

# **Aboriginal Family Planning Circle Evaluation:**

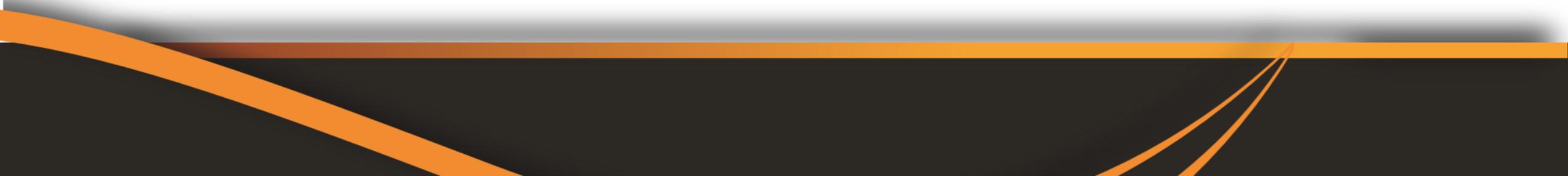
**Empowering Aboriginal communities in evaluating and future-proofing  
Aboriginal-led community programs**

**AES International Conference, Sydney  
17 September 2019**

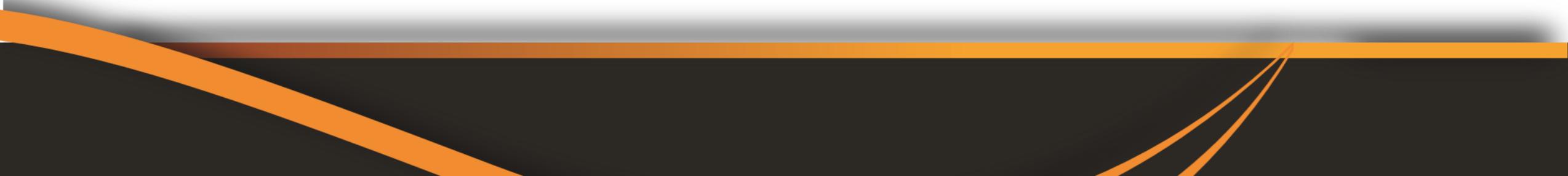
## **Presenters:**

Amy Lawton, WESTIR Limited  
Cheryl Jackson, Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation

# Presentation outline

- Acknowledgement of Country
  - History of the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) program
  - Overview of 2015 and 2017 AFPC evaluations – methods, results and recommendations
  - Lessons from the AFPC evaluations
  - Concluding thoughts
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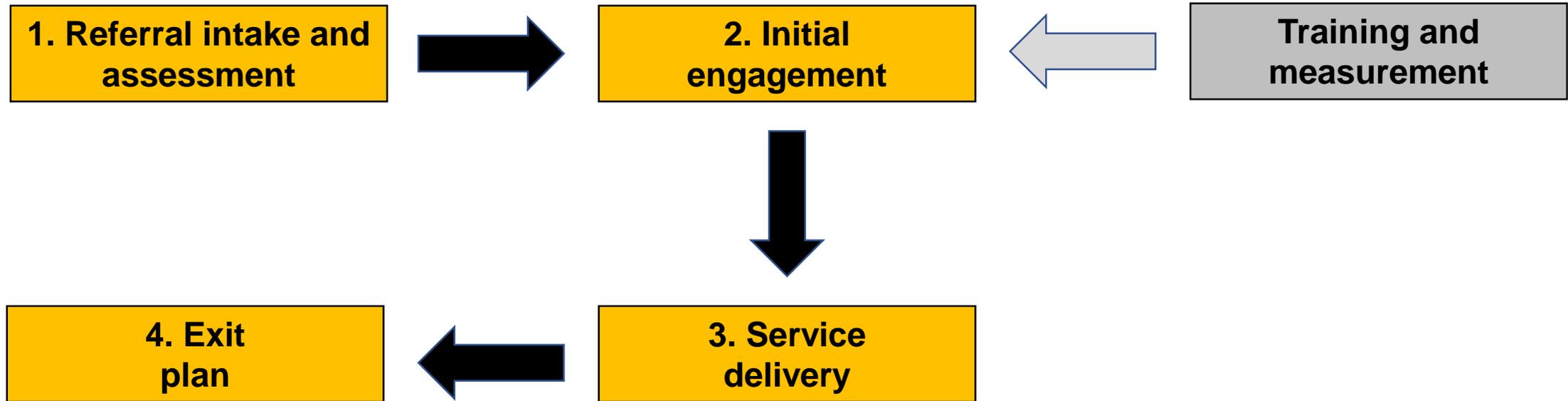
# Acknowledgement of Country

