



WISDOM IN YOUR LIFE  
Psychological and Aboriginal Ways

# Five Case Studies

The journey over three days in  
Art/Poetry for five young people in  
detention.

The background image is the 'stuff' the young people wanted to let go of.



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## Young person 1, Day 1 Painting 1



Me doing  
breaks to  
support my  
drugs and get  
money.  
Darkness is  
in me and  
surrounds  
me, grass is  
green.



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## Young person 1, Day 2 Painting 1



This is me. All  
anger and  
darkness. I am  
angry all the time.

## Young person 1, Day 2 Painting 2



This is the essence  
of me, pure white  
and yellow.

*He became distressed as this painting  
and the previous one are incompatible,  
they do not. This demonstrates  
cognitive dissonance*



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## Young person 1, Day 3 Painting 1



The death of three members of my family in 18 months, that broke my heart, that led to the darkness that led to the drugs.

*The black has changed to purple.*



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## Young person 1, Day 3 Painting 2



Me in *detention*,  
which has darkness  
all around me, but  
not inside me. The  
people inside and  
outside that will  
help me.



# Deaths in the family:

About 60% of young people in detention had one or multiple family deaths (siblings and parents) six months before their first crime. Most started using drugs to cope with the pain, then this lead to crime, usually stealing.

- “I found my sister hanging, I wasn’t strong enough to save her (age 9)”
- “My brother died in my arms and I couldn’t save him” (age 14)
- “I was all good, had a scholarship, travelled overseas with my sport, then my best friend died in a car accident and I couldn’t see a future anymore”



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## Young person 2, Day 1 Painting 1

*This painting originally had many dots in the centre to signify his family, which he messed up later in the day*



Stage 1.

My family is wonderful and we have culture, land, earth and the blue dots the ocean

Stage 2.

It's all a lie, my family all use drugs, there's violence, crime, it is shit.



# Young person 2, Day 1 Painting 2

Originally this painting only had red.



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Stage 1.

The red is all  
the anger in  
me.

Stage 2.

The blue is the  
love.

# Young person 2, Day 2 Painting 1

Originally this painting didn't have the black line through the heart.



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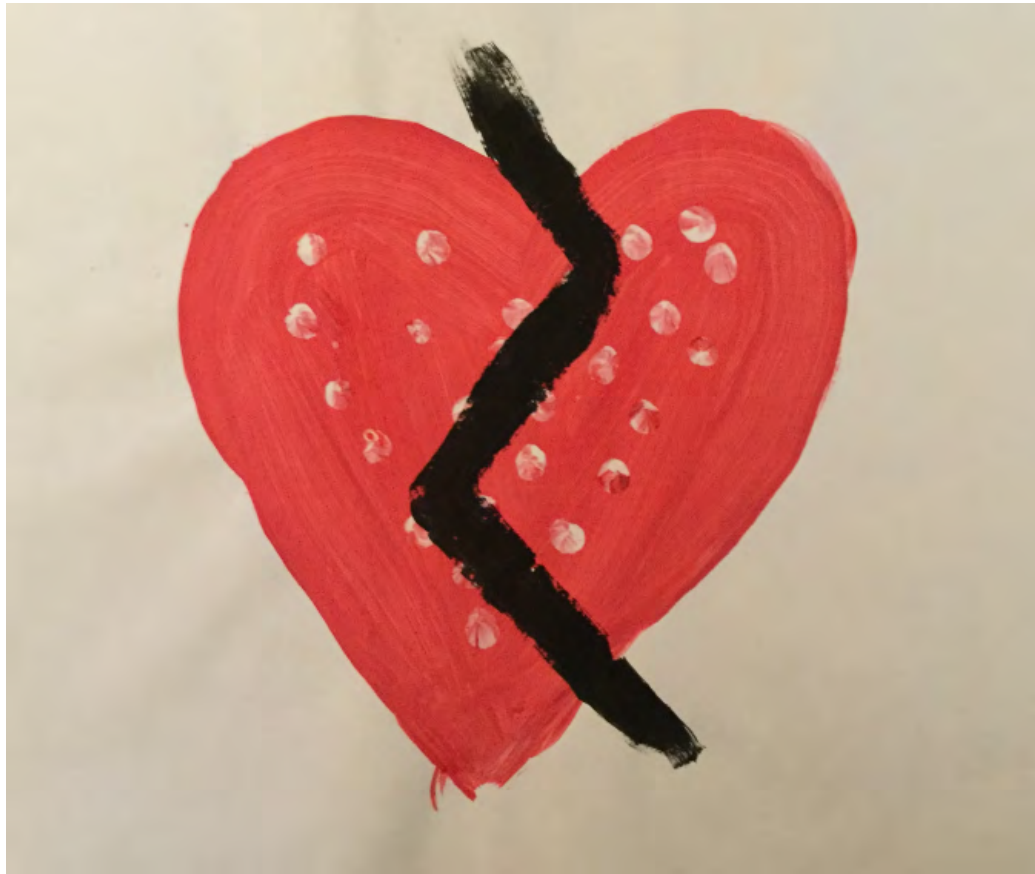
Stage 1.

