young man,” he says. “I want to go for my licence or go for my boat licence or work on a boat out on the ocean or build houses. I’d rather do things with my life and I’m proud of what I want to do.”

Breaking the cycle of incarceration

Though it may seem an arduous process to provide support for someone like Jared, the cost of imprisonment is exorbitant. According to a 2015 Productivity Commission report, adult prison beds cost between \$250,000 and \$500,000 for infrastructure, and about \$100,000 to run each year. Youth justice beds cost about \$200,000.

In prison we have got marginalised, disaffected people who aren’t supported and who are unwell
Anthea Krieg

Locally-led, community-based justice approaches make economic sense, Krieg says. Incarcerating youths does not make the community safer, she adds, with numerous studies showing that youth incarceration ingrains and expands a child’s repertoire of criminal behaviours and exacerbates mental health issues.

Krieg was the lead author of a piece the Medical Journal of Australia published in August. She wrote that integrated service responses for vulnerable youth had the potential to significantly reduce incarceration rates and support them to live contributing, satisfying lives.

“Many vulnerable people, often with limited capacity to advocate for their own needs, fall through very wide gaps in service delivery and are, in effect, efficiently channelled into the justice system from an early age,” she wrote.

Krieg knows what prison does to people. In the mid-1990s she was a doctor at the Adelaide women’s prison. By 1998 she was the clinical director of the South Australian prison health service. It was while working there that she formed the view that by the time she began working with offenders, it was too late.

“In prison we have got marginalised, disaffected people who aren’t supported and who are unwell,” she says. “Over 30% of prisoners have significant mental health problems, almost 50% have drug and alcohol issues, and over half have acquired brain injuries. There are numbers everywhere. But the point is, I was seeing people do so badly inside.

“I thought, ‘Right, the solution is in community. Has to be. Let’s support people when they come out the door.’ Then, it didn’t take long to appreciate what was still missing, which is services that are there valuing these people before they even go in.”

Once a child went into the justice system for the first time, it was difficult for the to break that cycle. “Police begin watching you more closely,” Krieg says. “Understandably, it’s their job to do that. But there are times when the line merges between keeping an eye, community safety and outright targeting.”

Bail conditions in communities surrounding Ceduna were often onerous and set children up to fail and end up back in detention, she says. Ordering a child not to go into town, when the town was the only place they could access essential services, often led to children landing back in detention for breaching bail conditions.

Whether the youths she works with are “good kids or bad kids” is beside the point, Krieg says. They all came out of detention with worse health and social problems and learned criminal behaviours.



Koonibba is the former site of an Aboriginal mission, founded in 1901 just outside of Ceduna. Today it is a dusty town with a population of about 200. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

“We are losing so much potential of so many really good children and people to prison,” Krieg says. “And I know them because I live here and I keep finding myself saying, ‘These are good kids. They’re all good kids in a mad system.’”

“You are actually carrying the hope until you can hand it back to people and they’re ready to have that hope for themselves again. If children have got that hope in their extended families, you know you can work with that and they can fight. Other families don’t have that hope.”

Unfair and relentless targeting

Jodie Milne, who lives in the small homeland community of Yarilena, about 5km from Ceduna, says she has “high hopes” for her three sons, who are aged 21, 17 and 15. An enrolled nurse who works at the local pharmacy, Milne says her hope is diminishing given what she describes as unfair and relentless targeting of her family by Ceduna police. There are some “very cheeky” police, she says. In Ceduna, “cheeky” means aggressive.

“There was one incident where police were looking for a stolen motorbike,” Milne says softly. “My oldest son, who has never got in trouble in his life, was coming along on a pushbike. Police said to my son, ‘You better tell me the truth or I’ll get your head and shove it in the back of this car.’”

“When I pulled up, he told me what the police officer said, so I said to the police, ‘Who’s the policeman who wants to put my son’s head through the car?’ It’s things like that that the kids in this town go through.”

Milne encourages her children to speak up for themselves and she also has words to police when she feels that her family are being unfairly targeted.

He slammed my head into the car. I had a big bruise. I went to the lawyers. They threw the case against me out of court
Jodie Milne

“They are my children,” she says. “I am there to protect them. My kids will back themselves up too, they know how to. I taught them well. They knew how to stick up for themselves.”

When Guardian Australia speaks to youths in the town about what they want to be when they grow up, many of them say “police”. “It’s the only role they see as having any power,” Krieg says.

Milne says that she too has been targeted by police. On Christmas Eve a few years ago, she says, she was at the local sports club where some children were throwing rocks. She dropped her cigarette and bent down to pick it up. A police officer assumed she was bending down to pick up a rock.

