

Staying at Home

Understanding the social value of the *Staying at Home* pilot

November 2022



Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa



Acknowledgement

SVA acknowledges Martu people and pay respect to Martu elders past, present, and emerging.

SVA would also like to acknowledge the participation of Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa employees who took time to provide thoughtful and thorough input, contributing to the strong evidence base critical to this analysis.

Professional Disclosure statement

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) have prepared this report in good faith on the basis of our research and information available to us at the date of publication, without any independent verification. Information has been obtained from sources that we believe to be reliable and up to date, but SVA do not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the information. The information in the report is general in nature and is not intended to and should not be used or relied upon by readers as the basis for any strategic, business, financial, tax, accounting, legal or regulatory decisions.

This report was prepared by SVA for the use and benefit of our client only and for the purpose for which it was provided. This report must not be disclosed to any third parties or reproduced by third parties without SVA's written consent. SVA does not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternate purpose from which it was intended, nor to any third party in respect of this report.

©Social Ventures Australia Limited, 2022

This report has been prepared by Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to alleviate disadvantage – towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning about what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives and advocating for change.

SVA Consulting is Australia's leading not-for-profit consultancy. We focus solely on social impact and work with partners to increase their capacity to create positive change. Thanks to more than 15 years of working with not-for-profits, government and funders, we have developed a deep understanding of the sector and 'what works'.

Our team is passionate about what they do and use their diverse experience to work together to solve Australia's most pressing challenges.

This report has been authored by SVA Consulting by Simon Faivel (a level 3 Social Value and SROI Advanced Practitioner and Accredited Trainer) and Alison Kwok. Based on the scope and budget for this report, it has not been submitted to Social Value International for external assurance.

For more information contact us:

consulting@socialventures.com.au

Contents

About this report	3
Summary of insights	4
About the issue	7
About the Pilot	9
Project approach	11
Outcomes from the Pilot	12
Insights	20

About this report

Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa and Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation commissioned Social Ventures Australia Consulting to understand the social outcomes created by the *Staying at Home* pilot (Pilot).

This report presents the key outcomes that have been observed as a result of the Pilot between April 2021 and September 2022.¹ The report describes those outcomes and presents detailed examples of the changes that have taken place for Martu as a result of the infrastructure and advocacy support provided by the Pilot.

¹ While the Pilot period was intended to span over one year, early delays in the first six months associated with infrastructure installation, staffing and COVID extended the implementation period.

Summary of insights

About the issue

Australia is moving to a digital world where access to services, transactions and opportunities increasingly rely on an individual's ability to access and engage with digital platforms. While governments, corporates and communities acknowledge the benefits and necessity of this progress, many also recognise a growing divide between mainstream Australia and sections of the community who do not have the infrastructure or ability to engage with a digital world.

Martu living in remote communities do not have equal access to fundamental services such as banking, telecommunication, or government support. Their barriers to access are many. They include geographical remoteness; lack of infrastructure; challenges with language literacy, digital literacy, and process literacy; as well as a lack of access to identification documents.

The culmination of these barriers excludes Martu from mainstream society and from the services, supports and opportunities they are entitled to as Australian citizens.

About the Staying at Home Pilot

The Pilot is an infrastructure and service advocacy solution for Martu. It aims to help Martu in remote communities connect with vital services and undertake basic transactions by providing high quality digital capability and advocacy support thereby dispensing with the need to travel long distances to Newman and beyond. BHP invested \$500,000 into the Pilot.

Outcomes observed

1

Martu have more dignity and agency

The Pilot bridges part of the digital divide between Martu and the rest of Australia. Digital infrastructure has improved connectivity and human navigation and advocacy support has helped Martu overcome literacy challenges. The Pilot has provided the opportunity and support that Martu need to better control their personal affairs.

2

Martu experience less stress and negative mental health impacts

Being unable to reliably access money, services or meet court mandated reporting obligations is stressful. The stress is compounded when there is no support. The Pilot has provided a reliable and safe option for Martu to conduct business directly from community with the benefit of human support working alongside them.

3

Martu can advocate, navigate, and have more equitable access

The Pilot has improved Martu's ability to access services. Importantly, human support has helped Martu navigate complex and fractured systems and advocate for their needs. A key example is the increase in access to legal advice that the Pilot has enabled through new video conferencing capabilities.