**This is all the  
love inside me.**

*Day 1 this young man  
expressed that his heart is  
rotten to the core and there  
was nothing good about him.*

Stage 2.

**My heart is  
broken, like my  
family.**



## Young person 2, Day 3 Painting 1



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This is me at the centre with my culture, land and sea, there are paths for me to take.



# Doing crime for the family

About 10% admitted to doing crime (usually stealing) to support their family members drug habit.

- “My foster mum has all us kids stealing”
- “I do jobs with my dad, (it’s the only time I see him)”
- “I can’t tell anyone that my aunty, who the courts have told I have to live with, is a drug dealer!”
- “If I don’t do crime, they say they will rape my sister”
- “I have a drug debt, so when I get out I have to do crime to pay back my uncle”

# Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 1



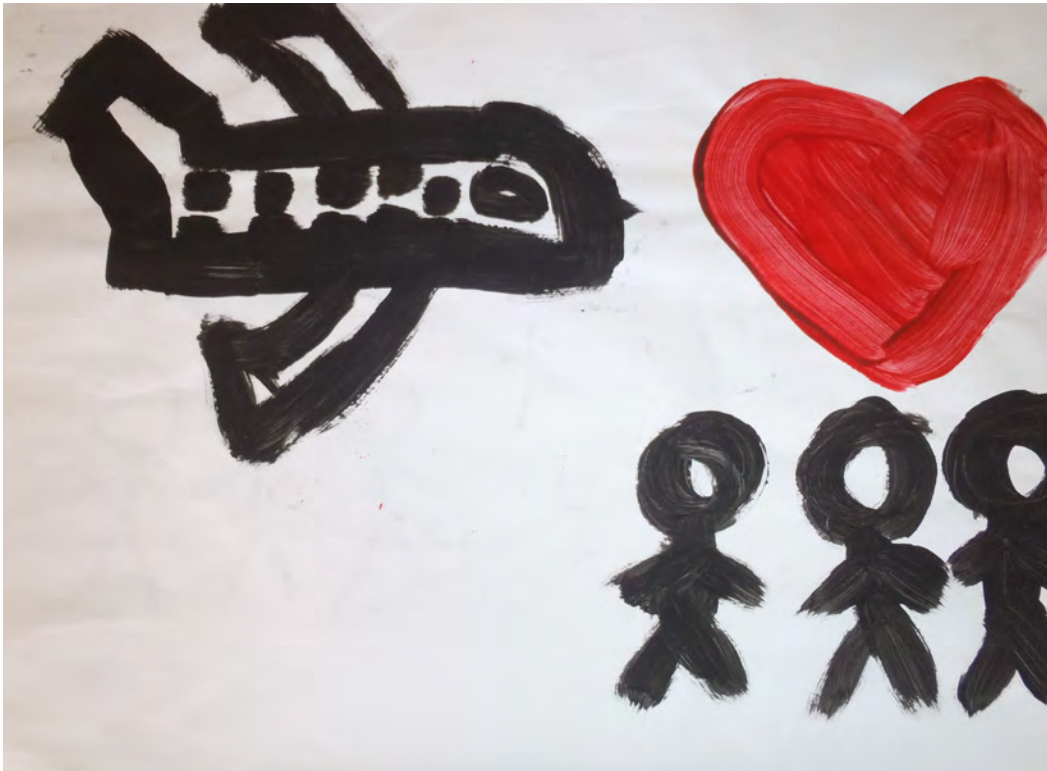
Me as a baby with  
my favourite uncle

## Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 2



Me and my uncle  
when he was going  
away

## Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 3



Me, mum and  
sister excited  
that my favourite  
uncle was  
coming back  
home

## Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 4

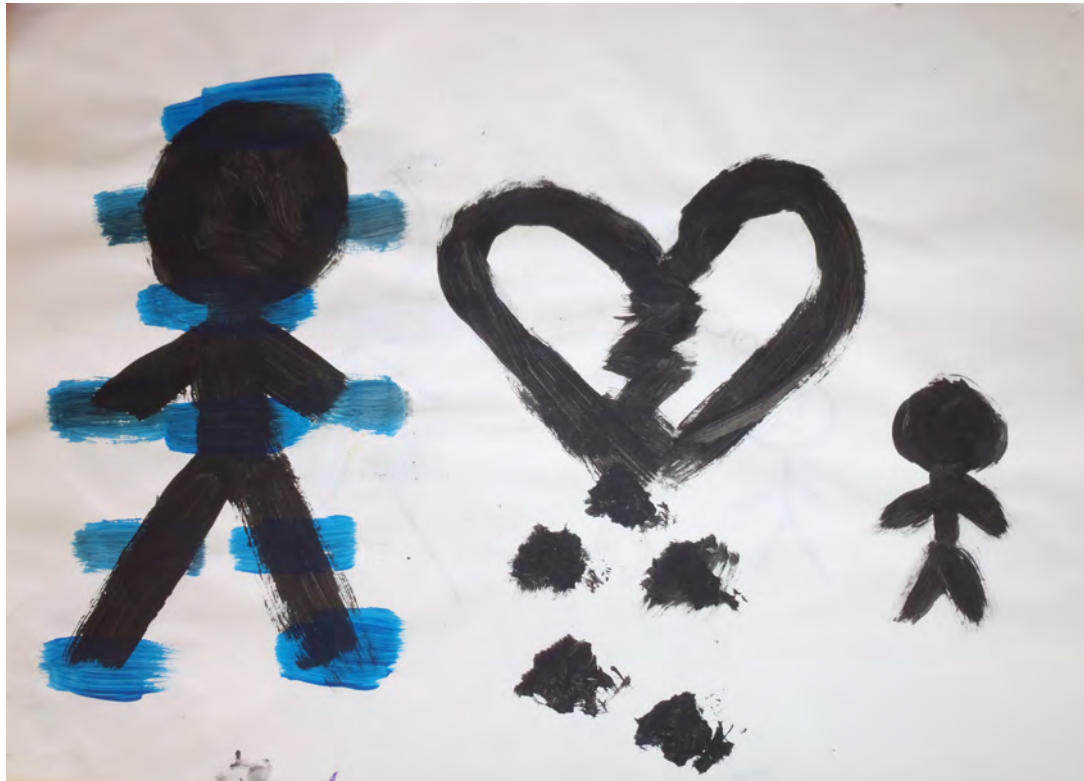


The house is dark, the light is on in my bedroom and my uncle broke my heart. I was 8 years old.

*This occurred every night for a week.*



# Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 5



My heart is  
broken, my uncle  
is broken

# Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 6



All my feelings

# Young person 3, Day 1 Painting 7



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## Visiting my uncle in jail with my family.

