

Partnering with men key in Darwin town communities

Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men on program design is the most effective way to tackle violence and other issues in our communities, according to the Healing Foundation.

Since 2014 the Healing Foundation and Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter Indigenous Men's Service have supported men's healing projects in the Darwin town communities of Amangal, Acacia, Belyuen, One Mile Dam, Bagot, Knuckey's Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village.

The *Strong Men Strong Communities* program – co-designed with men in each community to tackle local issues – is helping men address issues like violence, alcohol and other drug use and unemployment by increasing access to culturally appropriate support services and developing healing leadership within the communities.

Key results to date include:

- sixty nine men participated in the program during 2014 and 2015
- eight men found employment or commenced training over the period
- across the seven communities there has been an overall increase in participants' confidence and self-esteem and men are reporting improved coping skills, enabling them to seek support and better deal with stressors in their families and communities
- the men's use of medical services has increased and some men have sought out counselling, AOD support programs and healing services
- as healing emerges in the communities some of the senior men are beginning to take on advisory and senior roles and younger men are starting to attend the program

"These results underline the importance of partnering with local communities on program design," Healing Foundation CEO Richard Weston said.

"Despite the many daily challenges faced by these men including significant levels of trauma and restricted infrastructure and resources, playing a key role in the projects' development has seen men take ownership and responsibility for the projects and enabled these results to be achieved.

"On White Ribbon Day, this is something governments and service providers around Australia can learn from in addressing violence in our communities.

"Greater support is also needed for the *Strong Men Strong Communities* program which to date has operated without a permanent location for men to meet.

"The importance of a place where men can find relief and reconnect to themselves, each other and their communities cannot be overstated. At a bare minimum the project requires a common men's space at an appropriate Darwin location that can be accessed by all participating communities."

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on building culturally strong, community led healing solutions. More information is available at www.healingfoundation.org.au

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