- 4 Martu can claim financial entitlements**

Applications to claim and manage financial entitlements such as income tax returns, Centrelink or superannuation invariably require navigation of digital platforms. The Pilot is supporting Martu to claim those entitlements.
- 5 Martu avoid risks associated with travelling to Newman**

Martu consistently associate prison, police, court, fighting, alcohol and drugs with their experience of Newman. It is typically where destructive cycles plaguing Martu families worsen. The Pilot has allowed Martu to access services and complete transactions in community hence reducing the need for to travel to Newman.
- 6 Freed up time and resources for KJ**

Martu rely on KJ to help them overcome barriers to accessing services and completing transactions. A significant amount of KJ staff time is therefore directed to advocacy and transaction support despite receiving no funding to fill that role. By funding dedicated personnel in communities and reducing the cost of travel to Newman, the Pilot has helped free up KJ time and resources.

Key insights

This report identifies four key insights about the Pilot:

- 1 Digital infrastructure alone is insufficient - human navigation and advocacy support is critical to improve access**

More reliable internet and internet connection is insufficient to help Martu overcome the multifaceted literacy challenges they face. Without human support, infrastructure alone does little to help Martu overcome barriers.
- 2 The Pilot has not only helped Martu complete basic transactions, it has also demonstrated opportunities for system-wide improvements**

The Pilot has opened opportunities for system-wide improvements, particularly in the justice system. Martu can better advocate for communities, have access to lawyers and avoid travel to town as witnessing documents and court hearings can be done virtually.
- 3 Closing the digital divide to enable basic access to services and transactions has a profound impact on Martu lives**

While many Pilot transactions have been commonplace (e.g., banking), it is important to emphasise the profound impact they have on Martu’s lives and the disadvantage they cause when they cannot be easily completed.

4**Moving to an online self-service model leaves a support gap for those left behind and organisations like KJ are bearing the cost of filling that gap**

With the lack of support being offered to access services in this new digital world, people like Martu increasingly rely on trusted community organisations like KJ to fill that gap. Those organisations are not funded to fill that role and ultimately bear the cost as they invariably need to do so to ensure their communities' basic needs are met.

About the issue

Australia is moving to a digital world where access to services, transactions and opportunities increasingly rely on an individual's ability to access and engage with digital platforms.

The Australian government has committed to making all services available online by 2025, meaning critical supports that vulnerable communities rely on will be accessed and managed digitally.² The private sector is also increasingly moving their transactions online.

While governments, corporates and communities acknowledge the benefits and necessity of this progress, many also recognise a growing digital divide between mainstream Australia and sections of our community who do not have the infrastructure or capability to engage with a digital world.

Indeed, recent digital inclusion research identified that 11 per cent of Australians (approximately 2.8 million people) are considered "highly excluded" from digital services, meaning they do not have access to affordable internet or do not know how to use it.³ Among this cohort, remote Aboriginal communities experience this exclusion particularly severely.

"Remote First Nations communities have some of the worst digital access and affordability rates in Australia" – Telstra⁴

Martu living in remote communities do not have equal access to fundamental services such as banking, telecommunications or government support.

Martu live in one of the most remote places in the world and are physically removed from services and the infrastructure needed to access supports and basic transactions. For instance, to activate a new bankcard, Martu often need to travel for multiple days to Perth, Port Hedland or Newman and back.

In addition to geographical remoteness, Martu also face the following barriers, which significantly contribute to their exclusion from the digital world and mainstream society:

- **Infrastructure** – Remote Martu communities do not have telecommunication infrastructure to provide reliable internet and phone connection. There are also no computers in Martu homes. While Martu rely heavily on mobile phones, the turnover of these phones is extremely high in remote communities. The overreliance on mobile phones also creates barriers to developing digital skills needed for work and learning.
- **Literacy** – Martu's literacy challenges are multifaceted. Firstly, for many Martu, English is not their first language and reading comprehension is poor. There is therefore an immediate language barrier to engaging with services. Secondly, Martu experience challenges with digital literacy, which refers to an ability to use technologies to find, use and disseminate information.⁵ As noted above, while Martu are fluent in using mobile phones, navigating more complex online platforms such as MyGov or MyAgedCare are far more challenging. Thirdly, Martu face what may be referred to as challenges with 'whitefella'⁶ process literacy'. This refers to

² Australian Government Digital Government Strategy 2018-2025.

³ Measuring Australia's Digital Divide, Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2021. Available: <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/download-reports/>.

⁴ Telstra Exchange, 'The communities in Australia where digital inclusion is going backwards', 1 May 2022, Available: <https://exchange.telstra.com.au/the-communities-in-australia-where-digital-inclusion-is-going-backwards/>.

⁵ Deakin University, available: <https://www.deakin.edu.au/library/teaching-resources/digital-literacy>.

