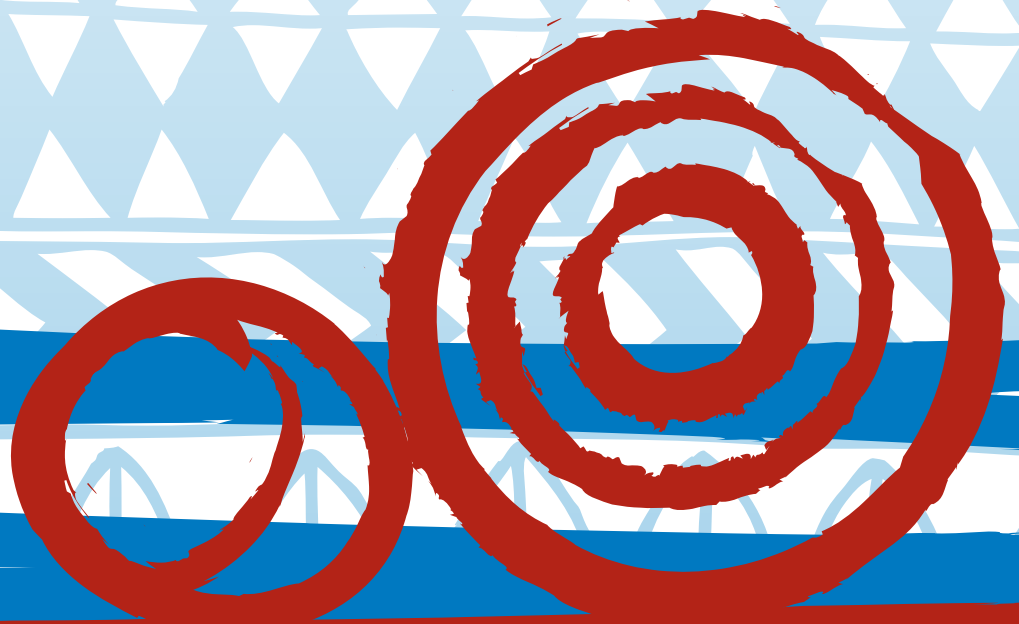




# Healing Foundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People



OUR HEALING OUR SOLUTIONS

*Sharing Our Evidence*

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Report from the independent desk review commissioned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation. It covers the 21 projects of the Healing Foundation's First Funding Round, championed under the banner "Our Healing Our Solutions". Megan Gilmour. Canberra. July 2013.

## Acknowledgements

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation is an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on *healing our community*.

This report was produced from an independent desk review commissioned by the Healing Foundation in June 2013. It covers a program of 21 projects implemented between January 2011 and June 2013, championed *Our Healing Our Solutions*. As components of the first program supported by the Healing Foundation, these projects signify a healing journey enabled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves.

The Healing Foundation acknowledges the hard work and dedication of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved in *Our Healing Our Solutions*. It is their healing stories and journeys upon which we reflect here. We also remember and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have walked the healing journey before these, those who walk alongside and those still to join.

The Healing Foundation gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. We also acknowledge collaboration with the Federal Departments of Health and Ageing and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, along with agencies of the State and Territory governments (in which the projects took place) of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland.

*Our Healing Our Solutions* was reviewed by Megan Gilmour, an external consultant to the Healing Foundation, in collaboration with the Healing Foundation programs team. The programs team provided important context, background policy and subject literature, individual project service delivery plans, activity and progress reports, data and evaluation documents. The review consultant gratefully acknowledges the direction and input given by Lisa Hillan, Healing Foundation Programs Director, along with support from the Healing Foundation Project Officers, Summer Edwards and Caitlin Mullins. She also acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective brought to the review through the Healing Foundation's Lindy Moffatt and Michael Galluzzo.

Canberra, Australia. July, 2013.



## Executive Summary

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Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in their healing journey is a national priority, galvanised by the national Apology in 2008 and the establishment of the Healing Foundation. In June 2013, the Healing Foundation commissioned a desk review in concluding 21 projects in a \$4.78 million funding round championed *Our Healing Our Solutions*. Commencing in January 2011, this healing program was an Australian-first in recognising the profound legacy of pain and hurt in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives. Pain and hurt caused by colonisation and past government policies such as forcefully removing children from their families.

Through *Our Healing Our Solutions*, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are telling their healing story. *Our Healing Our Solutions* has funded an impressive range of activities, and projects of values ranging from \$52,800 to \$400,000, for catalysing healing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities. The program showcases the critical role of traditional and cultural practices in healing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

While many healing projects supported more than one group, *Our Healing Our Solutions* ran equal numbers of healing projects that supported women (5), men (5), and children and young people (5). Thirteen projects had a cultural and traditional healing focus. Healing needs of the Stolen Generations were supported through four projects and their needs are now being addressed through a focused *Stolen Generations Initiative*.

*Our Healing Our Solutions* tended to focus in the Northern Territory and in remote and regional areas. Judgements on investment within *Our Healing Our Solutions* should recognise that (1) there is no data available on the impact of trauma experienced by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which would enable accurate targeting of healing initiatives<sup>1</sup>; (2) the data limitations and infancy of the Healing Foundation, at tender, meant that *Our Healing Our Solutions* was not a *pre-designed* intervention; and (3) available funding and resourcing is assumed to be modest compared to healing needs.

There are some very positive messages to be taken from the appreciable **performance data**<sup>2</sup> drawn from project six-monthly reports. The data shows that on average 28 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed per project, over 10000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participated in healing projects and experienced over 1000 healing services – most incorporating traditional and cultural practices. Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported being satisfied with their participation in *Our Healing Our Solutions*.

*Our Healing Our Solutions* favourably matched policy guideposts to healing such as **Closing the Gap** (72 per cent coverage) and **Social Determinants of Health** (61 per cent coverage). This matching exercise also flagged areas in which future healing programs might consider giving further attention. These include early childhood and education; police and justice; empowering relationships to land; and women in leadership.

Performance as measured by three **National Outcomes** – developed in consultation with project partners – shows impressive results in: (1) strengthened physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing assisted through 6879 wellbeing activities; (2) strengthened connection to culture assisted through 2087 culturally revitalising activities; and (3) strengthened pride in cultural identity assisted through 2176 cultural pride activities. On average, 94 per cent of participants reported a sense of increased wellbeing, connection to culture, and pride in cultural identity.

Consistent with a growing body of Australian and international research, **our own evidence** from *Our Healing Our Solutions* is showing that cultural and traditional practices act as a pathway to healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The review shows the following 10 emerging evidence themes for *our* healing:

- ▶ Identifying with our cultural lineage makes *us* proud and dignified
- ▶ Preserving and sharing cultural heritage gives *us* a sense of future
- ▶ Connecting with land, country and our history makes *us* strong
- ▶ Following our cultural ways makes *us* feel good and builds our spirits
- ▶ Strengthening our community gives *us* belonging and protection

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1 noting that the Healing Foundation is in the early days of breaking ground in building such evidence.

2 note that the data underestimates these measures because it omits data from the period Jan-Jun 2013.

- ▶ Acknowledging leadership allows us to mentor our future leaders
- ▶ Respecting self and others is an important cultural value that guides us
- ▶ Using our cultural skills in our work makes us feel valuable and rewards us
- ▶ Grieving space and healing time lets us take care of hurt
- ▶ Reconnecting with our spiritual selves is powerful and makes us feel whole

Evidence from *Our Healing Our Solutions* can be taken forward as what works, and applied to building a case for cultural healing methods as valid and reliable means to healing in an Australian Indigenous context. *Our Healing Our Solutions* showed 82 per cent coverage of the **(international evidence)** elements of a quality healing program. There is an impressively high degree of integrity between that and what is presenting across *Our Healing Our Solutions* from its independently conceptualised project initiatives. In future, greater application of evidence and theory in programming, and stronger evaluation frameworks, will help crystallise these program achievements.

Healing studies from international Indigenous settings point healing work to several important reminders. These are: healing takes time, cultural approaches should be blended with other healing traditions, there is a central spiritual component to healing, programs are better delivered by people of the same cultural group, program staff need support because of the emotional strain in healing work, there is substantial diversity among people needing healing, and healing programs must first *do no harm* (McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe and Bennett, in press).

The Healing Foundation continues to reflect on how better to target, program and support healing initiatives. The success of *Our Healing Our Solutions* reflects a great need for healing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also highlights a palpable capacity and desire to heal, along with the benefits of self-led, -owned and -enacted cultural and traditional healing practices. These practices are reconnecting people to their spiritual place in cultural identity, country, and community. In short, wellbeing.



## Introduction

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In February 2008, more than two centuries after colonisation, the Australian government gave a national Apology to the Stolen Generations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Subsequent funding and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation (the Healing Foundation). The Healing Foundation is an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on *healing our community*.

It takes courage to go on a healing journey and even more courage to tell that story to those who might only begin to recognise the profound legacy of pain and hurt in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives. Pain and hurt caused by colonisation and past government policies such as forcefully removing children from their families.

The healing story of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is their story to tell – now and for generations to come.

## Healing Foundation

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Established in 2009, on the first anniversary of the Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Healing Foundation is investing in the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and *working together* for building culturally strong community programs in healing. This means that all programs lead from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview and are designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Healing Foundation supports improving the wellbeing of *our people* by:

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

## Our healing our solutions : our program

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### Program overview

In January 2011, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation embarked on its first healing journey, a program of 21 projects funded through an Australian Government contribution of \$4.78 million and championed under the banner *Our Healing Our Solutions*.

