



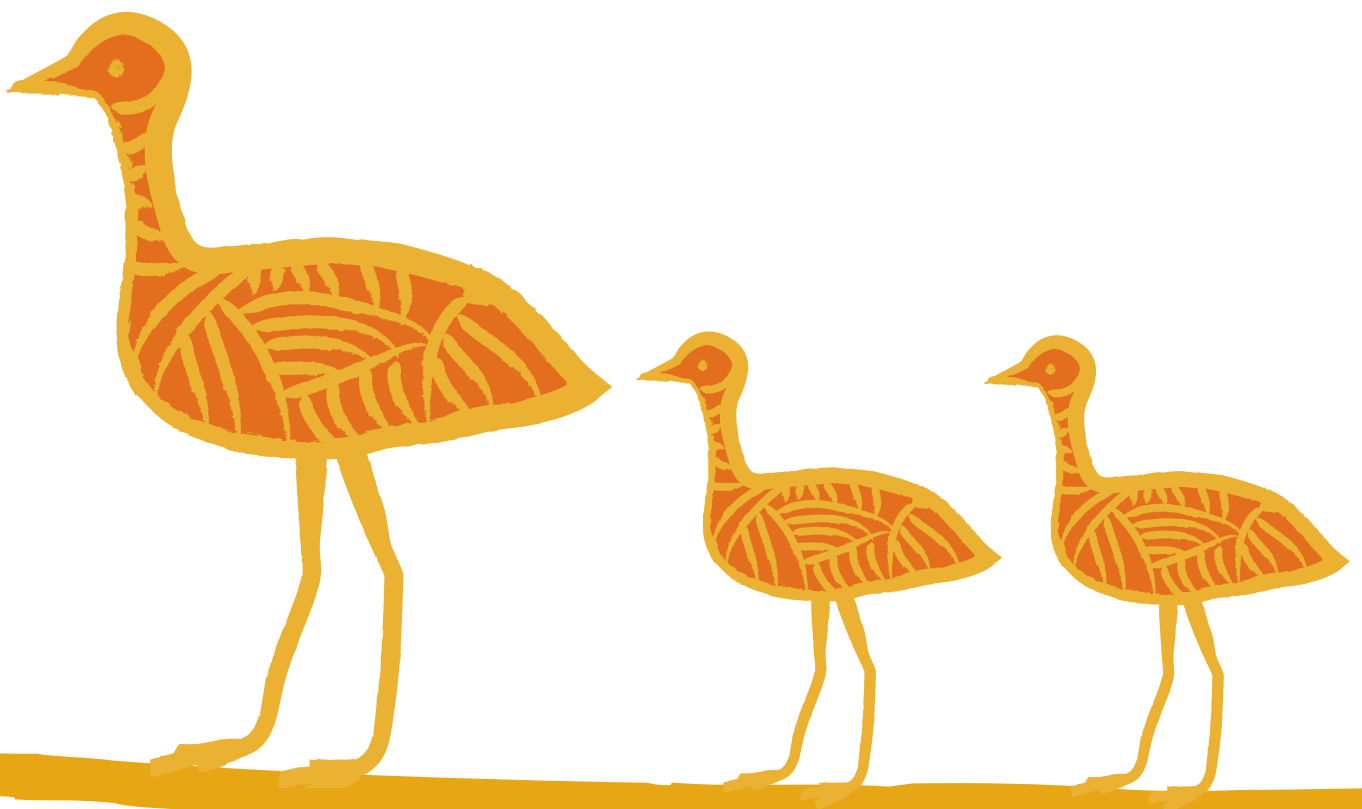
**HealingFoundation**

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

# **GROWING OUR CHILDREN UP STRONG**

***The Intergenerational  
Trauma Initiative: Volume 1***

**APRIL 2012 TO APRIL 2013**



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## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation is a national, independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on healing our community. Established on the first anniversary of the Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Healing Foundation works to address the profound legacy of pain and hurt of our people caused by colonisation, forced removals and other past government policies.

Building culturally strong community programs, designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview, the Healing Foundation is improving the wellbeing of our people by:

- developing the story of healing by funding healing programs
- raising the profile and documenting the importance of culturally strong healing programs through research and evaluation
- building leadership and the capacity of communities and workers to deal with trauma through education and training.

## Background to the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative

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In July 2011, the Healing Foundation announced a funding initiative aimed at acknowledging and addressing the devastating impact intergenerational trauma has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The overarching goal of the initiative is to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to heal from their distress and prevent the continuing transmission of trauma through future generations. The projects aim to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of young people by strengthening cultural connectedness and identity, providing opportunities for individual and family healing, and building skills to manage pain and loss in a way that allows for a hopeful future.

Following a select-tender funding process, in December 2011 the Healing Foundation awarded funds to three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in Brisbane (Ipswich-Logan-Inala corridor), Darwin and Kununurra. The distribution of project sites ensured representation across urban, regional and remote Australia. \$1.5million over two years has been allocated to support the development and implementation of these lighthouse projects.

A range of project activities will be delivered over the life of the initiative including:

- healing camps for young people and families
- healing circles
- use of country to support increased cultural connection
- outreach support to young people and families
- building young people's pride and identity through cultural activities and experiences
- mentoring and personal development programs for young people
- participation in employment and education programs
- counselling and therapeutic support for young people and families.