⁶ Martu characterise Western society and mainstream systems, government and organisations as 'whitefellas'.

an understanding of how mainstream systems and bureaucracy functions. Digital self-service requires a higher level of process literacy than attending an office for human assistance.

- *Identification documents* – Mainstream processes heavily operate on the assumption that individuals have easy access to photo identification, and this is increasingly so as the world moves online. Very few Martu have passports or drivers' licences and the advocacy processes to obtain identification are complex and often require travel to town.

The culmination of these barriers – geographical remoteness, limited infrastructure, poor literacy and a lack of identification – result in Martu experiencing significant and increasing exclusion from society as well as from the services, supports and opportunities they are entitled to as Australian citizens.

It is important to remember that there are profound social, cultural and economic reasons why Martu want to live in remote communities.

Martu want to live in remote communities away from town where drugs, alcohol and violence are abundant. Desert communities are where Martu are close to traditional lands and where they can fulfil deep cultural obligations to look after country and family. It is where many Martu feel safe and want to live, and where many social and economic outcomes are realised.

“We don't want our people to go back in town. No. Out here, there is a future out here, and it's very important” – Martu community member

Furthermore, economic studies have estimated significant government cost savings that flow from comparatively modest investments in remote Martu communities. Those investments support Martu to continue living in remote communities instead of moving to Newman, where there is much higher risk of negative health and policing impacts. These impacts also attract significant costs to the economy.⁷

⁷ Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 'Investment in Very Remote Communities, A Cost Benefit Analysis', October 2018.

About the Pilot

The Pilot is an infrastructure and service advocacy solution for Martu

The Pilot aims to help Martu in remote communities connect with vital services and undertake basic transactions by providing high quality digital capability and advocacy support thereby dispensing with the need to travel long distances to Newman and beyond.

BHP invested \$500,000 into the Pilot which funded both the installation of digital infrastructure in Kunawarritji, Parnngurr and Punmu (~70% of investment) as well as the wages of advocate staff based in those communities who support Martu to undertake transactions (~30% of investment).

The Pilot was launched in April 2021 with an intended operational period of one year.

The Pilot has supported Martu to undertake approximately 300 transactions

Between April 2021 and September 2022, the Pilot has supported Martu with approximately 300 transactions. The breadth of transaction types and numbers are summarised in the table below.

Transaction type (ordered by value/importance to Martu)	Number
Wangka Minyirra meetings: a “Martu Court” where community members meet via video conference to discuss options to divert Martu from custodial sentences to community-based programs. The outcome of these meetings are taken into account by the Magistrate.	13
Court procedural matters: Virtual meetings with lawyers for advice before court hearings and communications with court on procedural matters (e.g., request delayed court dates).	56
Corrective services: Meeting regular court reporting requirements.	13
Extraordinary Drivers Licences: Video link with Justice of the Peace to virtually witness documents and virtual attendance at court hearings for EDL applications.	29
Estates: Advocacy support to help Martu navigate intestate processes.	9
Attending board meetings: Video link to attend KJ board meetings virtually.	6
Income tax returns: Advocacy support connects Martu with tax agents to log tax returns.	6
Banking: Advocacy support to help Martu with internet/phone banking.	49
Birth, death, marriage: Advocacy support to help Martu prepare paperwork.	8
Police reporting: Communications with police to make or answer enquiries.	15
Licencing (cars and drivers): Advocacy support to help Martu prepare paperwork.	36
Medicare: Advocacy support to help Martu apply for Medicare card.	6
Online purchasing: Support Martu to purchase items online that they cannot access in community (e.g., new vehicles).	15
KJ pay issues: Support Martu to process pay deductions.	35
Total	296

Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ) was funded to implement the Pilot

KJ is a Martu organisation created in 2005 to achieve three objectives: to preserve Martu culture; to build a viable, sustainable economy in Martu communities; and to build realistic pathways for young Martu to a healthy and prosperous future.

In addressing these high-level objectives, KJ runs a suite of cultural, environmental and social programs in Martu communities and in Newman. These programs address a diverse array of issues and include many aspects of cultural knowledge preservation, a substantial ranger program and associated land management programs and programs addressing a myriad social issues including early childhood and adult education, reduction of incarceration, substance abuse and governance.

These programs seek to provide employment while preserving the deep Martu relationship with their country, maintaining the natural and cultural values of that country, creating greater Martu capacity to engage with Western agencies and developing Martu-led approaches to entrenched social problems.

