

At-risk Aboriginal youths 'returning to country' in crime reduction strategy

[ABC Mid West & Wheatbelt](#) / By Chris Lewis and Sebastian Neuweiler

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The boys return from a kangaroo hunt at the Murchison settlement. *(ABC News: Chris Lewis)*

A new program has reconnected a group of at-risk Aboriginal youths to the remote outback of Western Australia, in the hope of keeping them out of the juvenile justice system.

Ten boys aged between 12 and 17 have been taken into the heart of the Murchison,

about 660 kilometres north-east of Perth, as part of the City of Greater Geraldton's crime prevention initiative, the U-Turn Project.

Since the project began earlier this year, more than 200 at-risk youth have been involved in [activities — including a demolition derby](#) — with the five-day bush campout the latest initiative.

The camp was based at the Murchison Settlement, but the boys visit several stations including Wooleen and Mt Narryer.

During the camp they were taught how to hunt for kangaroos, set traps for dingoes, ride horses and even muster swans.

The city's youth development officer, Jesse Steele, said it was a chance for the boys to get away from some of the pressures they were facing at home.

Geraldton police are also partners in the project, and Mr Steele said Aboriginal liaison officers (ALO) Bobby Pepper and Charlie Comeagain were essential in both leading and acting as role models for the kids.

"It's impossible to run a return to country trip without people who have connection to land, so it was important we partnered with Yamajti people to effectively lead this trip," he said.

Project important in 'building and repairing relationships'

Mr Pepper said the boys' response to the camp was incredible.

"It was amazing for these kids to see where their old ancestors had been," he said.

"How their little eyes lit up when you tell them a yarn or they see something.

"It is a rare thing for a couple of police officers to hang out with kids out in the bush for a week, but hopefully we get to see a lot more of this."

Local youth crime prevention officer Simone Mahoney said the collaborative project was important in building and repairing relationships between troubled youths and local authorities.

She said it was also important to give the teens something to do.

"If you're sitting around and you got no one checking in on you, nothing to do, you're going to get bored, and when boys get bored they get up to mischief," she said.

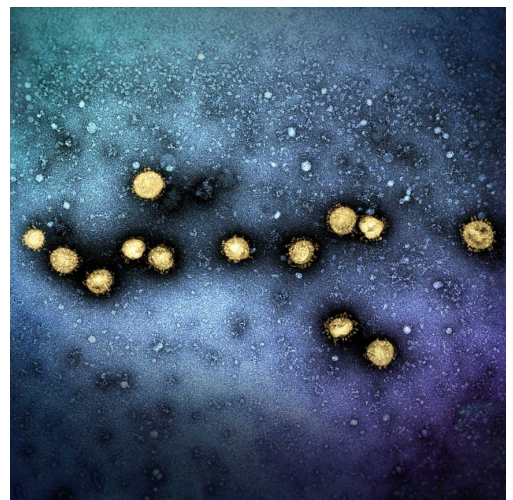
"So get them out of town, give them something to do."

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