The roll-out of the three funded projects was staggered, with the Brisbane site coming online first in April 2012. Additional time and resources were invested in the early phases of implementation in the Darwin and Kununurra sites to ensure effective programmatic design and community support, with the Darwin project commencing operation in September 2012 and the Kununurra project opening its doors in January 2013.

In October 2012, the Healing Foundation published a paper that examined the steps undertaken in the planning and development of the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative and how these connect to current research in the area of implementation science (Healing Foundation, 2012). This paper acknowledged that implementation is a process, not an event in and of itself, with a series of six identifiable phases. For the purposes of this report, Figure 1 is an indication of where in the process each project was during the 12 month period being examined.

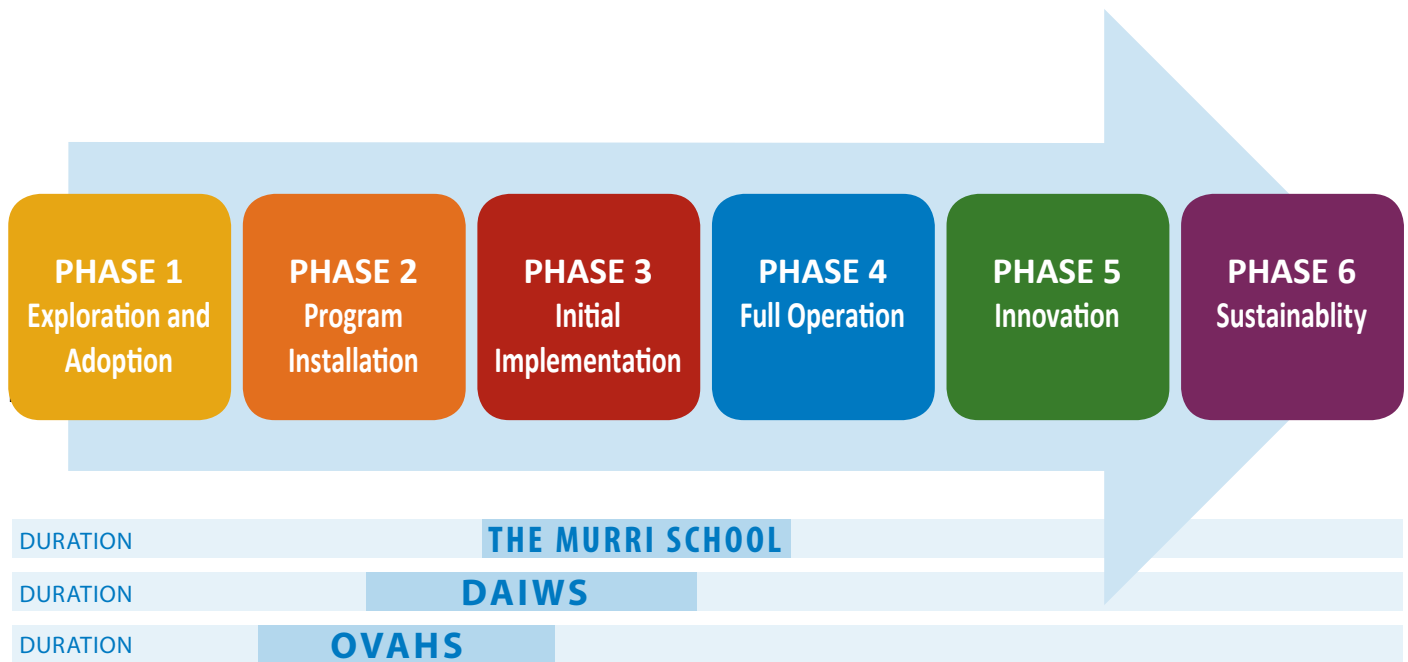


Figure 1: Phases of implementation (adapted from Fixsen et al., 2005)

## Key Achievements

Key achievements in the first 12 months of operation include:

- **17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been employed across the three projects**
- **At least 862 young people and family members have participated in individual and group activities**
- **Over 500 activities designed to improve the social and emotional wellbeing and resiliency of young people were delivered**
- **At least 95% of families participated positively in activities designed to improve family relationships**
- **More than 110 Elders and Indigenous community leaders have been involved in the design and delivery of the three projects**

## Data Analysis

At the end of each reporting period, data collected from the funded projects provides information about each project's performance in line with its service agreement with the Healing Foundation. As part of this process, projects also provide data on agreed national outcomes and associated indicators. This data and the case studies provide a picture of the healing work and its effectiveness. Funded projects are also participating in an external evaluation led by the Australian Centre for Child Protection in partnership with the Institute of Child Protection Studies.

Given the staggered start-up of the three projects, the reporting data does not easily match onto set reporting timeframes. Projects are required to submit either three- or six- monthly reports from the commencement of their funding agreement. The data in this report is displayed in six month periods beginning in April 2012, the point at which the first project commenced service delivery. Between April and October 2012, two projects were operational. Between November 2012 and April 2013, all three funded projects were delivering services to young people and families in their community.

## General indicators

Table 1 summarises the general performance reporting data collected from the three funded projects between 1 April 2012 and 30 April 2013.