Due to the dominant focus on preservation of the natural and cultural values of Martu country, KJ's programs are directed predominantly, although not exclusively, to Martu living in or near the Martu native title determination.

Project approach

Scope

This report considers the social outcomes that have been observed as a result of the Pilot's activities between April 2021 and September 2022. It is important to note that while the time period considered in this report spans across 18 months, the program experienced significant delays early in its implementation due to challenges in infrastructure installation and staffing in remote communities. COVID-19 also impacted on project implementation. As such, the 18 month period is more reflective of a 12 month implementation period.

Data collection

This report focusses on the outcomes created from BHP's initial \$500,000 investment. Based on the size of the investment, the time period of the Pilot and the nature of the Pilot taking place in remote country, the report relies on data collected by KJ staff (as opposed to independent data collection undertaken by evaluators). KJ staff have been overtly applying the Social Value principles in their work for the past decade, and therefore the data collected is aligned with Martu values and beliefs.

To record data, KJ staff collected information on the type of transaction, where they were providing that support and who they were providing that support to. The data was consistently recorded by KJ Pilot staff over the Pilot period and stored in a central repository. In addition to quantitative data, this report also relied on the qualitative observational data of KJ staff who have been at the forefront of the Pilot's implementation. They have personally observed the outcomes and opportunities that the Pilot has created and those insights have been captured in this report.

Outcomes from the Pilot

Six key outcomes have been observed as a result of the Pilot. Five have been experienced by Martu with the sixth primarily experienced by KJ.

1	Martu have more dignity and agency
2	Martu experience less stress and mental health impacts
3	Martu can advocate, navigate, and have more equitable access
4	Martu can claim financial entitlements
5	Martu avoid risks associated with travelling to Newman
6	Freed up time and resources for KJ

It is important to also emphasise that the Pilot outcomes experienced by Martu stakeholders align with the 12 outcomes that Martu identified as important to them and their communities in KJ's 10 year impact study, *'Think Martu. Think Differently. Act Differently'*.⁸ Those outcomes are:

1. **Ngurra** – Looking after and caring for country
2. **Wangka** – Keeping language strong
3. **Ninti** – Learning from and respecting old people
4. **Walyja** – Looking after kids and family
5. **Kujungkarrini** – Unity and harmony between Martu
6. **Strong communities** – Making community strong with high standard of living
7. **Confidence** – Building confidence through two-way learning
8. **Back to community** – Getting people out of town, out of prison and back to community
9. **Respect** – Better respect and relationship with 'whitefellas'
10. **Work** – Work and training
11. **Health** – Being healthy
12. **Safety**

The Pilot outcomes align strongly with and delivers on three of the 12 outcomes that are important to Martu. Firstly, the Pilot delivers directly on outcome *six* as it improves the infrastructure of remote

⁸ SVA Consulting, *'Think Martu. Think Differently. Act Differently.'*, 2021, Available at <https://www.kj.org.au/our-impact>.

communities and with it, the connectivity and access to services that is now possible from home. The Pilot also contributes to outcome *eight* as the improved community infrastructure reduces the need for Martu to travel back into town for basic transactions. It is worth noting that in the 10 year impact study, Martu reported outcomes six and eight as two outcomes requiring particular improvement.

Finally, the Pilot also delivers on outcome *nine*. Fundamentally, the Pilot helps to bridge the digital and societal gap between Martu and ‘whitefellas’. It does so by bringing the digital world closer to Martu such that they can better engage with the ‘whitefella’ world and in so doing, access the services and opportunities that are available to the rest of Australia.

Each of the six Pilot outcomes are discussed in detail below.

1 Martu have more dignity and agency

As mainstream society moves online, the digital divide between Martu and the rest of Australia will grow. Practically, this means Martu will increasingly have less control over their personal affairs and their ability to access support, claim entitlements and engage in opportunities will gradually erode. Ultimately, this means Martu living in remote communities have less dignity and agency in their lives.

The Pilot addresses this issue by bringing the digital world and the opportunities it affords, closer to Martu. In so doing, the Pilot bridges part of the digital divide between Martu in remote communities and the rest of Australia. The installation of digital infrastructure has improved connectivity in communities and human support has helped Martu overcome language, digital and process literacy challenges to access what they need. The Pilot has provided the opportunity and support that Martu need to better conduct basic personal affairs on their own terms.

“You can see a transaction like internet banking and you can order Medicare or other stuff, certificates. You can do anything. Even fines that we didn’t know how to do. Now we have transactions [the Pilot] so we can see what we need and what we want through the internet.” – Kunawarritji community member

There are two key examples of transactions that were made possible by the Pilot. The examples demonstrate how the Pilot has helped restore some dignity and agency to Martu.

