

AbSec



# MOUNTY Aboriginal Youth & Community Services

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Deadly Practice Case Study

June 2026

## Acknowledgement of Country

AbSec acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout New South Wales and their continuing connections to land, waters, and communities. Our head office is located on the land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, in Redfern, and AbSec operates statewide.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across New South Wales, honouring Elders past, present, and future.

We recognise and respect their enduring connection to Country, their ongoing care for community, and the preservation and practice of their culture for generations uncounted.

We acknowledge the Elders, leaders and advocates within our sector and pay our respects to them as knowledge holders within this space and every space.

AbSec also acknowledge the Stolen Generations who never came home and the ongoing impact of government policy and practice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.



# AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community  
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

AbSec is the peak organisation advocating for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities in New South Wales (NSW).

As an Aboriginal-led organisation, we champion self-determination and work towards a child and family system that is culturally safe, community-driven, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AbSec leads policy reform, strengthens the capacity of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain connected to family, community, and culture. We are a key member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the primary organisation responsible for Target 12 under Closing the Gap.

Through advocacy, research, and sector leadership, AbSec works to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC) and promote holistic, community-led approaches to child and family wellbeing. Our commitment is to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up strong in culture, identity, and connection.

Our vision is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving families and communities, raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture, and surrounded by holistic supports.

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities
- underpinning the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children, young people, families and carers
- being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control in delivering outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities
- committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive.

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## Deadly Practice Case Study

# Community Context: Mount Druitt, Darug Country

Mount Druitt is on Darug Country in Western Sydney. From the late 1960s onward, Aboriginal families from across NSW were taken and resettled through settler-colonial government policies. As a result of this a community has formed with many mobs and many Countries who have called Mount Druitt home across generations. The history of displacement and resettlement is central to understanding both the real challenges the community faces and the extraordinary strength that has grown from it.

For decades, Aboriginal young people in Mount Druitt have been disproportionately targeted by the system, over-represented in youth justice and out-of-home care, and without culturally safe services. Community members describe a pattern of over-surveillance from the system: removal, out-of-home care, bail conditions, check-ins at all hours, racial profiling, and encounters with systems that treated young people as problems to manage rather than people with futures worth investing in.

Community leader, Aunty Lizzie, who has lived in Mount Druitt since 1979, describes the gap that existed before MAYCS clearly:



*“When my son and other’s sons were going through the systems, we had no one. We had no one or nowhere to turn to. There was no Aboriginal youth service. There was no Aboriginal-specific place or organisation to help. You were lucky if you got a good worker.”*

*— Aunty Lizzie, Community leader and MAYCS founding member*

As Youth Engagement Coordinator Isaiah, who was born and raised there puts it, the community brings people from different mobs, different Countries, and different backgrounds together in a way that is “completely different” from anywhere else in Sydney. Mouny is a community formed by people who are “very good because we’ve all gone through the same stuff out here.”

That sense of shared experience, care for each other, and belonging across mobs is the very foundation Mouny Aboriginal Youth & Community Services (MAYCS) was built on.

# Mounty Aboriginal Youth & Community Services

## Origins

MAYCS grew from the Mt DrUITT Justice Reinvestment initiative, supported by Just Reinvest NSW. Justice Reinvestment in Mt DrUITT focused on bringing Aboriginal young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system together to tell their own stories and shape their own solutions through the Mounty Yarns project.

Mounty Yarns is a youth-led project that gathered stories, expertise and knowledge by and from Aboriginal young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system about the impacts of the criminal justice system. Young people created advocacy resources, including a film, a trailer and a report, to reflect the experiences, strengths and resilience of Aboriginal young people growing up in Mt DrUITT and the changes they want to see to create a better future for their families and community. Young people are using the resources to advocate for change in their community.



Artwork by Oumoula Mckenzie for Mounty Yarns

Aunty Julie, a proud Gamilaroi woman who has lived in Mounty her whole life, was pivotal in the creation of MAYCS. Aunty Julie came in when her daughter became a youth ambassador through the Justice Reinvestment initiative. Her experience as a parent trying to find support for a child being targeted across systems – too young for most services, not yet in formal contact with the law – mirrors the stories of families all across the area. “There was nothing specifically for our kids,” she says. “Nothing for our youth. We’re targeted, and there was nowhere for our kids to go to get the assistance that was culturally safe.”

It was clear from Mounty Yarns, what young people wanted was: an ACCO based in Mt Druitt, that was truly led by and for its young people, one where the community held the power, and where the people doing the work were the same ones who had lived through the systems.

## What MAYCS Does

MAYCS is a youth-led, community-controlled organisation based in the heart of Mount Druitt. It provides a culturally safe space where Aboriginal young people and their families can come for support, connection, and programs that young people themselves have shaped and continue to lead. The whole approach is grounded in a simple, powerful truth: the people who have lived through the system are the most important voices in designing and leading something better.