	Apr 2012 to Oct 2012	Nov 2012 to Apr 2013
Indigenous employment outcomes	14	17
Total number of participants	686	862
Total number of services delivered	11	22
Participant satisfaction	98%	97%

**Table 1: Reporting data – General indicators**

Most projects employ a core team of two to three workers who drive the project and deliver the majority of the individual and group activities. Brokerage funds have been utilised to employ casual staff, cultural consultants or contractors as specific needs arise. This allows the projects to be flexible and to effectively respond to emerging community needs and expectations.

The range of healing services provided included group education and cultural programs, yarning groups, healing camps, recreational and cultural activities, individual and family counselling, intensive family support, collaborative case conferences, and community wide events and celebrations. As projects have progressed from the initial implementation to full operation phases, the number of services delivered has increased.

The reported participant satisfaction levels have been estimated primarily based on participation rates and verbal feedback.

## National outcomes and indicators

The Healing Foundation works with the diversity of communities across our nation but also creates opportunities to highlight national themes that can contribute to the growing evidence base for healing.

Although each project was designed to meet the unique needs of the young people and families in their local community and the cultural context in which they operate, a review of the program logics identified four national outcomes for this initiative:

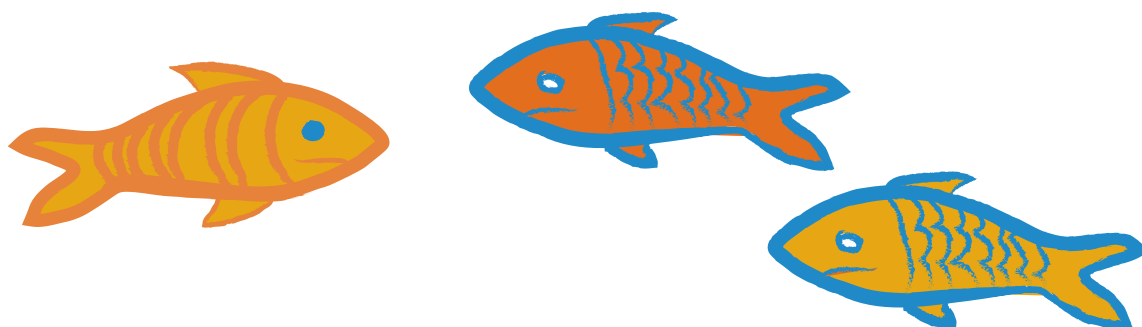
1. improved social and emotional wellbeing of our young people
2. improved resiliency of our young people
3. improved relationships between young people and their families
4. improved service coordination for young people and families.

Even though all three projects are working to achieve these common outcomes, project activities vary dependent on the design of the project. 'Activities' is used as a generic term but may include delivery of camps, cultural and educational group sessions, yarning groups, home visits and outreach support to families, therapeutic sessions, or community-wide events and celebrations.

The four national outcomes form the basis of the project reporting. Table 2 summarises the national outcomes reporting data from the three funded projects between 1 April 2012 and 30 April 2013.

	Apr 2012 to Oct 2012	Nov 2012 to Apr 2013
<b>National outcome 1: Improved social and emotional wellbeing of young people</b>		
Number of activities	69	209
Number of young people participating	379	529
Percentage of young people who engage in activities positively	98%	97%
<b>National outcome 2: Improved resiliency of young people</b>		
Number of activities	68	189
Number of young people	279	422
Percentage of young people who engage in activities positively	98%	97%
<b>National outcome 3: Improved relationships between young people and families</b>		
Number of activities designed to support positive interactions and family healing	22	43
Number of family members participating in activities	307	172
Percentage of families who engage positively	98%	95%
<b>National outcome 4: Improved service coordination</b>		
Number of Elders / Indigenous community leaders involved in program	91	111
Number of activities to improve service coordination	7	7
Number of partner agencies supporting program delivery	12	27

Table 2: Reporting data – National outcomes and indicators



## Elements of Quality Healing Programs

The Healing Foundation recently completed a review of Indigenous healing programs in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America (McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe & Bennett, in press). This literature review identified eight critical elements common to all quality Indigenous healing programs, regardless of where they were located, who they were servicing or what outcomes they were working towards achieving. Emerging evidence from our own analysis of projects funded by the Healing Foundation is showing the importance of these eight elements, as highlighted in the following discussion. Where elements are present, they have been highlighted in the relevant colour.



Figure 2: Elements of a quality healing program



## Key Outcome Themes

Project reports highlight themes that provide significant insight into emerging outcomes of healing work with young people and families. To capture and analyse these themes across the funding round, the Healing Foundation utilises NVIVO qualitative data analysis software to tell the story of healing at the national level. Through an analysis of the data and case studies, we are able to identify the key outcome themes emerging in the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative.

In the first 12 months of operation, the top four emerging outcome themes across the three projects were:

1. Creating a supportive environment for healing
2. Facilitating change and growth
3. Strengthening relationships to school and education
4. Coordinating service delivery.

### Creating a supportive environment for healing

Whilst the healing journey is unique to each individual, a supportive environment that promotes and enables healing for those on their journey is essential. This is particularly important given the collectivist nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. Change does not occur in isolation. People need the support of their families and communities and they need services that understand and can provide healing opportunities to enable growth and change. It is therefore important that healing projects work not just at the individual level but also target the family, community and systems levels in ways that create a supportive environment for healing.