Key example: Banking matters

Access to money is a basic precursor to dignity and agency. Banks are increasingly moving their transactions to an online banking model. Without reliable internet and the language, digital and process literacy required to navigate complicated online banking platforms, Martu cannot conduct basic banking matters online. Furthermore, while many banks have Indigenous phone lines, poor connectivity in remote communities means that option is often not feasible. In any case, Martu would still require support to properly understand the queries and requests being made to them by banking staff over telephone. Basic banking requirements such as ordering a new bank card or opening up a new bank account are therefore a stressful exercise for Martu.

With infrastructure improvements in communities, Martu have at least been able to reliably call banks to conduct some affairs. Critically, human advocacy and navigation support has helped enable more productive conversations between bank staff and Martu where Martu better understand the process, what is required of them and what they need to do to access their money. Between April 2021 and September 2022, Martu used the Pilot to conduct 49 banking related transactions from communities for 23 unique Martu individuals. Those transactions primarily related to simple issues such as ordering replacement cards or activating a new card. Despite the simplicity of these matters, it is likely that the majority of these issues would not have been resolved unless Martu physically attended a bank to

speak with bank staff and in these cases, they would still require a KJ staff member to provide support.

Key example: Wangka Minyirra

Wangka Minyirra supports a diversionary program that gives the Magistrate options to divert Martu away from prison to supported participation in a suite of programs in dry Martu communities. Wangka Minyirra is also known as the “Martu Court” and is where community members meet over video conference to discuss alternative community based sentencing options for Martu in prison. The community discuss particulars for a formal letter of support which is then sent to a lawyer for drafting and ultimately to the Magistrate for consideration as they review sentencing options.

Importantly, the effectiveness of Wangka Minyirra over the past year was only made possible through the Pilot. Without the infrastructure that enabled video conferencing, community members would need to travel long distances, which would impact on the feasibility, frequency and timeliness of those meetings. Since the Pilot started, there have been 13 Wangka Minyirra meetings convened to support Martu bail applications. 17 bail applications have been supported and 15 were successful. In addition, Wangka Minyirra was also instrumental in preparing support letters for four parole applications. As at September 2022 (the end of the time period considered by this report), one of those parole applications was successful with the remaining three still pending.

Wangka Minyirra demonstrates how the Pilot has created a new opportunity for Martu to take back some dignity and agency over how their family members experience the criminal justice system.

2 Martu experience less stress and negative mental health impacts

The experience of being unable to reliably access money, services or meet court mandated reporting obligations is stressful. This stress is compounded when the move to a self-service online model gradually reduces the expectation on governments and organisations to provide the support needed by vulnerable communities to access their services. The combined effect of both being unable to undertake basic transactions and the lack of support to do so has negative mental health impacts.

“I saw people experience stress in community because they could not access their money, had no way of accessing the bank, were in a community where nobody was ‘obliged’ to help. As we all learn more about stress and the role it plays in the body and the staggering impact it has on people’s lives, I think it becomes more understandable why people make the choices they make...”

– KJ staff member working in Kunawarritji

Beyond typical daily transactions such as banking and licencing, Martu also have substantially more high stress dealings with government than the average Australian, particularly with regards to criminal related matters.⁹ This means Martu have many reporting obligations to police, Department of Child Protection, courts and Correct Services. While Martu appreciate the weight of these obligations, the geographical remoteness and the lack of infrastructure in communities makes compliance difficult, which also contributes to the daily stress felt by Martu.

The Pilot has provided a reliable and safe option for Martu to better meet those reporting obligations and undertake basic life transactions without the need to travel long distances into town. Improved infrastructure presents a new option for Martu to connect with government services directly from

⁹ Reference a statistic about the % of Martu who have been arrested.

community with the benefit of human support working alongside them. Ultimately, this opportunity made available by the Pilot helps to alleviate some stress and reduce negative mental health impacts.

Key example: High stress criminal justice related transactions

Majority of Martu are involved in the criminal justice system.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this means that dealings with police, courts, corrective services and the Department of Child Protection are a part of life. These dealings require ongoing law enforcement related reporting and engagements that carry severe consequences. Before the Pilot, it was difficult for Martu to meet these obligations without multi-day trips into town. It is important to emphasise that town is a major source of trouble for Martu due to the availability of alcohol and drugs which cause violence and destructive behaviour.

