




# HealingFoundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

## HEALING FOR OUR STOLEN GENERATIONS: SHARING OUR STORIES

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





This report analyses 31 healing projects involving more than 3,676 Stolen Generations members and contains evidence about what works in healing our Stolen Generations. It offers insights relevant to policy makers around the country and service providers working with Stolen Generations members, their families and communities.

The projects were funded under the first two years of the Healing Foundation's *Stolen Generations Initiative 2013 - 2015*.

## **Background**

The removal of Stolen Generations members from their families, identities, lands, languages and cultures by past governments continues to have a profound impact on individuals, families and communities. Those children placed in institutions often experienced collective traumatisation and could only turn to each other for comfort. As a result, Stolen Generations members have specific healing needs.

***Stolen Generations members deal with loss and grief in various ways, most do not involve the generic counselling model used by most of the mainstream population. Their way of dealing with loss and grief is to come together as a family unit of Stolen Generations members and yarn, reminisce and heal (Project report, Stolen Generations Initiative)***

## **Healing our Stolen Generations**

Many Stolen Generations members find that it is coming together with other survivors, sharing stories and accessing group or collective healing opportunities in a community setting that helps them heal. This is particularly the case for those members who were removed to institutions.

***Collective healing broadens the scope of who does healing and who healing is for. It means moving from a model where expert professionals work with individuals, to a model where people are supported and empowered to develop the skills and capacity to enable healing in themselves, their families and their communities (Blignault et al. 2014, p. 14)***

Each of the collective healing projects funded under the *Stolen Generations Initiative* was designed to meet these unique healing needs and aspirations of Stolen Generations survivors.

### **Key outcomes of the *Stolen Generations Initiative* to date:**

- 72% of Stolen Generations members who participated in *Stolen Generations Initiative* projects said they were better able to care for their trauma and grief in healthy ways
- 68% felt more confident about accessing cultural and community support services to aid their ongoing healing journeys
- 77% reported an increased sense of belonging and connection to their culture

## **The *Stolen Generations Initiative***

***Collective healing is supported by bringing people with similar experiences together, often with their children and grandchildren, in a safe space where they can share, get to know their own story, build understanding and skills, and take positive steps towards a better future (Blignault et al. 2014, p. 15)***



Domo Boys at the premiere of The Domo Boys film at the Ration Shed Museum, Cherbourg July 2013

**The Stolen Generations Initiative aims to:**

- provide opportunities and support for Stolen Generations members, services and organisations to lead and develop their own solutions to the profound trauma, grief, loss and suffering experienced by Stolen Generations survivors, their families and communities
- reduce the damaging effects of colonisation and past government policies on Stolen Generations members, their families and communities through the provision of healing responses that are culturally based, strengths focused and trauma informed
- create important opportunities for Stolen Generations members to connect with their culture and strengthen their cultural identity and pride

Grants of between \$25,000 and \$90,000 totalling \$1,487,700 were made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the country in 2013 and 2014 to deliver healing responses for local Stolen Generations communities.

Funded projects delivered a range of collective healing activities for Stolen Generations members including yarning circles, trips on country, healing camps and gatherings, and workshops.

These projects enabled Stolen Generations members to reconnect with their inner strength and resilience, call on the wisdom of their fellow survivors and their cultures, connect with relevant services to support their healing journeys and envisage a more hopeful future for themselves, their families and their communities.

**86% of Stolen Generations members who participated in the projects were satisfied with the services and activities provided**

Despite the strong outcomes for participants, their families and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, these projects also faced significant challenges including the ageing and ill health of Stolen Generations members, high staff turnover and funding uncertainty.

### **Key findings**

Findings from the 31 *Stolen Generations Initiative* projects support the incorporation of four essential elements to create a healing environment for Stolen Generations.

#### **These are:**

- **coming together with other survivors and sharing stories of pain, hope and renewal** – Stolen Generations members provide a community of care for each other, a support system that cannot be replicated by any other professional means. Sharing their own stories and bearing witness to others' stories in a supportive environment helped participants reduce their sense of isolation and increase their strength
- **reconnecting and strengthening culture and cultural identity** – reconnecting with cultural values, knowledge systems and practices and restoring a sense of pride in one's cultural identity is consistently noted as a critical factor for healing. It is especially important for Stolen Generations members who were often forced to disown their culture as children. The inclusion of traditional arts, crafts, music, dance and song as ways to connect with culture emerged strongly in the project reports and brought great joy and pride to participants, as did being on country and connecting with land and significant sites
- **trauma informed services and responses** – increasing knowledge about trauma and how it impacts on Stolen Generations members, their children and grandchildren enabled project workers to provide trauma informed responses and helped Stolen Generations survivors and their families to better understand their healing needs. Participants developed skills to manage their trauma and grief in more positive ways including through expressive art and writing, music, yoga and meditation. Engagement with medical and counselling services, drug and alcohol programs, traditional healers and Link-Up services also increased
- **healing solutions led and developed by Stolen Generations members** – to restore self-determination and aid participants in their recovery from trauma, Stolen Generations services and organisations worked directly with Stolen Generations members from particular communities and regions to identify the types of activities that would be most meaningful for them. Activities ranged from forums and gatherings to strengthening organisations that represent former residents of institutions

Investing in healing opportunities that work for Stolen Generations members will improve their health, social and emotional wellbeing, workforce participation, family functioning, community involvement and leadership. When Stolen Generations members are healthy, strong and vibrant this creates positive benefits for their families, communities and workplaces and limits the transfer of trauma to subsequent generations.

*This report was prepared in conjunction with the Healing Foundation's Stolen Generations Reference Committee which guides the Healing Foundation's work.*

*Cover image: Performers and family members at the Darcy Wright family reunion September 2014*

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