A large part of the early work required to establish the intergenerational trauma projects has been to create a healing framework within the context of the host organisations and the local communities they serve. The three projects are situated within a community-based organisation, school and health service respectively. Whilst these three organisations were already working in the healing space, this funding has given them the opportunity to build upon and extend these efforts. For many of these sites this has resulted in them beginning and strengthening their ability to become trauma-informed services with capacity to deliver trauma-specific care and interventions for their young people and families (Atkinson, 2013). In this way, the projects are impacting on the community and systems levels to enable healing.

One of the first and most significant steps in moving towards becoming a trauma-informed service is **acknowledging and developing a shared understanding of the impact of colonisation, unresolved grief and intergenerational trauma** on the development of pain-based behaviours in young people and their families. Project leaders are working within their organisations and communities to support this shift and working in partnership with ‘healing champions’ who can assist them on the journey. Moving from traditional to trauma-informed service delivery can be challenging and creating a core group of ‘healing champions’ we can support this move has been important for the projects.

Another important element of trauma-informed service delivery is improving access to and engagement with appropriate support services and practitioners. All three projects have purposefully chosen to incorporate healing work within the context of camps, recreational and cultural activities, and community events or celebrations. From the outside, these types of activities might seem to be simply about providing enjoyable, pleasurable and entertaining diversionary activities. In fact, they provide invaluable opportunities for young people and families to build trusting relationships with workers in non-threatening environments. Once trust and safety has been established, people are more willing to raise issues of concern or seek help to address problems in their lives. As one young participant commented, the best thing about participating in these group programs is *“the really friendly people ... I felt really comfortable”*.

1 These figures are derived from an analysis of the qualitative data provided in the project reports. It is important note that these numbers are not definitive. Projects are asked to highlight case studies and stories of impact that are significant to them. Some projects may not highlight some of the themes in their report but the work of their project may still address these themes. Therefore, any specific figures that relate to the qualitative data should not be seen as scientific but they do give an indication of the relative importance of many themes.



Projects are providing trauma-specific care and interventions by **combining Western methodologies and Indigenous healing concepts and practices** to enable healing and recovery from trauma. One project employed the services of a psychologist to work alongside their Indigenous family workers, providing young people and families with access to specialist mental health support in a culturally safe environment. Another project has developed a ten-week education and cultural program for young people incorporating sessions on respectful relationships, self-esteem and goal-setting alongside activities designed to strengthen cultural pride and identity. An example of this is the painting of message sticks as a way for young people to share their story and document their hopes for the future. One young person reflected that the use of message sticks was a great way to “*tell my story and let my parents see it*”.

### **Facilitating change and growth**

A key tenet of trauma theory is the concept of ‘learned helplessness’, the observable phenomenon that once an individual becomes accustomed to trauma, their ability to recognise and escape from danger is impaired. In the same way, young people who learn that they have little control over the outcome of their lives, give up trying to change their future. Bloom (1999) recommends that interventions designed to help people overcome the effects of trauma should include activities that provide experiences of success, mastery and empowerment whilst avoiding further experiences of helplessness and frustration.

Many of the activities delivered by the projects were designed to be enjoyable and inspiring for young people and generate positive feelings about themselves, their family, community and culture. The activities attempted to maximise opportunities for choice-making and self-motivation and encouraged participants to step outside of their comfort zone to try new things. They were carefully structured so that young people left with a sense of achievement and personal mastery because they had been willing to have a go and open themselves up to new experiences. As one young person commented after participating in canoeing whilst on camp, “*watching everyone have a go, having different jobs, trying to row together ... it was good*”. Another young person who had joined in team building activities reflected that “*we might not have worked it out but it was fun*”.

It is often the experience of perceiving themselves as different that makes the difference for young people. The activities offered through these projects are helping them to grow and be changed. They focus on **enhancing the inherent strengths, rather than correcting problems or concerns**. By celebrating the small achievements of their young people in these new spaces, project workers have been able to leverage these positive feelings towards further self-efficacy, personal leadership and change. In this way, they are **building the capacity of young people to create a new vision for themselves, their families and communities**.

### **Project Case Study: The transformative experience of camps**

*Each school holidays, a group of students, teachers and support staff from the Murri School have participated in three to five day camps on country. Students partake in adventure-based activities such as canoeing, low and high rope courses, rock climbing, surfing and bush walks, with the focus on encouraging everyone to have a go. Students are also assigned responsibilities and tasks to ensure the smooth running of the camp and are asked to contribute to ensuring the safety and support of their fellow campers. Staff reported significant shifts in the young people from participating in the camp experiences. For one young boy from a troubled home life and who could be very disruptive in the classroom, the camp provided him with the opportunity to take on a leadership role with his peers, extend a hand of friendship to another student who had trouble forming friendships, and experience a sense of personal success and achievement. His actions in the lead up to, whilst on and since returning from camp helped teachers to see him in a different light and they are more receptive and supportive of him as a result. This student has now started to see himself and others, including the adults around him, in more positive ways and it made a real difference in terms of his engagement with learning.*

Another central tenet of trauma theory is that people need stability and safety in order to begin the process of recovery and healing (Rothschild, 2011). We know many of our young people do not experience a sense of safety in their families and communities due to ongoing and repeated outcomes of trauma such as violence, abuse, addictions and loss. These are complex social issues that cannot be easily resolved. Rothschild (2011) recommends that when people continue to experience ongoing trauma, the focus of healing work should be to increase an individual's sense of safety, enhance their healthy connections, develop coping strategies and strengthen their emotional regulation skills.