Before the Pilot, Martu had limited means to meet their obligations and in many instances missed reporting deadlines or court hearings as a result. This is a significant source of stress for Martu. Over an 18 month period, the Pilot supported Martu to undertake 84 criminal justice related engagements. 56 of those related to procedural dealings with the court and lawyers, 13 were to meet court reporting obligations and 15 related to communications with police. The Pilot reduces mental health impacts for Martu as there is now a reliable option to meet obligations directly from community.

3 Martu can advocate, navigate, and have more equitable access

A lack of digital connectivity is a primary barrier to equity of access. Without reliable internet, Martu are physically excluded from services. Beyond digital connectivity, however, Martu also need to overcome the multi-layered literacy challenges discussed above – language, digital and process literacy. In this way, assuming Martu living in remote communities are able to access digital platforms, they are likely unable to navigate those portals let alone advocate for their own needs without further support directly from a person who understands the systems.

The Pilot adopts a two pronged approach to addressing this challenge. It has brought both digital connection to remote communities and perhaps more significantly, provided the human support needed to help Martu navigate those systems and advocate for their own needs.

“The ability for Martu to use a video call to speak to their lawyers before having to appear in court is hugely transformational”
 – KJ transaction records

Key example: Access to legal advice

As noted above, majority of Martu are known to the criminal justice system with many involved in ongoing court matters. Unfortunately, most Martu have limited to no access to legal advice. If Martu do engage with lawyers, it is typically only for a few minutes outside the courtroom immediately before appearing in court. The lack of access to legal advice is primarily due to an inability to physically connect with lawyers as well as language and process literacy barriers.

The Pilot created a way for Martu to access legal advice and in so doing, improved their capacity to advocate for themselves. Instead of a mere few minutes of legal advice prior to court hearings, the Pilot enabled 110 contacts with lawyers at 20 minutes each and 17 video link sessions with lawyers or court at 15 minutes each. It is therefore estimated that Martu received over 40 hours of legal advice over the course of the Pilot which is significantly more than they have previously had access to. These meetings also contributed significantly to more favourable outcomes for Martu in court applications.

¹⁰ Western Australia Police reported that over a four year period up to financial year 2017/2018, 80% of arrested adult offenders and 98% of arrested juvenile offenders in Newman were Aboriginal. Martu make up a majority of Aboriginal people in Newman, but only 7% of the town’s population; KJ, *The Case for Investment in the Martu Desert Communities*, October 2018.

4 Martu can claim financial entitlements

Digital platforms are not only the primary means to access services, but they are also increasingly the main pathway to claiming financial entitlements owed to individuals by the system. For example, to receive tax returns or Centrelink payments, one must invariably navigate government websites and the MyGov portal. Without the infrastructure, literacy or identification documents to do so, claiming financial entitlements becomes significantly more challenging.

The Pilot has helped Martu begin to bridge this gap. In particular, the human advocacy and navigation support provided through the Pilot has played a critical role in helping Martu understand processes, prepare paperwork and submit appropriate applications to access entitlements. Through the Pilot, Martu are beginning to better claim funds owing to them.

“Due to the complicated identification requirements, transactions such as bank transfers are difficult to undertake. Older Martu rely on younger trusted relatives or advocates to assist. Unreliable advocates expose these people to abuse of their funds” – KJ transactions records

Key example: Income tax returns

Lodging an income tax return is a complicated process for Martu. Not only is the process of submitting a tax return challenging, but the need also to set up and link services in MyGov and provide identification documentation is an earlier hurdle. Pilot staff help Martu set up and navigate these government portals. They also connect Martu with appropriate tax agents and facilitate virtual appointments to enable lodgements to take place. As Martu typically earn below the tax free threshold of \$18,200,¹¹ majority of Martu are entitled to have all tax withheld returned to them.

KJ is the main employer of Martu. Over a five year period between July 2017 to June 2022, KJ has withheld over \$730,000 of tax on behalf of Martu. Without support to lodge tax returns at the end of each financial year, much of this tax has been unclaimed (80% estimated unclaimed¹²). The Pilot is creating a new option for Martu to lodge tax returns to claim those funds. Since the Pilot commenced, it has supported six Martu lodge their tax returns. While this number is low, these transactions highlight the potential of the Pilot to help Martu claim their financial entitlements.

Key example: Estates

Martu often die intestate (without a will). As such, the distribution of estates require complicated legal procedures to take place including the preparation of letters of administration and dealings with the Probate Office of the Supreme Court. Martu are unable to navigate these procedures alone.