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# Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) program

- Established in 2006 by the Aboriginal Family Workers Support Group working in the Blacktown Local Government Area.
- Works with Aboriginal families to address their complex issues and reduce the risk of having their children put into out-of-home care.

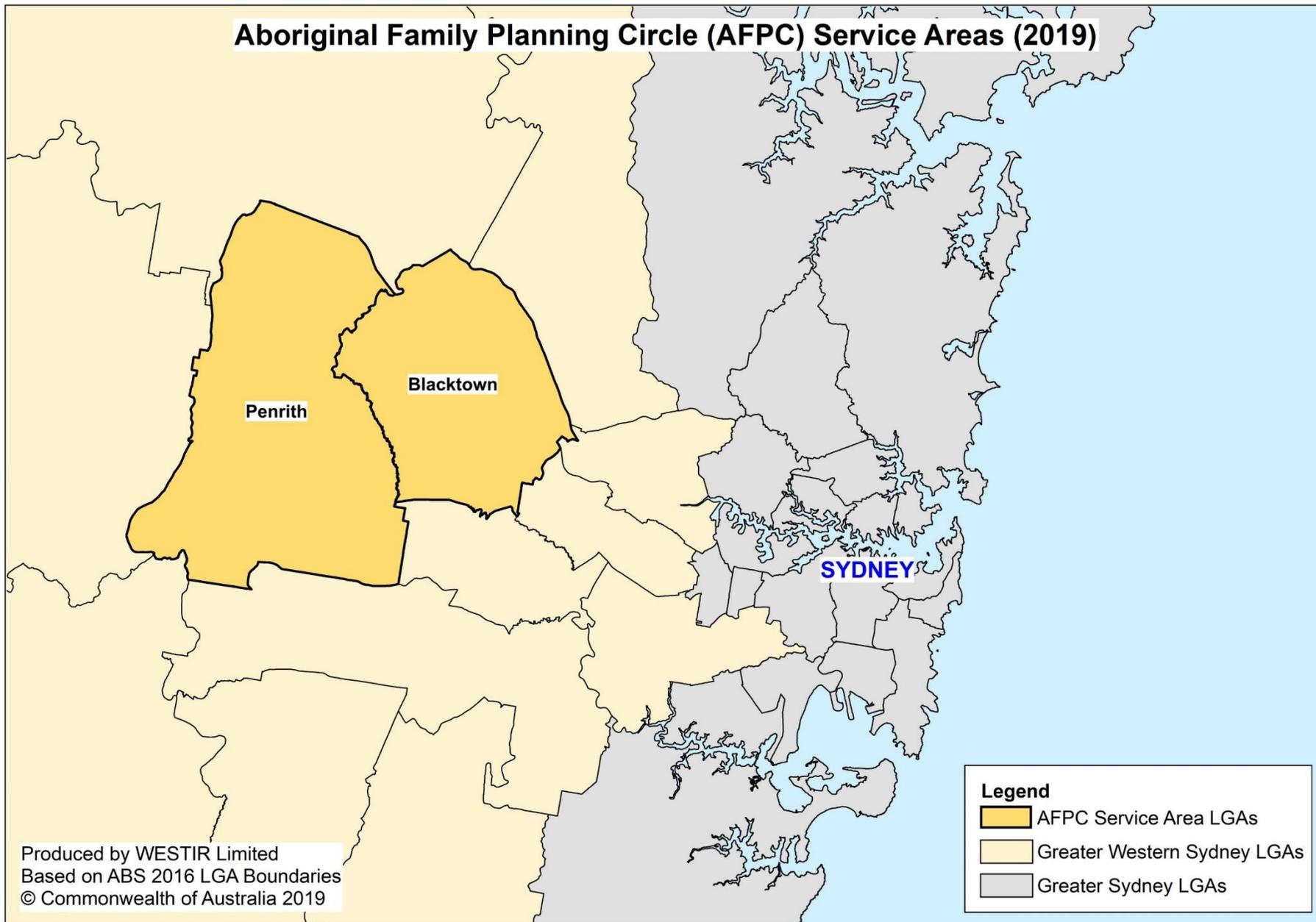
# Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) program



# Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) program

- Initially a volunteer-run, community based initiative. Funding was sought from the then NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) (now NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)) when it outgrew its original capacity.
- From 2015 to 2017, the funding was used to appoint an AFPC Coordinator and expand service delivery to both Blacktown and Penrith LGAs.
- In 2018, the AFPC program was moved from DCJ to Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation.

# Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) Service Areas (2019)



Produced by WESTIR Limited  
Based on ABS 2016 LGA Boundaries  
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**Legend**

-  AFPC Service Area LGAs
-  Greater Western Sydney LGAs
-  Greater Sydney LGAs

# Evaluation methods – first evaluation

- **Context:** WESTIR Limited approached by AFPC staff to undertake initial evaluation in 2015.
- **Aim of evaluation:** provide a comprehensive assessment of how effective the program had been for participants and identify areas of improvement.
- **Methods:** Qualitative framework. Seven participant interviews, two service provider focus groups, five service provider interviews, and two written service provider responses. Data analysis used to formulate recommendations.

# Evaluation methods – second evaluation

- **Context:** DCJ senior management requested evidence on the economic value of the AFPC program, leading to second evaluation in 2017.
- **Aim of evaluation:** examine whether the AFPC program had continued to meet its objectives and where possible, demonstrate the savings and return on investment that the program created for the out-of-home care system in NSW.
- **Methods:** Quantitative and qualitative components – basic savings and return on investment calculations, interviews with participants and service providers. Updated recommendations provided.

# Results – first evaluation

## Participant interview analysis:

- Positive experience for those involved.
- Gave participants motivation to seek help and change their lives. Empowered them to take control of their lives, held all parties accountable and develop more balanced relationships with government services.
- Identified a number of tangible outcomes (securing housing, resolving relationship issues, retaining or resuming custody of children) which gave them confidence, resilience and hope for the future.

## Results – first evaluation

*‘Well it’s helped me keep [my baby], that’s the first one. And it’s just helped all the support workers... they just all come together... how I am today compared to how I was when I first started the Circle because you know they helped me with Housing, they helped me get into a parenting group... helped me to maintain everything that I need to do to get my other two children as well and keeping them.’ (Client # 6)*

# Results – first evaluation

## Service provider interview analysis:

- Confirmed the strengths-based model of the AFPC program.
- In addition to participant outcomes, there were benefits for their practice including enhanced communication and support between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services.

## Results – first evaluation

*‘As a single worker I'd have to take them to...Centrelink, then I have to take them to see [Department of] Housing, taken them to see [Department of] Community Services. I'd be spending most of my time running this client around... But doing it this way, it's all quality time... and everything's there.’ (Focus Group 1)*

# Results – second evaluation

## Estimated savings and return on investment (ROI):

- Two children restored and five children remained at home due to AFPC program in 2015/16.
- Based on the average annual cost of keeping a child in OOHC in NSW (\$57,800 per child), AFPC program saved the NSW Government approximately \$404,600 in 2015/16.
- Only program funding received was the salary of the AFPC Coordinator (\$95,039 per financial year), equating to approximately 326% ROI for the NSW Government in 2015/16.
- Limitations to calculations.

# Results – second evaluation

## Participant and service provider interview analysis:

- Revealed additional issues from the first evaluation:
  - Need to prioritise early intervention activities.
  - Addressing the tension between mandatory DCJ requirements in a voluntary process.
  - Uncertainty around the funding of the AFPC Coordinator position impacted service delivery.