The healing projects have positioned themselves in systems and services that provide stability and safety and can act as sanctuaries for young people such as schools, drop-in or community centres, camps, and weekend or holiday activities. The interventions are not designed to be intensive trauma therapy per se but instead focus on **building the capacity and resiliency of their young people to withstand these pressures**. They provide experiences that can act as a meaningful contradiction in the lives of young people by showing them that they, and the adults around them, can behave in different ways. They do this by remaining grounded in the strength and wisdom of the oldest living continuous culture in the world.

Trauma theory also posits that repeated traumatic events can lead to a prolonged physiological alarm reaction that in turn, can lead to altered biological, neurological and psychological states in young people (Coade, Downey & McClung, 2008). Traumatic experiences flood the individual's system with adrenalin and triggers the 'flight or fight' response, the effects of which can be so dramatic that a person does not operate in the same way when they are in a heightened state compared to when they are calm (Bloom, 1999). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who might be in repeated and ongoing states of high stress due to family and community distress, their bodies can adapt to become highly sensitive to perceived danger, so much so that even minor threats can trigger a sequence of physiological, emotional and cognitive responses.

The intergenerational trauma projects encourage young people to participate in outdoors, physical and cultural activities. These types of activities have been shown to assist with sensory integration, calming and soothing distress, regulating homeostatic states (eg. heartbeat and breathing rates), and promoting positive relational interactions (Coade, Downey & McClung, 2008). These modern, Western approaches are congruent with traditional cultural practices that made use of processes that were rhythmic and repetitive as a way to soothe, calm and contain stress and distress. In this way, the intergenerational trauma projects are **combining traditional and modern knowledge to provide healing and facilitate change and growth** in their young people.

### ***Strengthening relationships to school and education***

Educational attainment is strongly correlated with a range of indicators of social wellbeing. Receiving a quality education can act as a springboard for life and can play a significant role in determining a person's career prospects, financial security and health. As such, a key element of the Closing the Gap strategy is to improve the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification (Australian Government, 2013).

Only one of the three projects funded under the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative is auspiced by a school. Despite this, all three projects work extensively with their local schools and education systems to support young people's engagement in learning. One project was asked by a local high school to deliver their ten-week education and cultural program as part of the Indigenous Studies unit offered to students. Feedback from the teachers was that class attendance significantly increased on the days the hands-on sessions were delivered by the healing project staff. Another project worked with an alternative education program run in their community for young people disengaged from education. Each week they visited the program to run cultural, personal development and mentoring sessions. The program leaders observed that students participated more positively in these sessions compared to when they were led by non-Indigenous workers from mainstream support services.

These improvements in attendance and participation suggest that when education is grounded in a cultural context, it has more meaning for young people. As culture is the at the core of who Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are, embedding culture and involving respected and trusted Indigenous workers in classrooms appears to be helping young people make sense of and participate more fully in the learning environment.

Schools are also excellent soft-entry points to engage with young people and families. Research has shown that placing skilled workers, including those who role it is to support healing and recovery from trauma, in non-stigmatising settings such as schools has great potential for improving the accessibility of services and linking people with the specialist support they might require (Butler, McArthur, Thomson & Winkworth, 2012). By positioning themselves in their local schools and education facilities and by ensuring universal access to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, the healing projects have successfully overcome identified barriers to engaging with what has historically been termed 'hard-to-reach' groups. Workers become known, trusted and sought out when times get tough. They can provide immediate support and also act as a broker to more targeted or specialist services that can assist in the healing journey.

### Coordinating service delivery

The issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families are often multi-faceted, complex and inter-related. As such, it is unlikely that any single service provider has the requisite capacity, skill set or resources to address the full range of issues facing Indigenous families. Research suggests that inflexible service delivery models and silo-based frameworks do not lead to positive outcomes for Indigenous clients and communities, particularly in regional and remote areas (Stewart, Lohar & Higgins, 2011). Partnerships between government and non-government and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services are therefore necessary to enable effective child and family support service delivery (Healing Foundation, SNAICC & QATSICPP, 2013).

Although the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature, cooperation, coordination and collaboration can be thought of as distinct constructs along a partnership continuum (McDonald & Rosier, 2011) as demonstrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Partnership continuum (adapted from McDonald & Rosier, 2011)

A common goal of each of the three intergenerational trauma projects is improved service coordination for young people and families. In the context of these projects, service coordination has involved improved linkages, information sharing, joint planning and programming, streamlined referral processes, and sharing of resources and staff between the auspice organisation, healing project and other government and community-based organisations and services. The three intergenerational trauma projects have worked with their local schools and education facilities, health services, and child and family support services with the aim of providing a holistic, coordinated response for their young people and their families. Some of the projects are also considering establishing reference committees, including a youth reference committee at one site, to guide their work as they continue to grow and develop.