“He slammed my head into the car,” she says. “I had a big bruise. I went to the lawyers. They threw the case against me out of court. I worked at the hospital doing nursing, so why would I harm somebody?”



Jodie Milne, who lives near Ceduna, says she and her children have been relentlessly targeted by police. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

Milne says she is stopped regularly by Ceduna traffic police, at least every two weeks – and more frequently when there is a blitz. In July she was issued with a 12-month licence disqualification after losing three demerit points for failing to ensure a rear passenger seat had a secured seatbelt.

In a remote town with no public transport and no other family members with a licence, the loss meant Milne was likely to lose her job in town. She also drove her 17-year-old son, who had spent a couple of weeks in youth detention, to and from his work.

Krieg tried to argue to the Department of Transport that taking away Milne's licence would have serious repercussions for her family and the community. She argued that if Milne's son lost his job, he would be at greater risk of criminal behaviour. But she was unsuccessful, with no formal processes in place to challenge the consequences of inflexible laws around driving offences.

While Milne does believe there should be repercussions for her children's actions, she also says there is unfair, racially biased targeting.

My first break and enter was with my dad chucking me through the window of a house when I was about six or seven
Noah

Milne's relative, Noah (not his real name), was staying with her at the time of Guardian Australia's visit, having been released from prison on home detention while awaiting an upcoming court date. He was 13 when he first went into juvenile

detention. Now 25, he is in the adult system and has spent more than half his life in jail.

“My first break and enter was with my dad chucking me through the window of a house when I was about six or seven,” he says. “Dad was bad on the drugs. It’s like work experience. Once you get a taste you might end up pursuing that pathway in life.”

As a child, he would steal cars just to find somewhere warm to sleep, he says. It was stealing cars that first landed him in juvenile detention. “When I first went to court, Mum told me, ‘Son, I can’t tell you how to do court. The only advice I can give you is expect the worst and hope for the best.’ And that’s what I think every day.”



Noah, 25, has been in and out of detention most of his life. Young people like him fall off a services cliff once they turn 18, says Krieg. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

About a year ago, Noah attempted to take his own life. He has struggled with ice addiction in the past but managed to shake that while in jail. He says he wants to stay out of prison and get a job.

Krieg says young people like Noah fall off a services cliff once they turn 18. “That transition point also changes what mental health services are available, policing rules change. A whole lot of service responses change at that time and people fall through the gaps.”

Since Guardian Australia’s visit, Noah has returned to custody.

Patrolling the streets

Street Beat, a program that began in Ceduna in January last year, is an outreach service with staff from multiple agencies, including the Red Cross and the state Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. It patrols the streets and talks to people, and refers them to services such as the sober-up centre and housing support. The aim is to connect with youths and other vulnerable people on the streets before police do.

When Guardian Australia visits, Karen Gardner, a youth services coordinator with the inSYNC, and Simone Miller, a Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service alcohol and other drugs outreach counsellor, are on patrol.

A young Aboriginal fella ... when he crossed the train tracks he got arrested for jaywalking
Karen Gardner

They don't deny that children are committing crimes but they believe that young Aboriginal people in Ceduna are being targeted by police and enter a rigid court system that does not cater to their circumstances or needs.

"I walk across the train tracks all the time with no consequences," Gardner says. "A young Aboriginal fella lives 10 houses up and when he crossed the train tracks he got arrested for jaywalking. He had to go to court, at which point it's court fees and, if you don't pay your fines, it's more fines. And then the same kid was pulled over and charged by the cops for having his car window down and his elbow hanging out for showing a protruding limb.

"We've got people not even 18 who have so many crimes like these against them and fines already, and there's no way for these kids to ever get these fines down to zero. The police say, 'These are the only options we've got.'

Guardian Australia was told of one 16-year-old in Ceduna living at home with his parents, who are on Centrelink, who has \$14,000 in fines.



Youth worker Simone Miller, left tries to engages with members of the community during a Street Beat patrol. She says many youths are in a cultural limbo. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

Guardian Australia requested interviews with Ceduna police and the officer in charge of the Eyre western local service area, Superintendent Andrew Thiele. Guardian Australia was denied interviews but Thiele sent through a short statement.

South Australia police is part of the Ceduna leadership group and working with other agencies to support vulnerable people in Ceduna. A joint agency approach has provided many benefits to the community in Ceduna and assisted in making the community a safer place.

Gardner says that, anecdotally, police have noticed a reduction in call-outs since Street Beat started. Krieg has also helped to keep young people out of jail, she adds.