As a first for the Healing Foundation, *Our Healing Our Solutions* was both a pilot and driver for an emerging appreciation of what healing means, and how it unfolds, within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. This context, and the evidence it produces, can be aligned with a backdrop of international Indigenous evidence of *what works*. The purpose of *Our Healing Our Solutions* was to contribute to improved holistic wellbeing (sense of body, mind, spirit and culture) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. Specifically, the program intended to fund projects that supported recovery from the historical legacy of trauma and grief as a result of colonisation, forced removals and other past government policies. Each healing initiative needed to demonstrate a match to at least one of the following:

**Prevention.** Reduced likelihood of trauma and/or destructive behaviour being passed from generation to generation (6 projects named this category)

**Trauma Recovery.** Reduced impacts of trauma and grief on communities and individuals (14 projects named this category)

**Short-term Crisis Response.** Increased stabilisation of the immediate wellbeing of people who are in crisis (no projects applied under this category)

**Relationships.** Improved relationships between agencies, individuals, groups, families and peers (1 project named this category)

To be successful, applicants had to demonstrate healing initiatives that were established in evidence and of suitable and sustainable design with a realistic budget and means of management (including methods of monitoring and evaluation). Further, the proposed initiatives needed to be supported by their community and put forward by organisations with a reliable performance record and a clear view of salient risks and how these would be managed.

Following an open-tender process<sup>3</sup>, the Healing Foundation awarded funding agreements to 21 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations<sup>4</sup>.

## Projects in the program

The projects, and the organisations responsible for their implementation, are listed below.

- ▶ Aboriginal Art and Music Showcase Program, Total Health and Educational Foundation (Warwick Peace Festival), Regional Queensland (\$70,400)
- ▶ Angkwerre-iweme: To Heal Someone Using Magic, Akeyulerre Inc, The Healing Centre, Remote Northern Territory (\$310,162)
- ▶ Halo Healing, The Halo Leadership Development Agency Incorporated, Urban Western Australia (\$121,166)
- ▶ Healing Journeys through Ceremony, Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative, Regional Victoria (\$246,000)
- ▶ Healing Project, Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, Remote Northern Territory (\$147,309)
- ▶ Healing Project, Kura Yerlo Incorporated, Urban South Australia (\$99,120)
- ▶ Keeping Our Spirit Strong Healing Circles, 2 Women Dreaming Healing Incorporated, Urban NSW (\$154,752)
- ▶ Kooramook Biganga Ngootyoong: Possum Skin Cloak Healing, Banmirra Arts Incorporated, Regional Victoria (\$299,350)
- ▶ Marumali Healing Camps, Yarning Circles and Youth Healing Program, Winangali Marumali Pty Ltd, Regional, Queensland (\$138,951)
- ▶ Minyma Ngangkari Project, Ngaanyatjatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Remote Northern Territory (\$284,684)
- ▶ Nar-un-bah and Thou Walla Engaging: Aboriginal Fathers Project, University of Newcastle, Family Action Centre, Urban NSW (\$335,120)
- ▶ Seasons for Healing, Aboriginal Family Support Services Incorporated, Urban South Australia (\$399,898)
- ▶ Sister Kate's Home – Kid's Healing Centre and Well Being Program, Communicare Incorporated, Urban Western Australia (\$254,944)
- ▶ Stolen Generation Peoples Healing Camp, Link-Up Queensland, Urban Queensland (\$52,800)
- ▶ The Men's Place, Tangentyere Council Incorporated, Remote Northern Territory (\$388,788)
- ▶ The StrongBala Male Healthy 4 Life Program, Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service, Remote Northern Territory (\$303,207)
- ▶ The Wellbeing Program, Yothu Yindi Foundation Aboriginal Corporation, Regional Northern Territory (\$400,000)
- ▶ Traditional Cultural Healing & Wellbeing Workshops Program, Northern Carers' Network, Urban South Australia (\$114,600)
- ▶ Traditional Healing Centre, Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, Regional Victoria (\$399,270)
- ▶ Wake Up Time Group Traditional Weaving Program, The Buttery, Regional NSW (\$56,180)
- ▶ Youth Healing Camps, Balunu Foundation Ltd, Regional Northern Territory (\$200,000)

<sup>3</sup> The open-tender process commenced in May 2010 and closed at 5pm on 30 June 2010.

<sup>4</sup> There were a total of 120 applications received in this first funding round.



## Program timing

The timing and duration of projects has varied. Close to half of projects in the program have run across the full funding period, from January 2011 to June 2013. With existing funding, four projects have been granted extensions into the second half 2013 and one to the end of June 2014. An additional four projects have been extended to June 2014, with new funding. One project, having already been extended from its original finish date, will continue with new funding beyond July 2013. A summary of projects and their timing can be obtained from the Healing Foundation on request.

## Program activities

*Our Healing Our Solutions* has covered an impressive range of activities for catalysing healing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities. Following are some examples of participatory activities that have taken place across the program, and country:

- ▶ bush trips and trips to country to collect bush tucker and bush medicine, and to learn culture and stories
- ▶ community healing forums and consultations
- ▶ connecting to and learning kinship structures
- ▶ counselling for individuals and groups
- ▶ developing community decision making processes and leadership
- ▶ developing local healing centres
- ▶ developing resources to heal trauma, grief and loss
- ▶ establishing governance structures such as steering committees and reference groups
- ▶ healing camps for elders, stolen generations, girls, young men, kids in out-of-home care and whole of community
- ▶ increasing healing skills and knowledge sharing between organisations and individuals
- ▶ life skills programs focusing on resilience, and preventing and recovery from trauma
- ▶ men's and women's gatherings
- ▶ mentoring in leadership with a focus on preventing trauma
- ▶ performances and concerts providing healing through ceremony
- ▶ suicide prevention workshop
- ▶ taking care of pain in an aboriginal and torres strait islander way
- ▶ traditional and western healing practices including ngangkari treatments, bush medicine, wild flower essences, meditation, massage and bush tucker
- ▶ traditional arts including basket weaving, fabric dying, and possum skin cloak making
- ▶ traditional dance, song, arts and crafts, ritual and ceremony
- ▶ traditional healing work including smoking ceremonies, producing bush medicine and ngangkari treatments

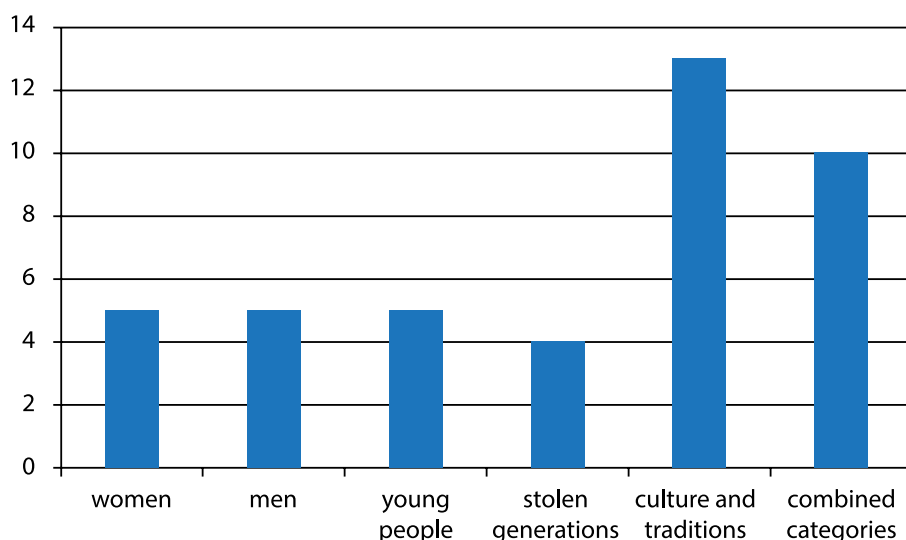
A clear picture is emerging from the activities in each project, and recurring across the program. That is, the critical role of traditional and cultural practices in conceptions, methods and experiences of healing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. This will be illustrated later in this report as qualitative and quantitative data is explored.

## Program areas of investment

In October 2011, the Healing Foundation conducted an Evaluation of the Inaugural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Funding Round, a document that covers in substantial detail lessons learned from the tender process. Material from the evaluation is contributing to continuous improvement in the Healing Foundation's tender and selection processes to ensure allocated resources are invested in a way that affords the greatest potential for healing for the greatest number of people. The critique in this paper on the spread of investment within *Our Healing Our Solutions* should be read with the following in mind:

- 1 there is no data available on the impact of trauma experienced by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which would enable accurate targeting of healing initiatives<sup>5</sup>;
- 2 the data limitations, and infancy of the Healing Foundation at the time, meant that *Our Healing Our Solutions* was not a pre-designed intervention<sup>6</sup>; and
- 3 available funding and resourcing is assumed to be modest compared to healing needs.

In the last twelve months, the Healing Foundation has settled on five categories into which its healing projects fall. Using these categories as a gauge, the funding offered through *Our Healing Our Solutions* has enabled awardees to support and run equal numbers of healing projects for women, for men, for children and young people. It is instructive that thirteen of the projects had a cultural and traditional healing focus and ten supported healing across more than one of the categories. Figure 1 depicts coverage of the categories across the program.