## Contributing to the Growing Evidence Base for Healing

Healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities is relatively new. It is an emerging and developing approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Despite growing anecdotal evidence of the positive change healing can and does create, there are limited empirical reviews or critical evaluations of healing projects.

Through ongoing analyses of the earlier Our Healing, Our Solutions and The Journey to Healing funding initiatives, the Healing Foundation is **contributing to the development of a theory and evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing**. Several important constructs have already emerged, most notably the centrality of culture to healing. Over time, as the richness of the story of these projects is amplified, the key emerging outcome themes identified in the first 12 months of the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative will also form part of the theory and evidence base for healing. In the meantime, a brief discussion of how the experiences of the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative contribute to the previously identified constructs follows.

### Culture as the process for healing

Across all the projects funded by the Healing Foundation, the centrality of culture as a tool for healing is consistently and strongly emerging as a critical factor. Rather than being incidental or an added extra, connection to culture and spirituality is the key component through which healing takes place. This is as true for communities that have been most disconnected from their traditional culture and country as it is for communities who are strong in their traditions.

In the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative, the use of culture as the process for healing is again emerging particularly in terms of:

- the importance of being on country
- sharing of cultural knowledge and wisdom across the generations from Elders and community leaders to their young people
- revitalising long held cultural knowledge and practices such as song, dance, story, art, language, smoking ceremonies, kinship structures and value systems
- strengthening pride, inner strength and sense of positive identity by participating in cultural life.

### Project Case Study: Healing through reconnecting with culture

*The Past, Present, Future group program developed by the DAIWS team and delivered to local high school students and young people remanded in youth detention is an example of how culture can change relationships between young people. The ten-week program includes cultural activities such as lighting a campfire, cooking bush tucker, playing the didgeridoo, smoking ceremonies, painting message sticks and storytelling. The education sessions include discussions about Aboriginal identity, local history, language areas, value systems, and protocols of land and communication. Young people who participated in the program have shown an interest in learning more about Aboriginal culture, arts and crafts, history and lifestyles, bush tucker and cooking, and Indigenous sports and games. Workers have noticed improvements in the young people's engagement and communication skills as they learn to relate to each other in small teams to complete set activities. Yarning, talking and laughing around the dinner table has been an important part of their personal growth as they bond and form respectful relationships with their peers. Workers report that the confidence and pride amongst participants is growing as they learn more about their culture and who they are as Aboriginal people.*

## **The need to address the issue of violence**

Although not amongst the top issues identified in the analysis of the project reports, the issue of violence was still a consistent and strong factor reported by the three projects. In the context of the intergenerational trauma projects, the issue of violence was raised in terms of:

- young people being witness to or experiencing violence in their families and communities
- the growing problem of cyber-bullying amongst young people
- lateral violence and family feuding
- young people acting in aggressive and violent ways as an expression of their internal pain and poor emotional regulation skills.

The Healing Foundation believes that the current high levels of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is an expression of the unresolved trauma those communities are struggling with. The issue of violence has also been raised by the other healing and training and education projects funded by the Healing Foundation and emerging evidence from the latter projects is demonstrating that when trauma is addressed within a cultural framework, a significant contribution towards ending the cycle of violence can be achieved (Healing Foundation, 2013).

Given the issue of violence is a troubling concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and communities, the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative will develop and incorporate responses to violence in their future work. Emerging work at each site has a particular focus on helping young people to relate and solve disagreements in more positive ways. Families are being encouraged and supported to discuss problems and complexities with better communications skills. There are opportunities for referral and additional supports for young people and their families at all sites to address more complex issues that might arise.

## **Challenges**

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Undertaking healing work with young people and families is not without its challenges. Through the project reports and conversations with the Healing Foundation, the three intergenerational trauma projects have identified a number of challenges they encountered in the program installation and initial implementation phases including:

- attracting and retaining project workers with the right mix of qualifications, skills, experience and community knowledge and acceptance
- connecting with and making use of local Indigenous healing knowledge systems
- incorporating Indigenous healing knowledge and modalities into project activities
- incorporating culturally competent delivery of mainstream services (eg. psychology services)
- identifying young people who are at-risk of poor social and emotional wellbeing or mental health problems and facilitating access to appropriate support services
- engaging parents and extended family members and encouraging their participation in family healing activities
- supporting host organisations to move towards becoming trauma-informed services and improving congruency across all levels of the organisation (ie. governance, management and service delivery)
- sourcing appropriate professional development opportunities for project staff
- providing appropriate healing experiences for project workers so that they feel confident and capable of leading healing experiences for their young people and families
- developing a pilot project and the uncertainty and ambiguity that operating in such a context can create
- capturing both output and outcome based evidence without imposing undue administrative burden on project workers
- operating within limited financial resources, particularly those in remote locations.