## Results – second evaluation

*“What has occurred with the tenuous nature of the funding of the [AFPC Coordinator] position has been something that's been a little debilitating... I'm really weighing up whether I should be sending a family to the Circle, because I don't know how long that's going to go for, and the family might need support for longer than the Circle...” (Service Provider 2)*

# Evaluation recommendations (1)

- The recommendations from both AFPC evaluations were largely similar:
  - Retaining the AFPC Coordinator position
  - Increasing program funding
  - Training more AFPC facilitators
  - Encouraging more community presence
  - Developing referral pathways
  - Establishing a robust data collection system
  - Developing clearer communication around program requirements

## Evaluation recommendations (2)

- Recommendations have driven positive changes to AFPC program:
  - Establishment of family pregnancy meetings
  - Connecting with local men's groups to address domestic violence
  - Transition to an online data collection system for program reporting
- Implementation of recommendations largely credited to moving out of DCJ to Marrin Weejali.

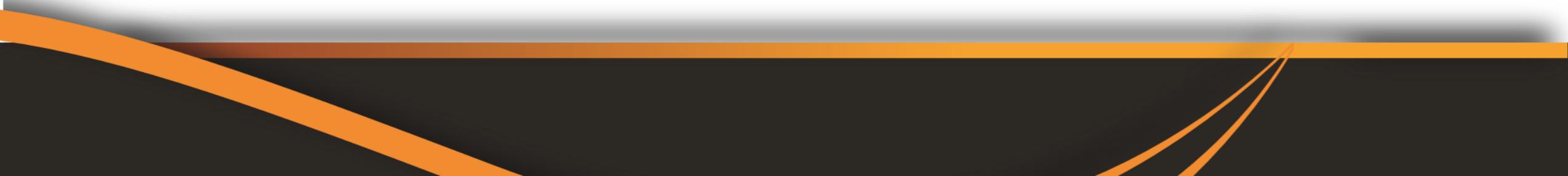
# Lessons from AFPC evaluations (1)

- The value of strengths-based, culturally responsive evaluation frameworks.
- The value of pro-bono evaluation partnership between AFPC program and WESTIR Limited – ‘two way approach’.
- Reliance on non-Indigenous ‘outsider’ evaluators and strategies to mitigate power imbalances.

## Lessons from AFPC evaluations (2)

- The importance of communicating evaluation findings and using evidence-based recommendations to advocate for continued funding.
- The strength in mixed methods approach, but the need for evaluators to have more training in value-based evaluation methods (e.g. SROI)
- The ongoing need to recognise Aboriginal-led program models and culturally responsive program evaluation in the community services system.

# Concluding thoughts

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## More resources

- Executive summaries of AFPC evaluations available on WESTIR Limited website ([www.westir.org.au](http://www.westir.org.au)).
- Journal article being submitted to *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* and/or on WESTIR Limited website.

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**Marrin Weejali** Aboriginal Corporation

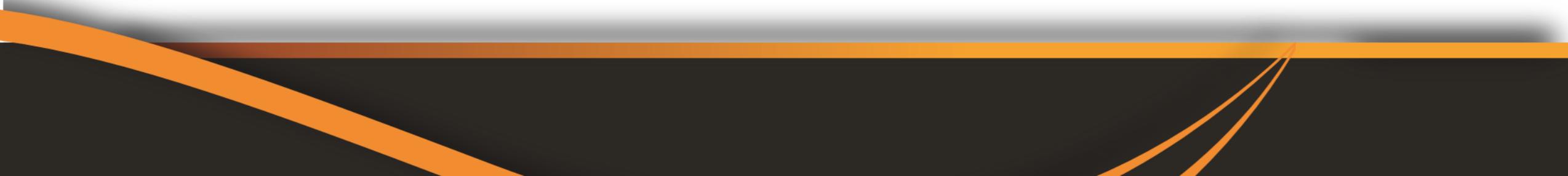
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**Thank you for listening!**

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