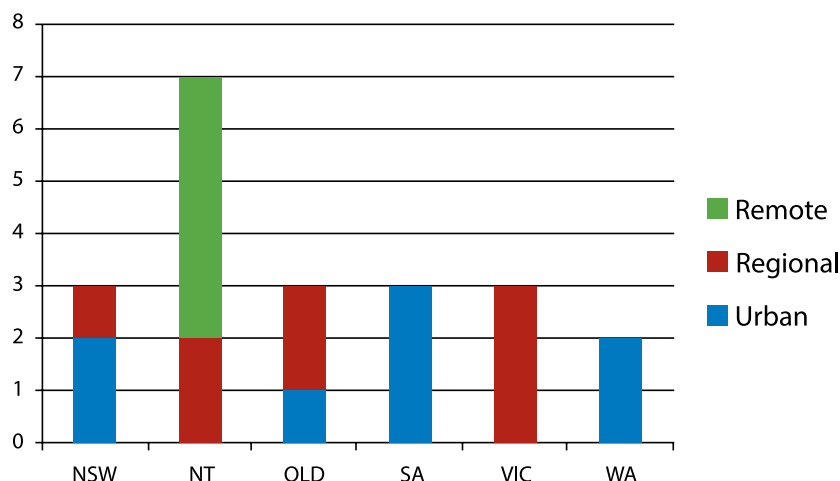
**Figure 1: Our Healing Our Solutions – programs by category**

While support for stolen generations was included in three of the projects, only one project was specifically geared to the particular healing needs of this group. Recognising stolen generations as a cohort in exceptional need of healing support, the Healing Foundation subsequently addressed the limitations in *Our Healing Our Solutions* by introducing a *Stolen Generations Initiative*.

The organisations represented in the program were of a variety of sizes and types and had charge of activity budgets ranging from \$52,800 at the lowest end, to \$400,000 at the highest. Eight projects were located in urban locations, eight in regional and five in remote areas. The Northern Territory hosted the largest number of projects, at seven. New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria each hosted three, followed by Western Australia in which two projects took place. There were no projects funded in the Australian Capital Territory, nor Tasmania.

<sup>5</sup> noting that the Healing Foundation is in the early days of breaking ground in building such evidence.

<sup>6</sup> meaning *Our Healing Our Solutions* could not follow a theory of change or probable program logic.



**Figure 2: Number of projects by state and geographical type**

As Figure 2 shows, the program tended to perhaps over-concentrate effort in the Northern Territory by geographical type (remote areas), and in terms of percentage of overall program value. Table 1 shows that just over forty per cent of program funding went to projects in the Northern Territory, meaning projects in five other states shared the remaining program budget. These states also showed uneven spread by geographical type, however none hosted remotely located projects.

ORGANISATION NAME	STATE	TYPE	VALUE	TOTAL FUNDING BY STATE	PERCENTAGE FUNDING BY STATE
The Buttery	NSW	Regional	\$56,180	\$546,052	11%
2 Women Dreaming Healing Incorporated	NSW	Urban	\$154,752		
University of Newcastle, Family Action Centre	NSW	Urban	\$335,120		
Yothu Yindi Foundation Aboriginal Corporation	NT	Regional	\$400,000	\$2,034,150	43%
Balunu Foundation	NT	Regional	\$200,000		
Akeyulerre Incorporated - The healing Centre	NT	Remote	\$310,162		
Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation	NT	Remote	\$147,309		
NPY Women's Council	NT	Remote	\$284,684		
Tangentyere Council Incorporated	NT	Remote	\$388,788		
Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service	NT	Remote	\$303,207	\$138,951	5%
Total Health and Education Foundation	QLD	Regional	\$70,400		
Winangali Marumali Pty Ltd	QLD	Regional	\$138,951		
Link-Up Queensland	QLD	Urban	\$52,800	\$613,618	13%
Kura Yerlo Incorporated	SA	Urban	\$99,120		
Aboriginal Family Support Services	SA	Urban	\$399,898		
Northern Carers Network	SA	Urban	\$114,600	\$944,620	20%
Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative	VIC	Regional	\$246,000		
Banmirra Arts Incorporated	VIC	Regional	\$299,350		
Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative	VIC	Regional	\$399,270	\$376,110	8%
The Halo Leadership Development Agency Incorporated	WA	Urban	\$121,166		
Communicare Incorporated	WA	Urban	\$254,944		
<b>TOTAL PROGRAM VALUE</b>			<b>\$4,776,701</b>	<b>\$4,776,701</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 1: Funding by organisation, state/territory and geographical type**

The program geography is worth further comment in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demographics. Studies initiated by the Healing Foundation (part way through the program) found that fewer of the projects were in states and urban areas where there are larger numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is conceivably an artefact of a tender selection process that did not cross-reference project applicants to geographical measures of population. While the data from *Our Healing Our Solutions* shows that the program funding met areas of significant healing need, the Healing Foundation is now using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population centres as a coordinated means for targeting program resources for best reach.

At the same time, the Healing Foundation recognises that there are measures (beyond population alone) for effectively targeting healing resources. The data limitations that have previously restricted those targeting strategies are, in part, being addressed by evidence emerging from *Our Healing Our Solutions* and other Healing Foundation initiatives. Future programming will benefit from these advances in evidence, which can be aligned with policy, ensuring that program resources are most equitably applied to greatest effect in influencing healing outcomes.

## Program performance<sup>7</sup>

There are a number of ways in which the Healing Foundation measures program performance. One way is to collect project data every six months on employment outcomes, number of project participants, services delivered, and the level of program satisfaction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who participated. Table 2 shows this program performance data for the January 2011 – December 2012 period.

<b>Indigenous employment outcomes</b>	<b>585 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders employed</b>
<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>13743 people participated in the healing projects (including 2466 at Aboriginal Music Showcase)</b>
<b>Total number of services delivered</b>	<b>1055 distinct healing services delivered</b>
<b>Participant satisfaction</b>	<b>98 per cent of participants reported being satisfied with the services offered by the project</b>

Table 2 Performance reporting data, January 2011 – December 2012

There are some positive messages to be taken from this data. It shows that on average 28 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed per project as project managers, project coordinators, cultural consultants and contractors. Over 10000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participated in healing projects and experienced over 1000 healing services – most of them incorporating traditional and cultural practices. Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported being satisfied<sup>8</sup> with their participation in *Our Healing Our Solutions*.

<sup>7</sup> Project performance refers to reporting data that is collected for Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as part of the Healing Foundation's fiduciary responsibility.

<sup>8</sup> The Healing Foundation acknowledges that most projects found data collection challenging. The lessons learned from this are being used to inform future monitoring and evaluation practice to improve validity and reliability of data at the project and program levels (discussed under Lessons in Evaluation).

## Our healing our solutions : looking back

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At the end of June 2013, the funding round for *Our Healing Our Solutions* draws to a close and the Healing Foundation has commissioned this independent desk review and report on the program. The desk review for *Our Healing Our Solutions* serves as an honourable reflection of perspectives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and peoples who own the healing journeys within its scope. Their voice is central to the review. The review will be distributed (as were six-monthly program reports) among all implementing organisations in the program, along with staff and partners of the Healing Foundation, government agencies and the general public.

### Purpose of review

Set in the context of its development as an organisation, the learning from *Our Healing Our Solutions* will guide the Healing Foundation's strategic planning and offer directions for future programming. To serve those objectives and the accountability the Healing Foundation shares with its funding and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, the desk review will:

- ▶ analyse the level to which the program and each project met National Outcomes, Close the Gap measures and Social Determinants of Health indicators
- ▶ identify emerging evidence for healing through themes recurring across the program
- ▶ compare emerging program evidence for healing to international Indigenous evidence on community protective factors and elements of a quality healing program
- ▶ identify program strengths and specific challenges
- ▶ comment on sustainability
- ▶ summarise lessons for future programming.

The review takes in program reporting periods from January 2011 to December 2012. Program data from January to June 2013 is still being collated at the time of this review, and does not form part of the analysis. Outcomes reported in the review should, therefore, be read as a conservative estimate of the program's achievements.

### Approach to review

The review of *Our Healing Our Solutions* took place across a four-week period and adopted a participatory approach between the Healing Foundation's programs team and the reviewer. The terms of reference and guidelines for the review were jointly developed at inception. It was agreed that the review would conduct a baseline study of individual project data in combination with a meta-analysis of the program's existing six-monthly reports<sup>9</sup>.

Information, the review established the policy context within which the program was initiated and operated, and then considered subject and international literature informing the program's direction, implementation and evaluation. It then looked at each of the 21 individual projects through their service delivery plans, activity and progress reports, and data and evaluation documents which offered an appreciation of project characteristics, and enabled data to be assessed against each of the performance indicators.

The meta-analysis drew out healing themes that emerged across the program. Qualitative data from each project was then distilled to show evidence of healing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program participants against each healing theme. A workshop was held after baseline data was collated and analysed so that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint was embedded prior to developing the narrative report.

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<sup>9</sup> The program's six-monthly report for December, 2012, comprised only quantitative analysis, whereas the six monthly reports for the period to June 2011, December 2011 and June 2012 were quantitative and qualitative.

## Methodology and phases of review

**Mapping and collating literature and data (week 1).** Interviewed project officers, collated background and project material, identified material gaps, aligned projects to categories, identified significant issues, and agreed the review approach and methodology.

**Reviewing, synthesising and analysing literature and data (week 2).** Reviewed relevant policy documents and background material for context, reviewed project material and prepared individual project data sheet for each project, collated data on all indicators, reviewed strengths and challenges for each project and the basis for evaluation and sustainability, prepared report framework.

**Workshopping combined data and findings through an Indigenous perspective (week 3).** Present interim findings and perspectives, discuss the voice in which the document is written, and agree document structure and overall content.

**Drafting review report, preparing draft final report and delivering final report (weeks 3&4).** Prepared draft report for review and feedback. Incorporated feedback and prepared draft final report for review and corrections. Incorporated remaining edits and submitted final report for layout, design and publishing by the Healing Foundation.

## Our healing our solutions : our context

### The role of healing in our context

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in their healing journey is a national priority. The trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a result of colonisation and subsequent policies, such as the forced removal of children, has had devastating consequences. The disruption to culture and the negative impacts on cultural identity has had lasting negative effects, which are being passed from generation to generation. The cumulative effect of this intergenerational trauma severely interferes with the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to fully and positively participate in their lives and communities. This, in turn, leads to widespread disadvantage.