At MAYCS, community members can simply come through the door. Nobody is turned away. That open-door approach is itself a form of cultural safety, it removes the gatekeeping that too often keeps Aboriginal families from services that are technically available but practically out of reach.

Programs and activities developed through MAYCS include:

- Cultural Days and connection to Country and cultural identity
- Sporting programs including rugby league teams that MAYCS helps sponsor
- A gym program for young women
- School outreach and programs for young people in schools
- Support into employment and pathways, including through the Youth Ambassador program
- Programs and support with young people in juvenile detention centres and correctional centres
- Community fines action planning and bail support
- A Learner Driver Mentors Program supporting young people to obtain their licence

Youth Ambassador, Taite, sums it up: “We don’t see kids with problems. We see kids with potential.” Recognising young people as capable, as future leaders, as people whose lived experience is a strength not a deficit runs through everything MAYCS does.

## The Youth Ambassador Model

At the heart of MAYCS is its Youth Ambassador model. Young people who have been through harmful systems are employed and supported to walk alongside the younger mob coming up behind them.

Isaiah first encountered MAYCS through Justice Reinvestment workers while he was in juvenile detention. He is now in his fifth year with the organisation and was its second ever youth ambassador for Mount Druitt. He talks about what drove him with real warmth: “I just decided to work here because I met Dan and never really had a positive role model in my life, a father figure, role model, big brother, all in one. He made me want to work with the younger brothers and make life a bit easier for the ones coming up from behind us.”

Dillon grew up in Mount Druitt and started as an ambassador in 2023. He says his motivation was simple, “this is the neighbourhood I grew up in, seeing the struggle here. I just want to give back to my community.”

Tyrell, a Youth Ambassador with MAYCS, brings a similar perspective. Having walked a similar road to the young people MAYCS works with, he says “I’ve had similar experiences growing up, so I understand some of the challenges they face. I don’t want to see them go down the wrong path. I’m here to support them, listen to them, and encourage them to make good decisions.” Rayshawn, a Youth Ambassador with MAYCS, describes what drew him to the organisation “I had help when I was younger, but it wasn’t this prioritised with the kids. Being there to make a difference for other kids, when I didn’t have it – that worked out good for me.”

The result is an organisation where young people coming through the door see workers who look like them, who have been through what they’ve been through, and who are standing on the other side of it.



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## What Makes Mouny

### Community Controlled from the Ground Up

MAYCS is, as Dillon describes it, “the first ever Aboriginal Community Controlled youth service built in this community and with this community.” That distinction matters deeply. Community control means the people most affected by the organisation’s work are the very people deciding what that work looks like.

Government-funded services, even well-intentioned ones, can require communities to squeeze into predetermined program models, reporting frameworks, and eligibility criteria. MAYCS is being built to be completely different: flexible, organic, and responsive to what the community says it needs, not what government or funding guideline think it should need.



*“For it to work, it’s got to be led by kids and people who are going through it, and it’s got to be Aboriginal led.”*

*— Aunty Lizzie, Community leader and MAYCS founding member*

### Lived Experience as Expertise

Almost every worker at MAYCS brings something no formal qualification can replace: direct, personal knowledge of what it is like to grow up in Mount Druitt, to be impacted by racist systems, by the youth justice and out-of-home care systems and to try to navigate services and systems that were not built for you.

Taite came to MAYCS first as someone seeking support and ended up being employed. She describes the difference with real feeling: “Everyone is so genuine. It’s all coming from the heart, coming from lived experience, coming with intent, not just getting things done.” It is the way MAYCS works – “We heal through helping. We help through healing.”

That authenticity is not a nice extra. It is how MAYCS builds trust. Young people who have been let down repeatedly can read a worker going through the motions from a mile away. It is much easier to work with someone who has genuinely been where you are and found a way through.



*“Mouny listens to the kids and takes on the kids who are going through the issues, are going through the systems ... They give back to community.”*

*— Aunty Lizzie, Community leader and MAYCS founding member*



Artwork by Oumoula Mckenzie for Mouny Yarns

## Young People as Decision-Makers

MAYCS does not just employ young people with lived experience as service providers. It recognises them as the experts. Young people design programs, advocate for change in the systems that affect them, and lead the organisation's strategic direction. Their voice is not a token consultation, it's the whole point.

Multiple workers spoke independently about why this matters:

“

*“There’s a difference between hearing it from an older person with knowledge and hearing it from a young person that’s been through it at such a young age. It’s powerful.”*

— Dillon, MAYCS

“

*“Young people know the solutions to the problems. The problems affect them and they live the life, they go through it every day. What better person knows than the people who live it daily?”*

— Isaiah, MAYCS

“

*“They’re the next generation. They’re going to be the Elders of the future. You want to let them lead so they can lead the younger kids after them.”*

— Rayshawn, MAYCS

## A Second Family

In every conversation, the same word came up unprompted to describe MAYCS: family. Isaiah says it is “like a second family where I come in, be myself, and if I need help, the help is here.” Rayshawn reflects that he would not have called many of these people family before, but now he does. Tyrell says, “The kids are very comfortable here at work because it feels like a family environment. They know they’re supported, respected, and can be themselves, which helps build trust and positive relationships.”