“I call Anthea all the time because Aboriginal Legal Rights and the Aboriginal Family Violence Service, which can only represent people if it is a family violence issue, are the only two places you can get legal representation,” Gardner says.

“But if they’re representing the perpetrator, they can’t also represent the victim because it’s a conflict of interest, and vice versa. So often people self-represent or have no representation when they go to court. So that’s why it’s good to have Anthea.”

Miller, an Aboriginal woman from Koonibba with a background in youth work, agrees. “Anthea gets an amazing reaction from all these young mob here,” she says. “Them young fellas come in looking for her.”

If you make a difference with one family member in that group, then you watch the change in a lot of others too
Simone Miller

Miller says role models can be lacking for young people in Ceduna. Her own mentor was her uncle, who encouraged her to go to go onto tertiary study and undertake courses in health work. Having one person believe in her was enough to drive her to succeed.

“He kept annoying me about studying every time he saw me,” she says. “I said, ‘OK, give me the enrolment papers,’ just to get him off my back. That’s when my whole world view started changing.

“I’m sure young people have a lot of dreams about what they want to do with themselves, but because they don’t see their people succeeding in what they are doing, they see those people just stuck, they get caught up in that too.

“My mother works now, my sister works and my brother works. If you make a difference with one family member in that group, then you watch the change in a lot of others, too.”

According to Miller, many young people are in a limbo land between cultures. They are unable to speak their traditional language and connect with their own Aboriginal relatives – but they don’t fit in the mainstream schools and systems, either.

“A lot of those kids do what they do and they’re lost because of a loss of connection to culture and to community, you know?” she says. “I feel that missing within myself and it hurts. So I can only imagine how this young mob feel, how they’re dealing with that and their loss of connection to culture, community and language.”

Miller says many youths are struggling with poverty, managing the illnesses of family members who were traumatised as members of the stolen generations, and may be living in households where family violence is a frequent occurrence. Sometimes their parents have experiences of being racially abused when they were at school and, as a result, are not too keen sending their own children to an environment they feel is unsafe and discriminatory.

Leaving town is not the answer, Miller says, because, for Aboriginal people, the land where they grew up is an important part of who they are.

“When I come back here, it heals,” she says. “Our soul draws us back to country.”

Aiming to fill the gaps

But Krieg says for the youth who end up in detention, reconnecting them to land and culture, though critically important, is not always enough. “Whitefella systems”, as she calls them – including the courts, hospitals and social services – need to be less rigid and work together with Aboriginal communities to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth.

“Cultural mentoring and building support for people who are culturally lost works for some people,” she says. “But there is another group of youths who have high levels of complexity and who really need whitefella systems to be there to support them.

“It might be an intellectual disability, it might be significant mental health problems, or early psychosis that hasn’t been detected because the child hasn’t been in school. But currently, all we really have for them is an adversarial justice system that doesn’t cater to these needs.”

The Ceduna Flexible Learning Centre, one of the services that aims to fill that gap, picks up some of the most vulnerable youth in the town. It provides breakfast and lunch and, for many young people, is the safest place they know. It also works with police, case managers, child protection, health services and lawyers to link youth up to support.

At issue for the state government, which is funding the centre, is that people beyond 18 aren’t supposed to go to school – and the centre doesn’t adhere to a standard curriculum. While there is an argument that disadvantaged children should be included in mainstream schooling, the youth at the Flexible Learning Centre may have gone several years without being in a classroom.

The centre’s manager, Deb Woollatt, who has worked with Aboriginal youth her entire career, says some of the young people she teaches will never meet the key performance indicators set by the state’s Department of Education. To expect them to go from having limited schooling to completing a high school certificate is

unrealistic. Some are unable to interpret letters they receive from the courts and legal services, and rely on Woollatt and her staff to help them.

We do try to get the police to sit and talk to the kids and understand their actions
Deb Woollatt

“A lot of these kids are over the age of compulsion,” Woollatt says. “Normally, they would then fall under Centrelink and be getting youth allowance and that’s it. The education system doesn’t usually cater to them and there are people saying it is not the education department’s place to pick up this group of kids who come with all these other issues. But who else will do it?”

Every young person needs an individual program, she says. “Literacy, numeracy and life skills are the three main areas we work on, and it’s things like trying to get them to a point where they can fill in paperwork they need to fill in, and read and understand things that come through the post.”

Woollatt managed 32 students last year, with help from a school support officer. The centre tries to work with police to encourage them to deal with the children differently.

“Some days when I come to work, police are waiting on the doorstep because they know the kids will eventually show up here,” she says. “We do try to support them in their dealings with police because their automatic reaction as kids is to hide.