As the oldest living continuous culture in the world, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are strong and resilient. They have developed culturally effective ways of healing trauma and loss. The Healing Foundation initiatives are reconnecting *our people* to these ways, where colonisation and subsequent policies created disconnection. This reconnecting offers healing from pain and the deep and broad benefits of experiencing harmony and balance from participating more fully in family and community life in healthy, safe and confident ways.

*Our Healing Our Solutions* demonstrates a moving story of healing. To capture achievements, the projects have risen to the challenge of collecting and collating useful data, oftentimes within an *organic and dynamic* context which offers limited options for more formal *academic* evaluation. Recognising the challenge ahead, in February 2011 (at the program's inception) the Healing Foundation hosted an Evaluation Workshop to set a common foundation for projects in their evaluation targets and processes. While projects, and the program, worked to find the best (culturally relevant and appropriate) ways to measure outputs and outcomes, the healing journey was just unfolding and would later inform these approaches<sup>10</sup>. Despite this challenge, project reporting has generally been consistent and has yielded appreciable data.

Comprehensive project service agreements ensured that projects delivered six monthly reports to the Healing Foundation. These reports included quantitative and qualitative data from the preceding six months of implementation. Twenty projects submitted reports for January 2011 to June 2011 (one project was delayed in starting and had nothing to report); 19 projects were operating and reported in the July 2011 to December 2011 period; 17 projects submitted reports in the January 2012 to June 2012 period (one project had temporarily suspended implementation); and the remaining 15 operating projects reported for July 2012 to December 2012. Here is a summary of notable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing achievements, recognising that these do not include the final six months of reporting data from the program (January 2013 to June 2013). At the time of this review, that data is still to be collated.

<sup>10</sup> A number of projects in the program developed external partnerships with qualified evaluators to enable more robust and "in-line" evaluation design and approaches.

- ▶ 585 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed through 21 projects.
- ▶ All projects designed, developed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ensuring appropriate healing services for all participants.
- ▶ Over 10000 children, young people, men, women and Elders participated in healing activities, demonstrating the need for and importance of healing work.
- ▶ Almost 2100 cultural activities were provided, helping people reconnect with culture and supporting strengthening of cultural identity and pride.
- ▶ 92 per cent of participants reported improved physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural wellbeing as a result of participation in the healing projects.
- ▶ Strong organisational partnerships were developed and these links for service delivery allowed for more holistic services and interventions.
- ▶ Positive publicity celebrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and educated the wider community about healing.
- ▶ Significant contributions were made to the Closing the Gap agenda in the areas of economic participation, health, governance and leadership, and safe communities.

*Our context* offers a number of prisms through which the program can be viewed. These include *our own* National Outcomes and the Australian policy context (closing the gap and social determinants of health). Importantly, there is an evidence story for Indigenous healing practices shown in the international context that is emerging in *our own experience of healing in Our Healing Our Solutions*.

### **Healing meeting national outcomes**

*Our Healing Our Solutions* has also reported performance on collectively agreed<sup>11</sup> national outcomes. The national outcomes and data presented later *in our own words* offer a picture of the effectiveness of the healing that has taken place. Table 3 depicts the data collected from the 21 projects between January 2011 and December 2012 on the number of healing activities by type and the percentage of participants who self-reported improvements in those areas.

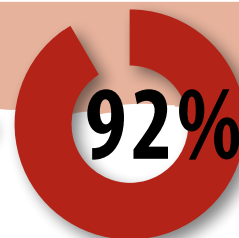
As traditional and cultural healing methods built momentum across the program, the number of activities supporting wellbeing, cultural revitalisation and cultural identity increased. Each six-monthly reporting period shows average increases in the number of activities first by 26 per cent, then by 12 per cent, and finally by 77 per cent. Table 3 summarises program national outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> In February 2011, at the commencement of the program, participating organisations were invited to Canberra to workshop and agree on national outcomes that would serve as drivers of program performance.

### National outcome 1: Strengthened physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing

Number of wellbeing activities provided	6879 wellbeing activities
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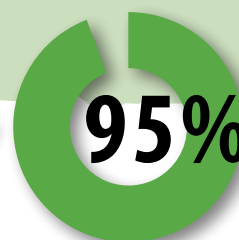
Percentage of project participants who reported increased social, spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing



### National outcome 2: Strengthened connection to culture

Number of cultural activities undertaken, revitalised or created	2087 culturally revitalising activities
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Percentage of project participants who reported increased or strengthened connection to culture



### National outcome 3: Strengthened pride in cultural identity

Number of cultural activities provided that increased pride	2176 cultural pride activities
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Percentage of project participants who reported strengthened pride in cultural identity

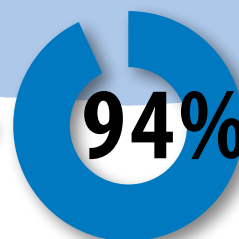


Table 3: National outcome data, January 2011 - December 2012



## Matching policy guideposts to healing

The Healing Foundation’s work clearly operates within Australian government policy guidelines and indicators. Chief among them is Closing the Gap and its guideposts to Social Determinants of Health, as summarised in Figure 3.

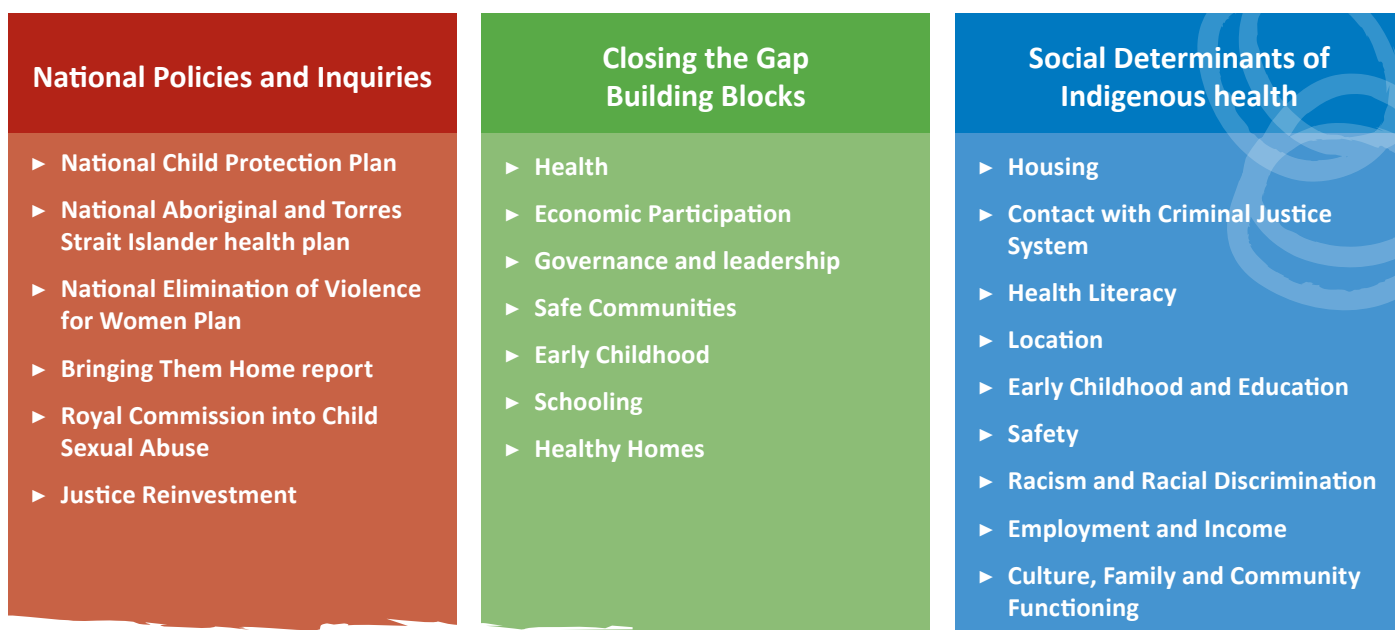


Figure 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program guideposts

The following sections show how *Our Healing Our Solutions* is meeting policy guideposts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### Healing is closing the gap and upholding the social determinants of health

*Our Healing Our Solutions* contributes to the Closing the Gap agenda in a variety of ways. Some projects support parents and carers to create healthy, positive environments for children. Others support young people to reconnect with schooling or prepare them for entering the workforce.

A number of projects work in partnership with government and community organisations to ensure *our communities* are being supported with their health, and are safer by enabling families to address the role played by hostility, gambling or substance misuse in the context of trauma and pain. Figure 4 shows how *Our Healing Our Solutions* is contributing to each of the Closing the Gap building blocks. Overall, the program shows 72% coverage of these indicators.