The Pilot provides basic advocacy and navigation support. It also facilitates engagement with lawyers. Since the Pilot commenced, it has supported nine Martu with estate matters to help them distribute deceased family members' estates. Again, while this number is low, it highlights the need and potential of the Pilot to help Martu claim financial entitlements.

It is worth noting that while there were no transactions relating to the disposal of superannuation funds in the event of a person's death logged during the Pilot, it should be referenced here as another key financial entitlement that Martu communities require support to properly distribute. Superannuation death benefits can be significant and do not automatically form part of a person's estate. Over the past five financial years between July 2017 and June 2022, Martu have accumulated over \$1 million in

¹¹ Australian Tax Office, available: <https://www.ato.gov.au/rates/individual-income-tax-rates/>.

¹² KJ Director.

superannuation.¹³ Without advocacy support, the disposal of those funds are outside the control of Martu families (it will be up to the discretion of the superfunds).

5 Martu avoid risks associated with travelling to Newman

Martu consistently associate prison, police, court, fighting, alcohol and drugs with their experience of Newman. It is typically where destructive cycles plaguing Martu families worsen. Remote communities are “dry” places (alcohol-free) where Martu can live a life free from toxic substances and be close to country, family and culture. Unfortunately, extremely limited access to services, support and infrastructure in communities force Martu to frequently travel to Newman.

“The video link between remote sites has been tested with Newman and South Hedland courthouse. It seems that the quality of the video is satisfactory to enable Martu to use this technology to appear for court hearings for minor offences, rather than having to attend in person. Attending court in person in regional towns has big risks for Martu as it exposes them to alcohol and other substances and therefore more trouble.” – KJ transaction records

The Pilot allows Martu to access services and complete basic transactions while in communities. It reduces the need for Martu to travel into the dangers and risks associated with Newman.

Key example: Extraordinary drivers licences

Martu often need to secure extraordinary drivers licences (EDLs) to work and live. Applying for EDLs require witnessing of signatures and attending court hearings with the Magistrate, both of which typically require travel to Newman. The videoconferencing ability created by the Pilot has removed the need for some Martu to travel. In particular, some Justice of the Peace are embracing the flexibility of witnessing signatures via videolink. Since the Pilot started, there have been three EDL applications that have been approved by the Magistrate via videoconference.

Key example: Attending board meetings

KJ is a Martu organisation governed by 12 Martu directors (and three non-voting non-Martu directors). Attending KJ board meetings is an important activity for Martu directors that often requires travel to Newman. During the Pilot there were six instances where Martu directors were able to connect to board meetings via videoconference from Parnngurr which is one day’s drive from Newman.

6 Freed up time and resources for KJ

As discussed throughout this report, there are multiple barriers preventing Martu from accessing services and undertaking basic transactions. Martu turn to and rely on KJ to overcome those barriers. As such, a significant amount of KJ staff time is directed to advocacy and transaction support for Martu. KJ staff estimate that 30% of their time is used for this purpose. KJ are not funded by government or other services to provide this support.

The Pilot has helped cover and avoid some of the costs that KJ routinely incur to support Martu. The infrastructure has opened up more telephonic and video conferencing capabilities which has removed the need need and associated costs of travel to Newman. A dedicated person in communities has also

¹³ KJ consolidated superannuation financial figures for FY2018 to FY2022.

meant that ranger coordinators, who are typically the KJ staff members providing ad hoc transactions support to Martu, are able to focus on ranger operations.

It is estimated that the Pilot has helped free up between \$65,000 and \$130,000 of resources for KJ. These are valuable resources that KJ will be able to direct to other high impact activities such as Kalyku Ninti trips costed at approximately \$6,000 per person. These trips take young and old Martu back to their traditional homelands and have profound spiritual and cultural significance for Martu.

The tables below set out the approach for estimates.

Freed up KJ staff time needed to help Martu access services/complete transactions

Transaction type	# of transactions	Estimated # of hours of support needed per transaction type (low - high)	Total # of hours of support (low - high range)
Wangka Minyirrupa	13	2 – 4	26 – 52
Court procedural matters	56	2 – 4	112 – 224
Corrective services	13	1 – 2	13 – 26
Extraordinary Drivers Licences	29	2 – 4	58 – 116
Estates	9	2 – 4	18 – 36
Attending board meetings	9	1 – 2	9 – 18
Income tax returns	6	1 – 2	6 – 12
Banking	49	2 – 4	98 – 196
Birth, death, marriage	8	1 – 2	8 – 16
Police reporting	15	1 – 2	15 – 30
Licencing (cars and drivers)	36	1 – 2	36 – 72
Medicare	6	1 – 2	6 – 12
Online purchasing	15	1 – 2	15 – 30
KJ pay issues	35	1 – 2	35 – 70
Total estimated # of hours of transaction support provided by Pilot			455 – 910
<i>Hourly rate of ranger coordinator</i>			<i>\$43¹⁴</i>
Total estimated cost of KJ time the Pilot has freed up			~\$20,000 – \$40,000¹⁵

¹⁴ HAYS salary guide FY22/23, regional Victorian ranger top pay range is \$90,000 per year converted to hourly rate.