*We established that this young person had never told anyone of this. When I suggested they talk to their psychologist they were adamant that this would not happen.*

*Later in the day they showed the artwork to their psychologist.*

## Young person 3, Day 2 Painting 8



### I am just like my uncle.

*I explained that when we become like our abuser, we sometimes do things that they would do. And that the next stage of treatment is remove the energy pattern of the abuser and reclaim what the abuser took from you.*

*This young person was extremely upset and I was concerned about them being locked down for the 1.5 hours for lunch. I raised this with the officer but they said nothing could be done.*

*The young person asked how they could change this energy pattern and I gave them things to do in the lunch lock down. Which they did.*

## Young person 3, Day 3 Painting 9



Me and my uncle  
now.

*Uncle is in a small box and the young  
person has reclaimed their power.*



# Domestic Violence and Abuse

137 out of 138 young people in detention told us that they had experienced domestic violence with weapons (machetes, knives, guns and chains).

- “I hit my girlfriend when I’m on ice”
- “It is safer in here, no one comes in at night”
- “I haven’t slept since I got in here, I think someone is going to come into my room and rape me”
- “I was at Forrest Chase in the middle of the day, when my boyfriend smashed into me, no one stopped him”

## Young person 4, Day 1 Painting 1



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My life. All good, me with my family, then my mother died, my brother was murdered and my best friend was killed and died in my arms. Then everything was bad.

*Notice the trees are small, and the young person has blood on their hands.*

## Young person 4, Overnight poem



*It is like my soul has gone and all I feel is heart ache  
No matter what I do I can't escape this dark place  
I can't help but dwell on what my past's made  
The pain is going to haunt me until my last day  
But I must march thru the fog and look for the light  
And hope the grass is green when I'm on the other side.*



# Young person 4, Day 2 Painting 2

*Originally this painting didn't have the black circle with the yellow around it.*



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*Stage 1.*

Good and bad, I  
feel like I am two  
people

*Stage 2. I had asked them to paint  
his sprit child*

I tried to make it  
lighter but it kept  
going black!

## Young person 4, Day 2 Painting 3



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*As this young person was struggling to paint their spirit child, I suggested imagining what it was like as they couldn't see it.*

**No words.**

*Stage 2 later in the afternoon*

**This is who I really am.**

*I explained that often when we have a split between good and bad, we need to join these two parts together. This young person did many more paintings trying to join the good and bad together and couldn't do it, these all went into the bin.*

# Young person 4, Day 3 Painting 4



The two sides  
of me joined.



# Good and Bad

About two thirds of the young people in detention expressed this 'split' between good and bad that they cannot control.

- Psychologically, this occurs in people who have experienced life threatening trauma while the mind is still developing (i.e. before 25). According to Nijeu et al. the mind dissociates 'splits' to cope with what is happening. Different parts of the mind is affected depending on the stage of development. This requires specialised treatment. Given the level of DV and abuse in this group, this is not unexpected.
- No amount of anger/stress management, mindfulness or CBT will fix this.

# Young person 5, Day 1 Painting 1



I was born in  
Hell.

## Young person 5, Day 1 Painting 2



Me handcuffed in the back of a police car, I was about 7 or 8. My foster mum wouldn't come, I was stealing for her. I was taken to a big house, for 2 years, I thought my family were all dead, until a brother arrived and then we escaped.

## Young person 5, Day 3 Painting 3



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My crime devil, lives  
inside of me. It lets me  
doing anything and  
keeps me safe.  
I can't get rid of it or  
bad things will happen  
to me.

*Between day 1 and day 3 this young person  
would've had done over 40 paintings, dealing  
with trauma they had been through.*



# Foster care

Many were ashamed of being in foster care.

- “I have been in 27 foster homes, all white”.
- “I keep running away from foster care and doing crime as I can be in here with family”
- “Everyone kept telling me how lucky I was to have such a great foster family, going on overseas holidays, no one knew that I had to lie in bed listening to my sister being abused at night”







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*WISDOM in Your Life uses psychological best practice delivered in traditional Aboriginal ways.*

- 138 Young people in detention voluntarily attended a 3 day *'the map'*
- 7 Aboriginal community people attended a 3 day *'the map'*
- 247 young people attended a 2 hour *A way through* in 6 locations in WA (Pilbara, SW and Perth)
- 81 Adults (Justice staff and family) attended 2 hour *A way through*