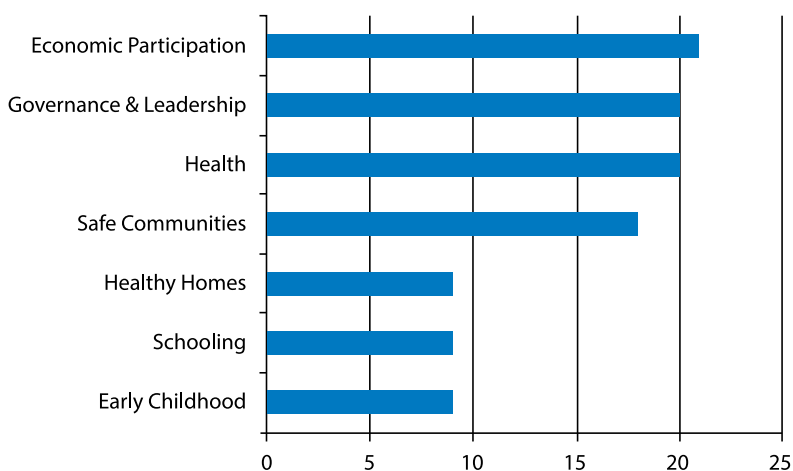
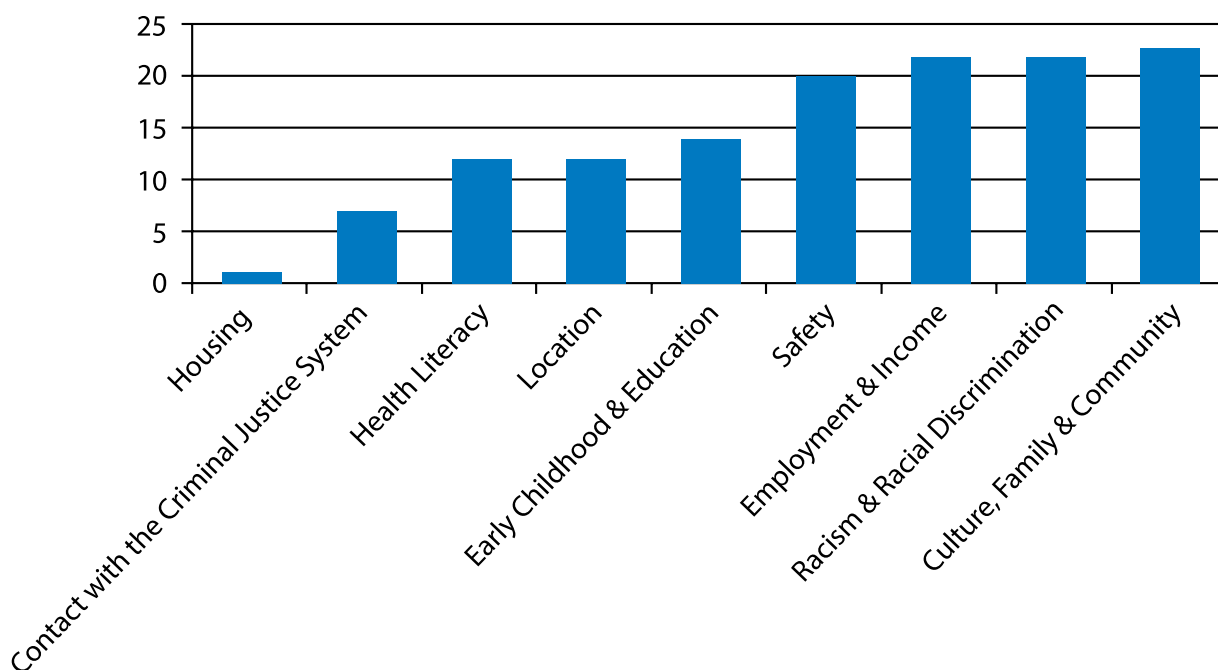


Figure 4: Program contribution to Closing the Gap building blocks

*Our Healing Our Solutions* is closing the gap through project activities addressing economic participation, governance and leadership (though more focussed on male leadership)<sup>12</sup>, health and building safe communities. The three areas that might be considered for more attention in future programming are: early childhood, schooling and healthy homes. These areas have, perhaps, already benefited more obviously than is shown by the data, as they are likely to have been underpinned by progress in the top four building blocks.

Closing the gap in health is an area worthy of further comment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples currently experience more illness, injury and disability than other Australians. Providing healing opportunities strengthens the health and wellbeing of *our people* and contributes to the goal of closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and other Australians by 2031.

The 2012 Prime Minister’s report on progress in Closing the Gap reported that between one-third and one-half of the health gap can be explained by differences in the social determinants of health (Australian Government 2012a). A subsequent discussion paper flagged development of a new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (Australian Government 2012b) and outlined nine significant social determinants of the health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes factors of early childhood, education, employment, income, housing, environment, safety and cultural and community functioning. Figure 5 shows the measure in which *Our Healing Our Solutions* is contributing to these areas.



**Figure 5: Program contribution to addressing social determinants of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples’ health**

The data also shows that future Healing Foundation program objectives might consider reflecting aspects of housing and location, contact with the criminal justice system, health literacy, and early childhood and education.

<sup>12</sup> Examination of Protective Factors shows that less than half the projects targeted women in leadership.

## The evidence for healing from an international context

International evidence is increasingly highlighting the need for healing initiatives that are informed by local Indigenous concepts of wellbeing – namely those that address the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural needs of local Indigenous peoples. These must acknowledge history and collective cultural experiences, both traumatic and positive (Caruana 2010).

### Cultural continuity and identity as protective factors

The concept of cultural continuity and identity in Aboriginal communities has been well-documented by Michael Chandler, a Canadian researcher with expertise in social and emotional wellbeing in First Nations communities. He argues that cultural continuity is enabled where communities understand their past and *own* a common future. For example, Chandler & Lalonde (2008) found a correlation between the number of *protective factors* present in First Nations communities and overall community wellbeing (as measured by youth suicide rates). The protective factors influencing community wellbeing, as measured, are:

- ▶ self-determination and self-government
- ▶ progression of native title and land claims
- ▶ measure of control over health, education and social services
- ▶ measure of influence over police and justice services
- ▶ measure of control over children’s services
- ▶ community facilities that allowed for preservation of culture
- ▶ knowledge of Indigenous languages
- ▶ women in leadership and governance roles.

Figure 6 illustrates that *Our Healing Our Solutions* has incorporated many of these protective factors in its overall design and delivery. The projects proposed suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples already know what supports their healing and community wellbeing from *our own* evidence viewpoint. Protective Factors such as self-determination, health, education and social services, language and cultural facilities are most evident in *Our Healing Our Solutions* projects—with self-determination being the most prominent factor.

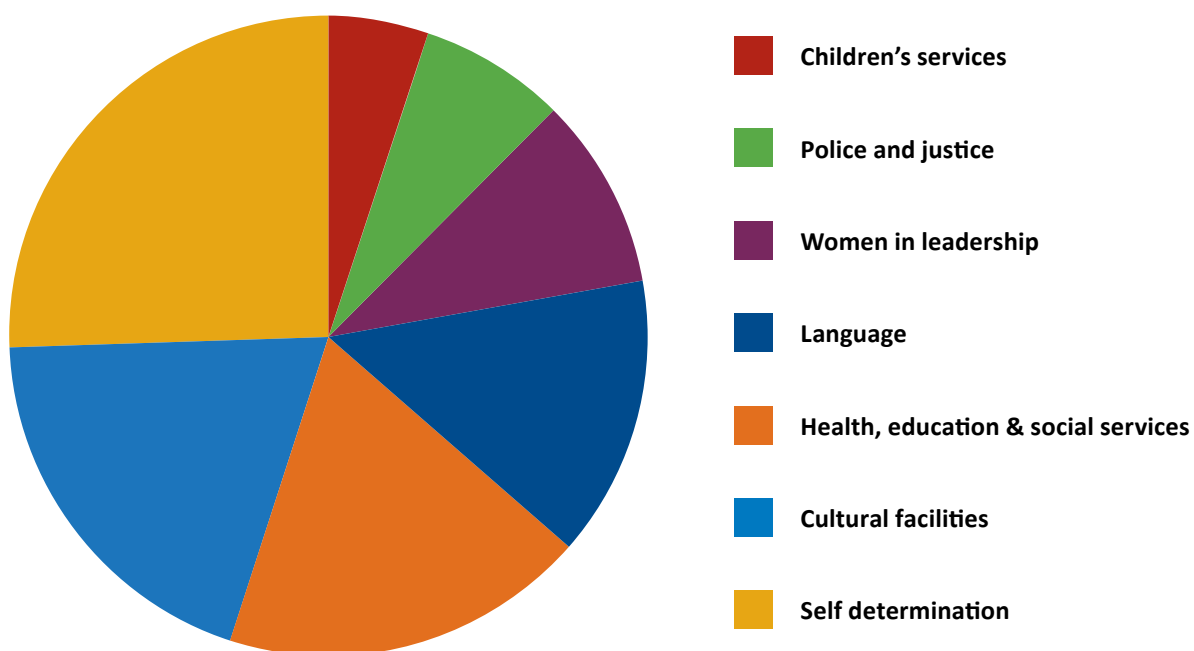


Figure 6: Inclusion of cultural continuity factors in healing service design and delivery

Increasing representation of protective factors in future programming may be found by renewing opportunities for women to participate more fully in governance and leadership, and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples developing more empowering relationships to children’s services, policing and justice, and land. It is worth noting that of all the indicators for *Our Healing Our Solutions*, program coverage of protective factors was the lowest at 49 per cent. But this is not surprising considering what protective factors say about certain Indigenous communities.

The factors are distilled from research in Canada on communities that have grown quite strongly into their own sound governance models which include conceptions of access and equality – women in leadership, land ownership, law enforcement, delivery of health, education and social and children’s services. Theoretically, these are goals to which quality healing programs in Indigenous Australia would contribute over a longer period, noting that the evidence here for drivers of social cohesion and wellbeing still needs to be more fully developed and understood.

### ***Elements of a quality healing program***

After *Our Healing Our Solutions* started, the Healing Foundation commissioned a review of international literature on Indigenous cultures in respect to healing. The literature review places the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs in the context of Indigenous healing programs from the United States, Canada and New Zealand using both formal and informal literature sources.

Using culturally appropriate methodologies to glean evidence, McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe and Bennett (*in press*) found recurring themes in international Indigenous healing settings. These suggest that healing takes time, cultural approaches are blended with other healing traditions, there is a central spiritual component to healing, programs are better delivered by people of the same cultural group, program staff need support because of the emotional strain in healing, there is substantial diversity among people needing healing, and healing programs must first do no harm.

Further, the international study lists a range of drivers of success for healing programs in an Indigenous context. Table 4 shows the strength of these drivers in *Our Healing Our Solutions*.