## Implementation Support

As noted earlier, over the past 12 months the Healing Foundation provided proactive, targeted support to the three projects to enable successful program installation and initial implementation including:

- regular contact with each site via telephone, email and site visits
- working collaboratively to develop and refine site-specific program logics
- supporting connections between the funded service and other local and national organisations working to achieve similar outcomes
- opportunity for all three projects to come together for two days to build relationships, share and learn from each other, and understand the evaluation process
- assistance to comply with reporting requirements
- support to problem-solve challenges as they arose
- flexibility to submit new workplans to adjust staffing levels, project activities or resource allocation based on emerging needs and in response to early learnings
- delivery of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training in Brisbane and Darwin sites
- identification of additional training and development needs, both site-specific and across the funding initiative as a whole.

A number of reviews have identified the need to support the implementation of quality programs in Indigenous communities if these services and organisations are to be effective. The 2010 Commonwealth Ombudsman report on the administration of funding agreements with remote and regional Indigenous organisations found that *“complex grant requirements and a failure to adequately support Indigenous organisations to meet reporting requirements increase the risk that these organisations will fail, even where the programs are being delivered successfully”* (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2010). This is consistent with our observations and the decision to invest considerable resources in the implementation support of these three projects is evidence of our commitment to their success and sustainability.

Similarly, a 2013 review of Indigenous youth social and emotional wellbeing programs conducted by the Maru Marri Indigenous Health Unit at the University of New South Wales (Haswell, Blignault, Fitzpatrick & Jackson Pulver, 2013) identified a number of critical success factors in the development of strong and sustainable youth healing programs. Many of these success factors are evident in the implementation support provided by the Healing Foundation including:

- allowing the time and space for the project to find the right path with the community and allowing trial and error to occur so that a strong local knowledge base can begin to emerge
- fostering innovation in tools and processes for staff recruitment, training and service delivery
- embedding meaningful accountability, monitoring and evaluation processes as part of everyday continuous improvement
- providing mechanisms to celebrate achievement, to emphasise the meaning and purpose of the work and to continuously reflect on ‘what are we doing, why are we doing it and how can we do it better?’
- creating safe working environments and structures where staff can discuss the inherent challenges associated with this work and in turn receive support and resources to nurture their resilience and self-confidence.

Reflecting on the challenges identified by the projects and our evolving knowledge about what it takes to support the development of high quality healing programs, the following are strategies the Healing Foundation could take in the coming 12 months to support the projects to progress to the phases of full implementation and innovation (Fixsen et al., 2005):

- source and sponsor appropriate training opportunities for project workers and leaders within their host organisations to facilitate the move towards becoming a trauma-informed service
- continue to support linkages between the three projects and with wider Indigenous healing knowledge systems that can support practice innovation
- refine project reporting systems to ensure we are capturing meaningful evidence that contributes to the national knowledge base about healing and that supports continuous improvement
- continue to act as an external champion for the projects.

## External Evaluation

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The Healing Foundation has contracted the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia (UniSA), in partnership with the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University (ACU), to conduct an external evaluation of the Intergenerational Trauma Initiative.

Whilst still in the establishment phase, the evaluation aims to:

- help create the evidence base for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for youth-focused healing programs in Australia
- broaden the knowledge of the wider community, practitioners and policy makers about such healing initiatives
- enhance the sustainability of such approaches through documentation of their development and outcomes.

A number of broad research questions have been identified and will be further developed and refined with each site. Using a participatory action research methodology, the evaluation will seek to better understand:

- What are children and young people's experience and understanding of healing?
- To what extent are Indigenous knowledge systems being built and incorporated into the healing projects?
- To what extent are cultural activities in and of themselves therapeutic or healing?
- How effective has the implementation support provided by the Healing Foundation been?

As the contract between the Healing Foundation and the external evaluation team was only signed in November 2012, the primary focus of the evaluation team during the period of this report has been to:

- negotiate the scope, structure, focus and timing of the evaluation with the Healing Foundation
- negotiate reporting processes with the Healing Foundation
- participate in the first gathering of all projects and provide an introduction to the evaluation
- submit applications to the Human Research Ethics Committees of UniSA and ACU.