“But they can’t hide forever, especially in a remote location like Ceduna. And we do try to get the police to sit and talk to the kids and understand their actions.”



Deb Woollatt manages the the Ceduna Flexible Learning Centre. She says many of the children fall through cracks in the education system. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

Because Ceduna is a town with no magistrate, if a child gets picked up by police after 4pm he or she will have to spend the night in custody until police can get hold of a magistrate and arrange for a release on bail.

Since Guardian Australia visited, the principal of the area school, who manages the budget for the Flexible Learning Centre, made the decision to cut back the off-site learning centre's hours this year from four days a week to two.

The move, Krieg says, will effectively "kill off the centre completely". In a letter of complaint written to the education department, she wrote that since it opened in 2014, the centre had kept youths out of jail and its work had led to improvements in literacy. Youth justice data for the far west has also identified a 40% decrease in offending by young people aged 11 to 17 between 2011 and 2015, she says.

'Flirting on the edge'

While the Flexible Learning Centre helps a high proportion of young people who have been in detention, Peter Jericho, the manager of the Ceduna Youth Hub – a drop-in centre for Ceduna youth aged 12 to 25 – says his centre targets those youth "flirting on the edge of the justice system". While it is open to all young people in Ceduna, 100% of those who attend are Aboriginal.

At the centre, children can play sports and video games, use computers, get a feed and, if they need to, speak with staff about their home lives and interactions with police.

"We have open conversations about how young people are doing and talk about how they can make things right, away from the justice system," Jericho says.

Jericho grew up in the region, which means he knows many of the families. When he worked in the juvenile detention centre in Adelaide he would see children he knew come through the system.

"Ultimately they are kids who have made mistakes and who often haven't had great role models, and we often don't make a huge effort to address issues at the cause of offending, whether it be abuse at home or other issues," he says.

The hub aims to reduce the number of times some young people are involved with police and to provide a point of support to help them navigate the justice system. An agreement with the state government means the hub can help them manage community service hours and is a neutral meeting point for information to be shared confidentially between service providers.

In October the centre received funding through the state government's crime prevention and community safety grants program. Jericho was adamant that the money should not be used to implement programs targeting Aboriginal people. Instead he used it to employ 10 part-time Aboriginal youth mentors.

Dee-anne Gray, 24, and Stanley Willis, 21, are two of the mentors on shift on a Saturday afternoon when Guardian Australia visits.

“I help the kids get back on track, get their lives back on track,” Gray says. “I want to give kids what I never had growing up – a place like this.”

Willis has been coming to the centre since it opened in 2012. His attitude towards his peers and his willingness to help out led to the job offer. “There were few out-of-school activities for kids in Ceduna until this place opened,” he says.



Ceduna Youth Hub mentors Stanley Willis and Dee-anne Gray. Gray says they're there to 'help the kids get back on track'. Photograph: Melissa Davey for the Guardian

But Jacqueline Costanzo, manager of the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion's Ceduna Services Reform, says while the Youth Hub is an outstanding service it does not have the capacity to reach all young people who could benefit from its approach, particularly vulnerable people in the surrounding communities including Oak Valley, Yalata and Koonibba.

“For kids in remote communities, often their experience of the world is that you finish school, if you go to school at all, and then you hang around not doing much because that's what your grandparents and parents did,” she says. “There are few part-time jobs in those communities – there are few opportunities.”

She acknowledges that there is a perception that police target Aboriginal young people. But she says things are changing in Ceduna.

There are few part-time jobs in those communities – there are few opportunities
Jacqueline Costanzo

“Police in Ceduna are hearing a whole lot of different perspectives about issues and they are able to respond and react differently,” she says. “I know of examples where someone from Street Beat has spoken to police and informed them that someone

they have detained has intellectual disabilities and so police will treat that person differently.

“And there are examples of where police will ring Street Beat before releasing someone, so that the person has an agency to talk to them ready to figure out where they’re staying that night once they’ve been released.”

It’s about building more flexibility into police responses, she says, but changes to procedures take time. It is this lack of flexibility that continues to frustrate Krieg. Sometimes she has successes – a magistrate willing to bend the rules and let her speak, who sympathises with the need to strike a balance between keeping the community safe and ensuring good outcomes for young people. She also finds it exasperating that she hits so many roadblocks in trying to build a picture of the lives of the children facing court.

“Information-sharing makes sense – but so often you have to work so hard, to fight, to get a collaboration going,” Krieg says. “On top of that, I want to keep kids out of detention.

“Police want to uphold their practice and responsibility to community safety, and they need to charge and lock up under their procedures to do that. So we have two systems working in direct competition and there’s only one of me doing this.”