Drivers of a quality healing program	Our Healing Our Solutions
growing from local culture and values	●●●
recognising the impacts of colonisation and trans-generational trauma	●●●
providing community empowerment	●●
acknowledging diversity	●●
applying principles of social justice and human rights	●●●
arising from an evidence or theory base	●
responding to needs identified by the local community	●●
enjoying support from the local community	●●●
involving elders	●●●
building individual, family and community knowledge and skills capacity	●●●
providing training, peer support and mentoring	●●●
providing a safe place for healing to occur	●●●
incorporating spirituality	●●●
offering flexibility	●●●
taking proactive rather than reactive steps to specific issues	●●
providing networks within and external to the community	●●
embedding sustainability and offering sufficient long-term resources	●
incorporating ongoing reflective evaluation from the beginning	●
aiming for <i>researching ourselves back to life</i> .	●●●

**Table 4: Measuring *Our Healing Our Solutions* against drivers of a quality healing program**

Informed by the international evidence, the Healing Foundation has synthesised the study’s findings and developed a set of reliable indicators, or *elements* of a quality healing program, for the Australian Indigenous context. This review has measured *Our Healing Our Solutions* for these elements and Figure 7 depicts the results. The program shows an admirable 82 per cent coverage of the elements of a quality healing program.

Specifically, the projects in *Our Healing Our Solutions* have recognised the quality healing elements of understanding the impact of colonisation, trans-generational trauma and grief, addressing issues in the local community, and being driven by local leadership. The programs have been proactive rather than reactive in building capacity in individuals, families and communities using a blend of Indigenous healing and western methodologies.

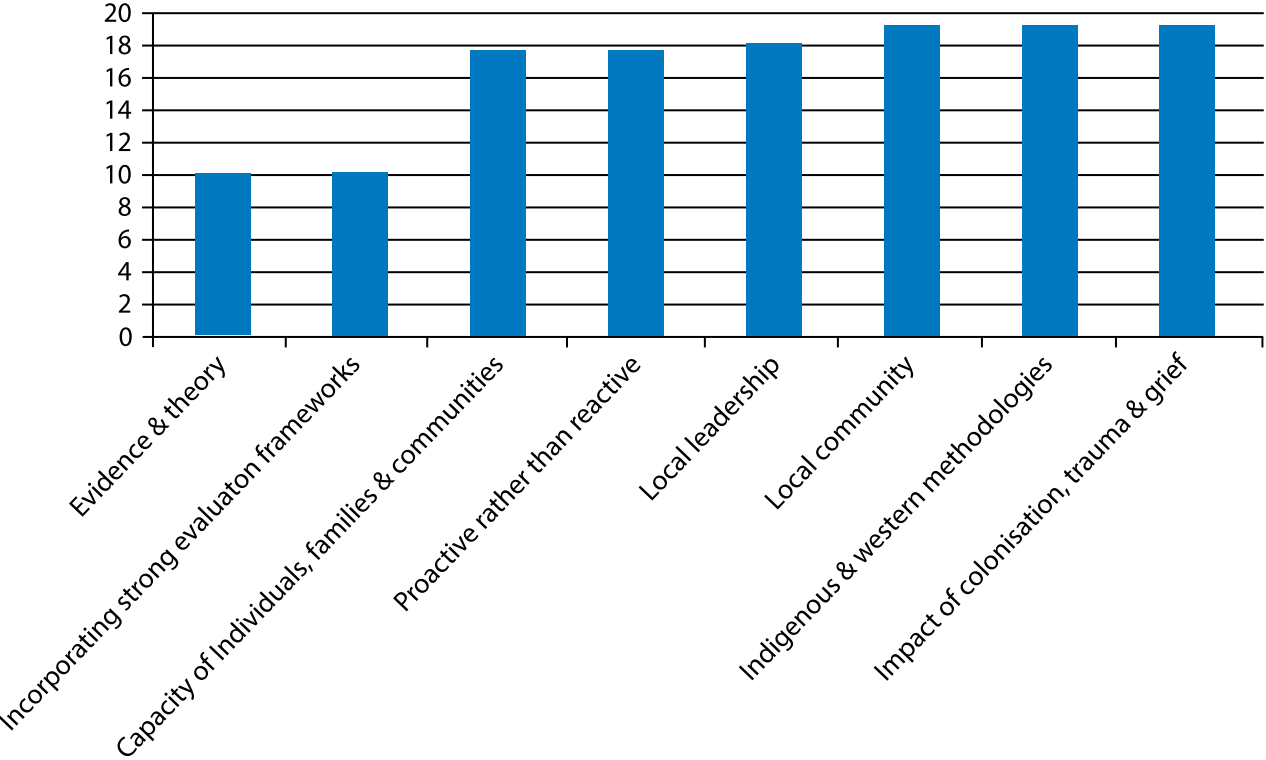


Figure 7: Elements of a quality healing program present in program

The study of elements of a quality healing program suggests two areas for further attention in future healing programs. These are application of evidence and theory and incorporating strong evaluation frameworks at the program level. Both of these areas are high priorities for the Healing Foundation. For example, the Healing Foundation commissioned the review of international literature (discussed in this section) and is making ongoing reference to Chandler-Lalonde’s (2008) protective factors in its programming. The Healing Foundation also recognises the importance of developing evidence and theory through strong evaluation practice and is engaged in ongoing work in this area with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program owners. This shows in the Baker IDI facilitated project evaluation workshop in late April 2013 and outcomes from the program evaluation workshop jointly run by the Healing Foundation and Australian Institute of Family Studies in May 2013.

Noting that, the accomplishment of *Our Healing Our Solutions* in meeting the drivers and elements of a quality healing program should not be understated. Recall that the program was not designed using a theory of change or program logic model, nor was it derived from a global evidence perspective. Despite these limitations, there is an impressively high degree of integrity in the *evidence elements* presenting across these independently conceptualised project initiatives that leads back to the international evidence. This suggests, again, that individual projects were inherently (culturally) well attuned to their own evaluation and evidence of *what works* for Indigenous healing.



## Our healing our solutions : our experience and evidence

### Our developing evidence in healing

Consistent with a growing body of Australian and international research, *our own evidence* from *Our Healing Our Solutions* is showing that cultural and traditional practices act as a pathway to healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Improved social and emotional wellbeing appears to be an outcome of the renewal of cultural practices that builds cultural and community strength and personal identity with pride and dignity. Project data and case studies clearly show the following recurring healing themes emerging from *Our Healing Our Solutions*.

#### Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context : Thematic evidence for healing

- 1 Identifying with our cultural lineage makes us proud and dignified
- 2 Preserving and sharing cultural heritage gives us a sense of future
- 3 Connecting with land, country and our history makes us strong
- 4 Following our cultural ways makes us feel good and builds our spirits
- 5 Strengthening our community gives us belonging and protection
- 6 Acknowledging leadership allows us to mentor our future leaders
- 7 Respecting self and others is an important cultural value that guides us
- 8 Using our cultural skills in our work makes us feel valuable and rewards us
- 9 Grieving space and healing time lets us take care of hurt
- 10 Reconnecting with our spiritual selves is powerful and makes us feel whole

The story told by these themes is consistent with that of healing literature from Indigenous communities outside Australia (as matched below in parentheses). The meaning and passage to healing they hold for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is evidenced *in our own words*.

**Identifying with our cultural lineage makes us proud and dignified** (Indigenous Methodologies). For us this means knowing who we are, where we come from and our place of belonging, growing in confidence and connection to country, culture and community, and speaking proudly our language. Speaking strongly in language and respecting country, elders and ancestors empowers our identity. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- › I feel our cultural identity is fundamental to our survival and future, and I still stand by that, nothing is more important to someone's wellbeing than knowing who they are and where they come from.
- › It made me feel privileged ... it gave me a sense of pride in my culture.
- › If we speak our language we can explain things differently, sometimes there aren't the right words in English language to say it the right way. We need to make sure we keep our language, it is very important for culture.
- › Common themes identified in stories ... by young people ... were increased self confidence and pride; an easing of negative emotions; and a sense of optimism about the future.

**Preserving and sharing cultural heritage gives us a sense of future** (Indigenous Methodologies). For us this means building positive cultural worldview for self and family, educating young ones in a future that values and builds on cultural knowledge, and telling who we are to non-Indigenous people. Reconnecting with our Aboriginal heritage, culture, spirit gives a new lease of life for us. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- › Humble to be part of the oldest continuing culture on the planet earth ... I feel like a shining star.
- › It is important for us to be telling our story our way and people can listen to what we are saying. This way we keep our culture and people strong and show respect to the Elders who came before us.
- › Makes me feel that what we have learnt today can be taught to our grandchildren and handed down to their children.
- › By having Aboriginal people speak about the past, present and future it helps create an understanding of why we are where we are and how we can go forward.

**Connecting with land, country and our history makes us strong** (Indigenous Methodologies). For us this means being on country and at sacred sites, standing where our ancestors stood and appreciating our lived history, and doing what our ancestors did and feeling their wisdom. Our Healing journeys captured a yearning for each individual's cultural connectedness to land, language and customs with stories of our dreamtime ancestors from the countries visited...unlocking the door to stories that had been passed down from generation to generation revealing an insight to our identities, history, and present journeys. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- › Participants explained it is crucial for their sense of identity to be connected to country. By being on country, they feel strongly connected to who they are and their spirit ... respecting culture directly strengthens people's sense of identity.
- › I felt really connected to the past. It was good to be on country again.
- › The more I do the more I am healed. It's helping me connect; this country is like my home...and this is healing me and giving me more than you know.
- › The experience...was very enriching for us all and highlighted that connection to land is the most important element for an Aboriginal person when healing.