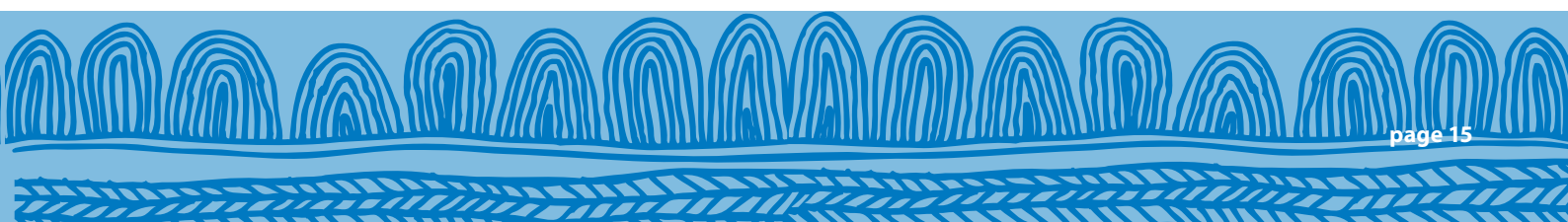
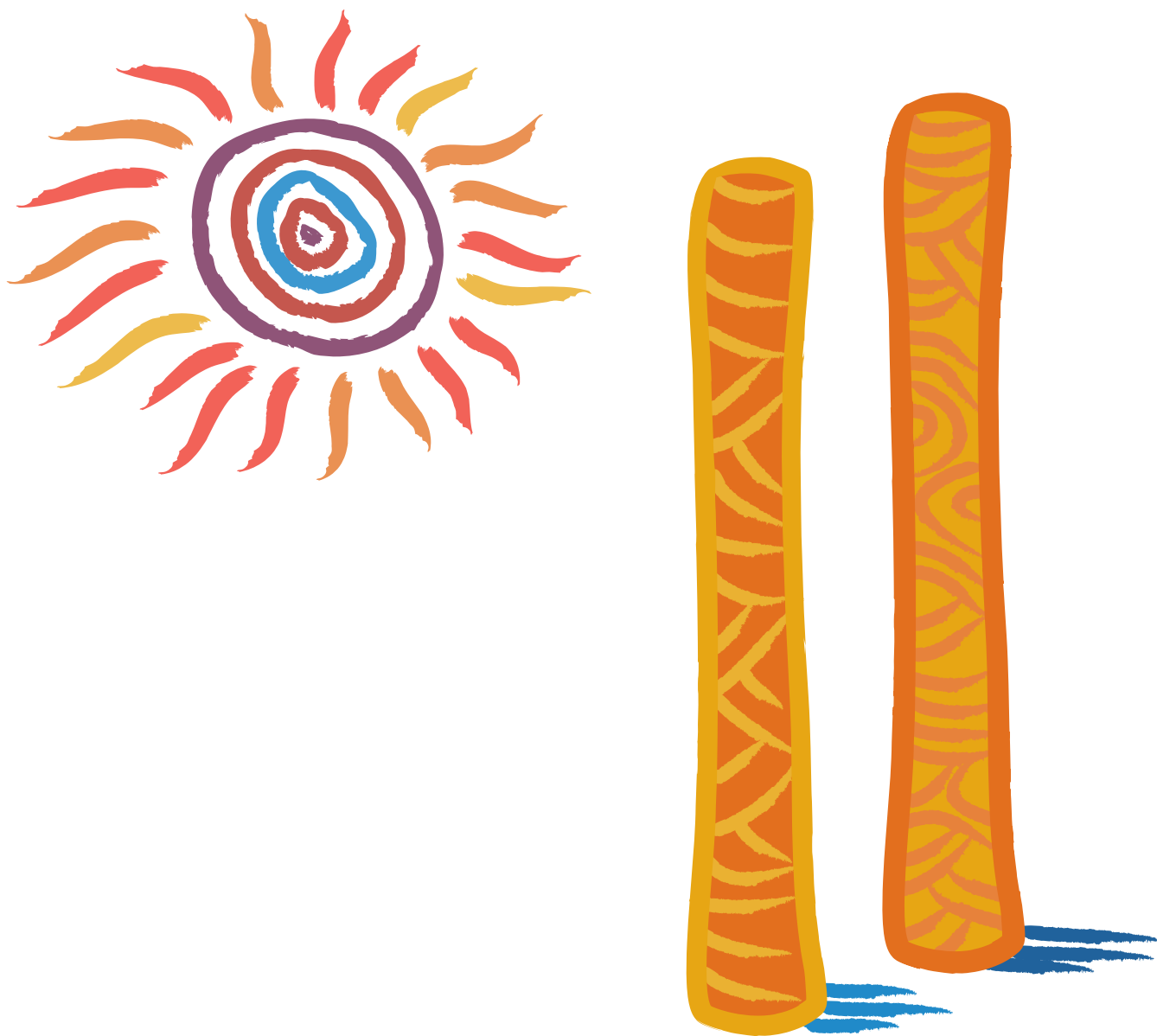
## Conclusion

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The Healing Foundation recognises that for the cycle of trauma and disadvantage to be interrupted it is imperative that we support our young people to heal. Investing in programs and services that aim to help our young people halt the continuing transmission of trauma is a national priority.

The Intergenerational Trauma Initiative is a new approach. These ground breaking projects demonstrate what can be achieved when responses are grounded in the strength and wisdom of culture, delivered by trusted workers and are based on Indigenous knowledge systems of healing and recovery.

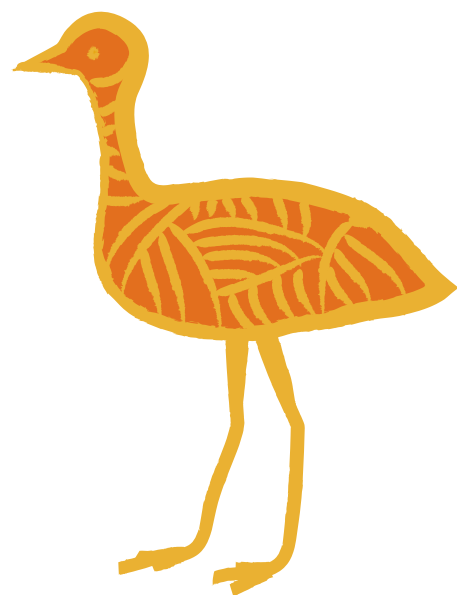
The Healing Foundation thanks the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School, Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women’s Shelter and Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service for their commitment, passion and willingness to design, develop and deliver these projects in partnership with us. Their efforts are helping to grow their children up strong in spirit and culture, creating stronger children and young people and communities now and into the future.



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