That sense of belonging is not accidental, and it is not just a warm feeling. For young people who have lived through the instability of out-of-home care, youth justice, or family disruption, a consistent, caring, and culturally safe place to return to is one of the most powerful protective factors there is. It is the kind of thing that genuinely changes where a life goes.



## No Turning Away

MAYCS’s open-door approach is a direct, practical response to the way mainstream services consistently fail to reach the young people who need them most. Aunty Julie explains it simply: “We’re not restricted. You don’t have to be referred to come here to get help or support. A community member can just come, and we don’t like to turn anyone away.”

Throughout the preparation of this case study, the open door approach was consistently reinforced as crucial. When you have spent years having to prove your need, fill in forms, be assessed by strangers, and sit on waiting lists, the ability to simply walk through a door and be welcomed is genuinely profound.

## Deadly Practice Case Study

# Mouny and AbSec's Aboriginal Youth-Led Forum

In May 2026, MAYCS and AbSec undertook a project to bring together an Aboriginal Youth-led Forum. This event was the first in New South Wales where Aboriginal young people with lived experience of the out-of-home care system stood up in front of community, ACCOs, government, and sector partners to share their knowledge and expertise and to drive real change.



### The Forum

The AbSec Quarterly Sector Youth Forum was held on 19 and 20 May 2026 on Bidjigal land, at the Prince Henry Centre in Little Bay, NSW. The forum put the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at the centre of system change conversations. The forum's artwork was created by Oumoula Mckenzie for Mouny Yarns, weaving MAYCS's identity into the very fabric of the event.

Day One centred lived experience, cultural care, and system change. Sessions explored:

- Lived experience perspectives from Aboriginal young people on the out-of-home care system
- What needs to change in out-of-home care
- Cultural care, including grief, loss, and Sorry Business
- Aftercare, restoration, and what it means to exit care
- Future directions for policy and reform

Day Two focused on strengthening community and shaping practical next steps, with sessions covering:

- Rights and advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Key updates on out-of-home care system reform
- Housing and support pathways for young people leaving care
- Intergenerational advocacy and shared knowledge



The forum was free, and travel, accommodation, and meals support was offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from right across NSW through an Expression of Interest process. That practical support for participation reflects the same principle that underpins everything MAYCS does: removing barriers so that the people whose voices matter most are actually in the room.

The forum was supported by the Cages Foundation, the Pastel Foundation, MacKillop Family Services, Legal Aid NSW, Act for Kids, Youth Action NSW and the NSW Office for Youth, a broad coalition that speaks to how widely the sector recognises the power of youth voice and lived experience leadership.





## Why This Forum Matters for the Sector

The forum is Deadly Practice at a systemic level. It is not just about celebrating one organisation. It is about what becomes possible when young people with lived experience are not just consulted, but genuinely lead.

Every worker at MAYCS spoke with real conviction about what a youth-led forum on out-of-home care would mean. Isaiah gets straight to it: “It’s needed, because most kids don’t know their rights. They don’t know what they’re entitled to ... if they knew all this stuff, they can back it up, help themselves, and not just themselves — help their family, help their future brothers and sisters, niece, nephews, whoever’s coming through the same system.” As Isaiah puts it, those young people deserve to know their rights and what they’re entitled to, so they “don’t get taken advantage of, or just walked over, or have their feelings and their rights chucked to the side.”

Aunty Julie speaks to the systemic importance simply and directly, saying “our young people, who we work with, who have that lived experience — they can share and yarn what their lived experience is and what they would like to see change within systems.”



Taite speaks to what it means for young people to see their voice valued at a sector level, “for youth to believe and see how valuable they are ... can really reinforce their ambitions and the way they see themselves, and where they can take themselves.” She traces her own turning point to the moment she was “exposed to more opportunities and people who can create change.”



*“You don’t have to play with the cards you’ve been dealt. You can change that. You can reshuffle the deck.”*

— Taite, Youth Ambassador, MAYCS

Rayshawn puts the forum’s purpose plainly, saying that the out-of-home care system needs to be understood not only by the young people who have been through it, but by the adults and carers who are part of that same system. “The out-of-home care system needs to be taught a lot more — not just to kids, but to adults as well, for the ones that take in kids.”