**Following our cultural ways makes us feel good and builds our spirits** (Indigenous Methodologies). For us this means learning, understanding, valuing, embodying our culture through storytelling, doing music, singing, arts, traditional dance, weaving, crafts, bush medicine, bush tucker, and participating in customs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and totems (practicing our rights and responsibilities). Sitting in deep listening and sharing stories brings us back together, and you feel connected with culture, our cultural ways. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- › The act of trying on the cloaks enhanced wellbeing and pride and was transformative.
- › Young ones enjoyed learning song and dance and making sacred artefacts and were proud to connect with their cultural heritage and community.
- › Wellbeing for me is getting back to cultural activities and protocols.
- › Singing is such an important part of traditional Aboriginal culture and the belief is that by singing together people may be able to resolve some of their difficulties.



**Strengthening our community gives us belonging and protection** (Local Community). For us this means a sense of belonging to a larger family of support, protection with our people, safety with each other, security, and not being alone, and finding kindred spirits and peer support in confidence. Participants were connected to each other and to services established to support the Stolen Generations, and have committed to Healing Journeys which will connect them with family, community, country, ancestors, spirituality and culture. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › I love my Koori heritage and the women love it too, the old stories and being on the same level. Always love meditation and deep listening, feels good. The confidentiality, I know I can talk about almost anything and know it will always stay within the group.

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  - › This workshop made me...think about the importance of our mobs. All together. One way, only way, right way is together. Where we are today and where we should be is together with culture.

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  - › People gathering to form community...you have a sense of belonging.

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  - › This boy has been able to connect with men in his community, link to his cultural heritage through his connection with those men and as a bonus improve his school performance.

**Acknowledging leadership allows us to mentor our future leaders** (Local Leadership). For us this means strengthening the role of Elders, and all other roles in intergenerational mentoring, recognising traditional rites of passage, taking traditional place and responsibility, and preparing and mentoring upcoming and emerging leaders for self-governance. Elders have been strong to express the ways they want to teach their families and the important things for them to learn, this shows a strength in their feeling about who they are and their position as Elders and teachers in their community. Younger ones have been expressing they want to spend time with Elders and learn which shows their interest and desires for learning. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › Elders practiced cultural tradition and shared their cultural knowledge of creation stories, sites and songlines with community members, youth and children

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  - › I learnt everything I need to know about my culture. I learned how to make spears and woomeras and learned from ... grandfather/elder.

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  - › Make a change, one small step at a time, by planting the seeds and that it is of the utmost importance to reconnect with culture and identity to create the strong leader for the future that ultimately breaks the cycle for good.

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  - › Being together sharing stories, connecting with Elders and young people. Walking away feeling empowered with knowledge.

**Respecting self and others is an important cultural value that guides us** (Building Capacity). For us this means resilience, coping, calm and control, learning to trust, breaking negative cycles, healthier habits (food, movement, reducing substance misuse, non-violence), and healthier relationships and mutual respect – finding greater purpose in the role of Elder, grandparent, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, healer, aunty, uncle, cousin, friend. Kinship is a powerful connection to culture. The families witness profound changes in the behaviour and attitude of their loved ones, and most of the youth...have become stronger and more culturally aware and therefore are on their way to becoming the warriors of the future that will break the cycle of neglect and violence by passing on only the goodness to their children and grandchildren and loved ones. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › Many youth reflect on the fact that they understand and are walking the pathway and taking on the challenge of the warrior and are ready to heal and strengthen themselves and to strive and break the cycle for their children.

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  - › Ladies ... we are jumping in the river with her, getting worked up, we need to think about that maybe she needs healing too ... we can't be rough to her, it's the behaviour we need to change.

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  - › Engaging men to be proactive in their daily lives and to identify their health conditions, strengthening their mind, body and function proactively as Aboriginal Elders within our community and wider community.

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  - › It's changed me a lot! I'm thinking a lot clearer now about my family and my child; about how can I better myself to be a proud and strong Aboriginal man. How can I be better, so I can uphold my responsibilities as an Aboriginal man and a father?

**Using our cultural skills in our work makes us feel valuable and rewards us** (Building Capacity). For us this means pride in working in, and living knowledge through, cultural assets, sustainable income and participating in economic activity, and recognising the value of traditional ways and service through payment for them. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › It is very therapeutic working on the cloak with my fellow community members, made me feel fantastic and overwhelmed. Used to feel you couldn't do it but now you know you can. It's given us the skills to carry on. It made me feel reconnected. But it also made me want to learn more and teach and promote it.

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  - › The project has received calls from several other women who have been making bush medicines, and believes that there is resurgence in interest in bush medicines. The project is looking at ways of marketing bush medicines.

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  - › The women say that when young people in communities see that ngangkari are paid, and that their work as ngangkari is respected and acknowledged ... then their interest in becoming ngangkari and learning about ngangkari practices increases.

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  - › Individual participants and the group as a whole have been approached to teach; for example ... a master weaver herself invited the group. But importantly, the women have been showing more initiative in organising events themselves.

**Grieving space and healing time lets us take care of hurt** (Impact of Colonisation, Transgenerational Trauma & Grief). For us this means hearing from our own people about our shared story of grief, understanding trauma, grief and loss and how this suffering is passed on, expressing grief and rewriting our personal stories by knowing our ancestral stories. We now feel normal about our grief and understand that there is no time or process around our grief. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › The majority of the children identify this as the first time anyone has ever tried to help them deal with the pain and the underlying issues in a safe and culturally appropriate manner.

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  - › Understanding the impact of psychological trauma on Indigenous health and how the integration of traditional practices and western ways works will be significant and important to how things occur in the future.

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  - › Until we can own the true history of what was done, none of us can ever heal. We will have the bitterness always eroding our spirit, our potentials and our souls. We must stand together and heal, while only one of us suffers, none of us is well.

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  - › The Stolen Generations formed connections with each other and services ... drew upon the strengths offered by Aboriginal culture(s), expressed pride in their identity and identified a need to develop their own connections and undertake their own healing journeys.

**Reconnecting with our spiritual selves is powerful and makes us feel whole** (Indigenous Methodologies). For us this means accessing and elevating status of traditional healing tools and Ngangkari, transformative cultural medicine, healing mind, body, emotions and spirit, and relaxing, releasing pain, rejuvenating and restoring joy. This is what healing is all about because you feel better everywhere, with spirit. Evidence found *in our own words*:

- 
- › A completely culturally driven program and...centred on...knowledge systems incorporating strengthened social, spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing, connection to culture and pride in cultural identity.

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  - › Wellbeing looks like freedom, healthy in mind, body, spirit. As a young Aboriginal person I feel free. So alive, proud and strong when connected to my culture and being in or working with my community.

---

  - › It is believed our community's spiritual and physical wellbeing increased giving a sense of ownership in accessing our own alternative and cultural healing treatments, therapies, and practices which were set aside from the western medicine.

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  - › Past cultural history has always included and mentioned natural healing and hands on healing. This makes me very proud that we can include natural healing which I believe will compliment western medicines. It will also allow community to become healers in their own right.

This emerging evidence and theory, hand in hand with stronger evaluation frameworks, will continue to proactively guide programming around *what works* in healing from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview. The possibility of always sustaining positive healing outcomes is improved by driving healing programs through traditional practices and combining, where appropriate, with western methodologies and sound policy. Those four elements – evidence and theory, strong evaluation, proactivity, and combined methodologies – can be seen to underpin sustainable healing in its broader sense. The remaining elements of quality healing programs, along with other policy indicators and protective factors, are *pillars* upon which projects, activities or healing journeys can be reliably built.

## Challenges in a healing program : our experience

The previous section showcases the strengths of *Our Healing Our Solutions* but, like all programs, it has faced some challenges. Two-thirds of the projects were delivered in remote and regional locations, so it is not surprising that a range of challenging circumstances presented, at times concurrently, placing additional strain on limited program resources. Although projects identified known project risks (and mitigation) prior to starting, many encountered unanticipated challenges. The predominant impact on the program was in (sometimes significant) delays to planned activities and increased workloads and pressure on staff. The projects performed admirably considering, as shown in the healing outcomes they achieved. The following summarises the recurring challenges faced by projects in the program<sup>13</sup>.

### Project challenges – staffing

- ▶ attraction and retention of staff in regional and remote locations - including appropriately skilled staff, and competing with the high wages paid to government workers
- ▶ difficulty in gaining police checks and meeting other legal commitments for remote community staff
- ▶ difficulty in managing administration as well as running project activities - the strain of resource intense projects and understaffing
- ▶ emotional impact of running healing programs on staff
- ▶ high staff turnover

### Project challenges – participants

- ▶ availability of ongoing healing support for participants after one-off activities
- ▶ ill health of key elders and community leaders
- ▶ participants leaving their families for extended periods and supporting participants to step away from the complexities of daily life to fully share in and contribute to the healing activities

### Project challenges – general

- ▶ availability of materials
- ▶ bereavement and sorry business commitments causing delays to project activities
- ▶ building relationships with other agencies/service providers
- ▶ collecting data for monitoring and evaluation without impeding the traditional and sacred nature of healing activities
- ▶ difficulty negotiating project activities in complex environments and relationship structures
- ▶ effects of wet season and remote geography
- ▶ lengthy time needed to negotiate and establish appropriate governance structures such as steering committees
- ▶ organisational changes making project management very difficult
- ▶ sustainability of projects based on limited resources and time-limited funding and the impact of that on morale

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<sup>13</sup> Deeper elaboration of these challenges is beyond the scope of this review but, in many cases, has been covered in individual project reports.