¹⁵ Dollar figures are rounded to nearest thousand

Total estimated travel cost avoided that would have been incurred by KJ

Key transaction types that likely would have required travel to Newman	# of transactions
Court procedural matters	56
Corrective services	13
Extraordinary Drivers Licences	29
Attending board meetings	9
Banking	49
Total number of transactions	156
# of transactions likely requiring travel to Newman (low 20% - high 40%)	31 – 62
# of Martu that can travel in one vehicle	4
# of trips to Newman that would have been required (low - high)	8 - 15
Estimated cost per trip to Newman (including expenses and KJ time)	\$6,000
Total estimated travel cost avoided	~\$45,000 – \$90,000

Insights

Four key insights can be gained from this review of the Pilot and the outcomes it has achieved.

1 Infrastructure alone is insufficient; human navigation and advocacy support is critical

Improved digital infrastructure helps to overcome a physical connection barrier for remote communities. A more reliable internet and phone connection means Martu can better connect to digital platforms. This, however, is insufficient to help Martu overcome the multifaceted literacy challenges that they face – language, process and digital literacy. Despite being able to connect to services, human support is needed to help Martu navigate mainstream systems and advocate for their needs and entitlements. Without human support, the infrastructure alone would do little to help Martu overcome barriers.

2 The Pilot has not only helped Martu complete basic transactions, but it has also demonstrated opportunities for system-wide improvements

The initial Pilot concept intended to help Martu better access a wider array of basic transactions directly from community. The outcomes observed from the Pilot, however, has revealed new opportunities for system-wide improvements that were not contemplated at the outset of the program. This is particularly the case with regards to the criminal justice system and other court related matters.

The Pilot has opened up opportunities (through Wangka Minyirpa) for Martu communities to take on more agency in sentencing decisions. These opportunities are increasingly being embraced by the Magistrate Court as an important way to consider alternative options to divert Martu away from prison and back to community.

The Pilot has increased Martu access to legal representation before court hearings and for court application. This has directly resulted in improved outcomes for Martu.

The Pilot has also increased the opportunity for EDL applications to be completed virtually. These applications require court hearings and witnessing of signatures. Justice of the Peace and Magistrates are increasingly embracing videoconferencing to complete these processes thereby reducing the cost on the system and the need for Martu to travel.

3 Closing the digital divide to enable basic access to services and transactions has a profound impact on Martu lives

The Pilot's primary focus has been to improve the capacity and capability of Martu to access services, supports and undertake basic life transactions. It is worth emphasising the profound impact this has on Martu's lives. For instance, undertaking bank transactions efficiently means Martu are able to access their money, securing an EDL quickly means Martu can work, access to lawyers means Martu have legal representation on their court matters and lodging income tax returns allows Martu to claim financial entitlements.

While many Pilot transactions have been objectively simple, it is important to emphasise the profound impact they have on Martu's lives and the disadvantage they cause when they cannot be easily completed.

4 Moving to an online self-service model leaves a support gap for those left behind and organisations like KJ are bearing the cost of filling that gap

As the world moves online, there is an increasingly expectation that individuals self-service their own needs. However, a significant subset of society do not have the capability and capacity to meet that expectation. With a lack of support being offered by government and organisations to access their services in this new digital world, people like Martu increasingly rely on trusted community organisations to fill that gap. Those organisations are not funded to fill that role and ultimately bear the cost as they invariably need to do so to ensure their communities' basic needs are met.

This is an issue being increasingly recognised by the sector.¹⁶

¹⁶ Paul Ramsay Foundation, Understanding Linkers, February 2022, available: <https://www.paulramsayfoundation.org.au/news-resources/understanding-linkers-new-role-emerges-to-help-people-navigate-complex-social-services-system>.



Social Ventures Australia
Brisbane | Darwin | Melbourne | Perth | Sydney | ABN 94 100 487 572 | AFSL 428 865
info@socialventures.com.au | socialventures.com.au | [@Social_Ventures](https://www.instagram.com/Social_Ventures)