



## Youth Justice Group Conferencing Program



**Justice and  
crime prevention**

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**Jesuit Social Services** is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential.

### What are the benefits of Group Conferencing?

Youth Justice Group Conferencing helps to:

- divert the young person from more intensive court outcomes
- reduce frequency and seriousness of re-offending among young people referred to the program
- increase victim satisfaction with the criminal justice process
- effectively integrate young people into the community following the conference process

### How do I make a referral?

A Judge in any of the Northern Territory's Children's Courts can refer a young person to Pre-Sentence Conferencing, under section 84 of the Youth Justice Act.

A referral is made after a court has found a young person guilty of an offence, and the referral can be made on the application of the young person or on the Court's initiative.

### What do participants say about Group Conferencing?

*"I'm taking full responsibility. Group Conferencing is an opportunity to apologise for what I have done. I have made changes, and I will never go that path again."* — Young person

*"I came angry but I am not now. You don't have a face of a criminal... You are a good kid. I can see it."* — Victim



## What is Youth Justice Group Conferencing?

Youth Justice Group Conferencing enables dialogue between young people who have offended, their victims and the wider community.

The program aims to divert young people from further or more serious offending.

It brings together those involved or affected by an offence to discuss how the young person can make amends for the harm done.

Youth Justice Group Conferencing is a problem-solving approach to offending that is based on principles of restorative justice, which balance the needs of offenders, victims and the community.

Jesuit Social Services delivers Youth Justice Group Conferencing throughout Darwin. We work in partnership with Elders, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and strong role models to ensure that our process is culturally safe, develops a young person's sense of identity, and strengthens their family and community connections.

## Who is it for?

The program is for young people aged 10–17 years at the time of offending, who have:

- pleaded guilty, or have been found guilty of, an offence(s)
- committed offences serious enough to warrant an order or a custodial sentence
- consented to participate, and
- been assessed as a suitable participant

## Who comes to a group conference?

A group conference is attended by:

- the young person, their family and supports
- the victim, or a representative, and their family and supports
- a legal representative
- a police informant
- community members, and
- the group conference convenor.

## How is a group conference run?

A group conference is a safe environment for everyone involved and affected by an offence to come together. The discussion in a group conference is controlled and structured. It allows those affected by the crime to: face the young person; talk about what happened; discuss how they were affected; ask the young person questions about the offence; and decide how to make things better. The conference also gives the young person a chance to apologise for their offence.

**Before the conference**, the convenor identifies and prepares people for the conference. They help participants agree on an outcome plan, which sets out what the young person will do to make amends for their offending, and how they will prevent re-offending. This lead-up phase can take up to 6-8 weeks.

**During the conference**, the convenor facilitates the group conference to ensure all participants' voices are heard. The group conference normally takes about two hours.

Victims take an active role in the conference. They contribute to a discussion about what the young person should do to make amends for their offending and to avoid re-offending.

Offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, and raise their understanding of the impact of their offending on the victim.

**After the conference**, the impact of the discussion lasts. A 2010 KPMG independent evaluation of young people who completed a Youth Justice Group Conference between 2007 and 2009 found that more than 80 per cent had not reoffended two years later.