Tyrell is clear about what he hopes those in attendance do with what young people share, “It’s for our young people, especially those in care or involved in the youth justice system, having a culturally safe space where they feel seen, heard, and valued is incredibly important. It gives them an opportunity to share their experiences, connect with their identity, and speak openly about what they’re going through. Equally important is that those listening do so with respect and understanding, taking those stories and lessons away to strengthen the support they provide and help create better outcomes for our young people and their communities.”



# Deadly Practice Case Study

## Challenges and Calls to Action

### Funding and Flexibility

MAYCS has grown from a single worker to a team of more than sixteen people. That growth reflects just how deep the need is, and how much the community trusts what is being built. What hasn't kept pace is the funding. Across every conversation, workers and community members came back to it: adequate, flexible, secure funding is the biggest thing standing between MAYCS and what it could fully become.

The ask is not just for more money. It is for funding that trusts community-controlled organisations to work in their own way to deliver what matters, to design programs and support that fit their community rather than a reporting template, and to be recognised as the experts they are. As Aunty Lizzie puts it, "we need to be able to do things organically, be able to do programs that we need, that we know will work. So look at the guidelines and give us a bit of leeway, because we know exactly what works."

Dillon is simple about it, saying that "any sort of funding will help because it goes to the community at the end of the day." Rayshawn is just as direct, saying "we don't get funded nowhere near enough. If we want to expand and take more kids – like we're trying to do – we need more funding for that."

### Land and Infrastructure

MAYCS has already outgrown its current premises. When community members talk about what they dream of building, the vision is wide and generous: a big Youth Centre where community can gather and events can happen, animal therapy programs, on-site mental health support, and dedicated space where mob can come together on their own terms.



*"I'd like to see us expand. We've grown too big for this office already. We need a space where we can hold community events, community functions, sporting events, all the different things. But mainly just to continue to grow and to provide the services that are long overdue."*

*— Aunty Lizzie, Community leader and MAYCS founding member*



*"Walk hand in hand with us through Mount Druitt instead of trying to do everything down their own way. Come work with us instead of against us."*

*— Isaiah, MAYCS*

## Changing the Narrative

Every person interviewed pushed back, firmly and with love for their community, on how Mount Druitt and its young people are portrayed. The community is not what the news says it is. The young people are not how the system has portrayed them, and their work continues to challenge those harmful narratives.



*"We're not all criminals. Don't always believe what you hear on the news ... There's a lot more to Mount Druitt than they make us out to be."*

— Isaiah, MAYCS



*"It's not as bad as people think ... It's a very family-orientated community. It's very good."*

— Rayshawn, MAYCS



*"A lot of the time, if we are struggling, especially for mob and youth in general, there are always assumptions. Never any sympathy or empathy and actually wanting to make the difference. Just assumptions ... approach things with more open-mindedness."*

— Taite, Youth Ambassador, MAYCS



*"Just take your time out of your life and come learn about our culture in Mount Druitt and in MAYCS. Get to know us."*

— Dillon, MAYCS

# Deadly Practice Case Study

## Looking Forward

Mounity Aboriginal Youth & Community Services has not finished their work. It is a living, growing movement, still discovering how far it can reach. Workers spoke of their experiences working in schools, jails and aspirations of reaching every young person regardless of age, gender, or circumstance that would like support. They talked about mentorship pathways, better mental health support on site, and one day to have the physical infrastructure to match the size of what they are trying to build and what the community needs.

What is clear is that MAYCS deserves genuine, sustained investment, not because it fits a predetermined model of what an Aboriginal youth service should look like, but because it built something outside those models and it is working.

Aunty Lizzie's message to anyone watching, reading, or weighing up whether to support MAYCS is: "By saving one kid, you save many kids. You save their families. You help many people. And you build strong leaders. That's what you're going to do. You're going to build a lot of strong leaders."



*"Be the person you needed when you were younger. Just keep believing that you're going to become that person, and you will."*

— Taite, Youth Ambassador, MAYCS



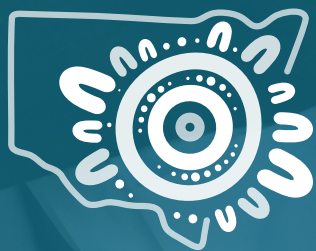
# Deadly Practice Case Study

## Key Information

Organisation	Mounty Aboriginal Youth & Community Services (MAYCS)
Also Known As	Mounty, or Mounty Yarns
Location	Mount Druitt, Western Sydney, Darug Country (NSW)
Organisation Type	Youth-led Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)
Established	2020 (first worker); grown to 14+ staff
Links	<a href="#">JustReinvest NSW – Mt Druitt</a> <a href="#">Mounty Yarns Film (YouTube)</a> <a href="#">AbSec Quarterly Sector Youth Forum – May 2026</a>

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*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document contains references to experiences of the criminal justice system, out-of-home care, and systemic disadvantage. All quotes are drawn from de-identified interviews with MAYCS workers and community members.*



# AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community  
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

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