Healing Foundation staff worked closely with each project to limit the impact of these challenges, or build in additional flexibility (including time extensions) where needed. The Healing Foundation actively reflects on its project and program work. It is centrally documenting lessons and provides an interface between all projects so that partner organisations can help each other to identify what is working and what needs to be done to overcome some of the more typical barriers and challenges. *Learning together* and *peer-to-peer capacity building* have been important drivers of change adopted by the Healing Foundation – the unity and inter-community relationships built through this approach are a critical strength of the arrangement.

## The particular challenge of evaluating healing : our observations

This review noted earlier, in several places, that monitoring and evaluation in *Our Healing Our Solutions* was an area of particular challenge for projects, and so the program. It is fair to say that the program's overall design limitation (as previously flagged), was a limiting factor in developing a coherent program evaluation framework and so project-level evaluation methodology was not an area of deep focus. Because incorporating strong evaluation frameworks is an element of quality healing programs and because there is a need to continue building compelling healing evidence for the Australian Indigenous context, evaluation within the program warrants further study. Before doing that, it is important to recognise that at least half of the projects applied fairly robust evaluation practice (either inline, or with external support). It is also clear that, overall, projects became better at collecting and reporting project data as the program evolved and matured. The imperative for doing so is clear, as McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe and Bennett (*in press*), observe:

*... Our discussions with Aboriginal people around Australia, and our own experience, lead us to conclude that there are many healing programs being run through Aboriginal communities and organisations that have not been documented at all. Lack of documentation – again from our consultations and our own experience – is usually due to the fact that most of the time and resources of those working in healing centres are taken up with the day-to-day work of delivering the services. However, lack of documentation has ramifications in terms of the program being less likely to attract funding, and this review has found that programs that do not have long-term adequate funding and resources are not likely to succeed ...*

The Healing Foundation places a priority on monitoring and evaluation and not just because it is part of the organisation's fiduciary responsibility. It recognises that good monitoring and evaluation practice is critical to building a sound evidence base in *what works* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing. Demonstrating ongoing commitment to rigorous evaluation, the Healing Foundation:

- 1 conducted an inception evaluation workshop in February, 2011, to bring individual project staff together to collectively explore and set expectations around critical measurements of progress and outcomes;
- 2 collaborated with the Australian Institute of Family Studies through an Evaluation Workshop in April, 2013, which assisted in developing a program logic – informed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island worldview – and broad evaluation framework for the range of Healing Foundation programs; and
- 3 supported a number of projects operating in Central Australia to work with Baker IDI for incorporating evaluation into their activities, conducting external evaluations of their projects, and developing evaluation skills capacity.

Raising evaluation standards is a significant undertaking in most settings. In this context, there is the combined challenge of building both evidence for a theory of change and strong evaluation frameworks that tie in culturally appropriate data collection methods. Indeed, the balance swings not just on the implementing organisation's resourcing and evaluation know how, but on the *evaluability* of activities. For example, it appears to be especially difficult in some cultural and sacred explorations of healing – where current tools are inadequate or inappropriate – to reliably measure participants' healing experiences after the activity, let alone in the long term.

So the question is how to measure the efficacy of traditional healing methods using western tools? The Healing Foundation is well aware that valid and reliable evidence can support a future in which traditional healing ways have a strong place. They know that projects that are achieving sound healing outcomes are sometimes the same ones that have not found the time to document their model or theory. This is primarily because they are run by smaller organisations, or are operating in remote areas. Secondly, the Healing Foundation observes that some projects are *cutting new ground* and therefore renewing ways of doing healing work – in fact they are in the process of creating new evidence.

## Our healing our solutions : our approach to program management

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Government grants, such as those given for *Our Healing Our Solutions*, carry a range of complex program management requirements. These requirements often place a heavy burden on Indigenous organisations, especially those already deep in the challenges of regional and remote work (like two-thirds of the projects in this review). A report from the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2010) on administering funding agreements with regional and remote Indigenous organisations links this increased administrative burden to an increased risk of failure for these organisations *even where the programs are being delivered successfully*. The Ombudsman outlines five principles to redress this imbalance. The Healing Foundation upholds its partnership with its projects by ensuring that these five principles underpin its approach to program support.

### Principle 1 : providing support and finding solutions

The Healing Foundation recognises the importance of assessing organisational and individual capability, providing appropriate training and support and finding creative solutions to challenges, by:

- ▶ Ensuring projects are set up to succeed. Where the Healing Foundation recognised that particular activities exposed limitations in a project's available skills or resources, they *worked with projects to modify* the planned activities, buy-in necessary skills and resources, or support access to appropriate training opportunities. This included linking project staff to other projects or organisations, where peer support could offer knowledge sharing and self-directed capacity development.
- ▶ Recognising and valuing the evolving nature of healing projects. While some projects had been formally engaged in healing activities for many years, other projects were taking their first steps. The Healing Foundation, itself a new organisation breaking ground in Australian Indigenous healing, adopted a *mindset of learning journey* with each project which made space for *working things out together*.
- ▶ Building relationships with project organisations. The Healing Foundation invested heavily in *building mutual respect and trust* with and between projects in the program. This created an environment where organisations felt safe to acknowledge their challenges, share their stories and ask for help.
- ▶ Collaborating to find creative solutions to challenges. The Healing Foundation acted as a *knowledge exchange* for capturing and sharing ideas on how projects responded to challenges. In this way, the Healing Foundation avoided a top-down approach to decisions and enabled projects a central point through which they could benefit from the program's *collective experience and wisdom*.

### Principle 2 : simplifying reporting

The Healing Foundation simplified reporting regimes and eased administrative burden, by:

- ▶ Providing projects with a *simple framework for reporting* and giving completed examples for comparison, along with how-to guides.
- ▶ Valuing *qualitative case studies and stories* of change as an aspect of reporting which aligns within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview. Quantitative performance measures were refined to allow projects to capture meaningful data while reducing the need for extensive data collection.
- ▶ Reducing resistance to the administrative task by *sharing the way in which reporting enables evidence* to be gathered for the benefit of the projects and organisations, themselves, but also from the perspective of future Indigenous healing programs.
- ▶ Implementing *six-monthly reporting*, rather than the usual quarterly reporting to reduce administrative overload.

- ▶ Supporting projects requiring extra assistance in meeting the reporting requirements. This included providing feedback or prompts on how to improve the report or, in some cases, *documenting verbal conversations with project staff* and seeking their approval for inclusion of this material in their report.

### Principle 3 : resolving disputes

The Healing Foundation promoted effective dispute resolution and complaint handling procedures, by:

- ▶ Opening up early opportunities for collaboratively solving potentially serious issues. Projects were encouraged to focus on achieving successful outcomes for their participants and communities by working in partnership with the Healing Foundation. This approach *avoided punitive and reactionary responses to challenges*.
- ▶ Giving projects the *option to temporarily suspend activities* so they could resolve internal governance or organisational issues that were negatively affecting service delivery. When projects re-commenced, the Healing Foundation closely supported staff to ensure projects could get back on track in meeting their funding agreement obligations.
- ▶ Committing to reflective practice and a willingness to learn from difficult experiences. This created the *flexibility to modify projects, processes and reporting* where necessary so that projects could successfully meet the healing needs of their participants.

### Principle 4 : meeting obligations

The Healing Foundation ensured that Program Funding Agreements contained and clearly explained all relevant obligations, by:

- ▶ Developing a *comprehensive Service Delivery Plan* before projects commenced and any funds were released, so that projects understood what they had committed to. The Service Delivery Plans allowed the Healing Foundation to review activities and assess whether they were achievable and congruent with the purpose of the funding initiative.
- ▶ Comparing six-monthly reports to the Service Delivery Plans to identify gaps and differences. This prompted an opportunity to liaise with project staff to understand the reasons for the differences, offer flexibility or negotiate and document amendments to the workplan.
- ▶ Reminding projects of upcoming reporting obligations via email and giving verbal and email prompts in cases of delayed reporting.

### Principle 5 : communicating effectively

The Healing Foundation ensured quality in decision making, clear reasoning and notification, by:

- ▶ Documenting contract management processes to enable consistency and fairness when interacting with projects.
- ▶ Making an effort to better understand the local context in which projects operated. This was achieved through site visits, regular communication, keeping up-to-date with sector reports and research, and seeking advice from external sources. The Healing Foundation avoided overly bureaucratic / corporatised approaches that disregarded on-the-ground issues that projects were grappling with, particularly those in regional and remote locations.
- ▶ Developing strong working relationships with project staff. For example, this meant allocating one or two dedicated Healing Foundation support staff to each project to act as reliable points of contact for advice and support.
- ▶ Keeping accurate records of conversations (telephone and email) between the Healing Foundation and projects to avoid miscommunication. This included following up telephone conversations with emails outlining the agreed decisions or actions.

The approach to program support in *Our Healing Our Solutions* is best summarised as interactional, rather than transactional. The challenges faced by project staff in remote and rural regions, indeed Indigenous organisations generally, is well established. But healing projects precipitate one further challenge for staff – and that is dealing with the increased emotional strain that comes with running healing projects<sup>14</sup>. This particular combination of challenges means that Indigenous healing program support necessitates significant and enduring investments of time from resourceful, empathic and discerning program support staff. Careful attention to resourcing for program support is paramount to the success of healing programs and the sustainability of partner organisations.

<sup>14</sup> The emotional strain of running healing activities and supporting participants was quoted in a number of project case studies in *Our Healing Our Solutions*.

## Our healing our solutions : looking forward

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The Healing Foundation embraces its ethos and role as a learning organisation. In that light, *Our Healing Our Solutions* has consistently provided opportunities for reflection on what works, what doesn't work and what needs more attention in working with its indigenous partners.

### Healing Foundation : our lessons learned

The Healing Foundation is taking its feedback forwards and using it to shape the organisation's approach to its operations and programs. From *Our Healing Our Solutions*, the Healing Foundation has learned some critical lessons:

- ▶ **Healing projects differ in the types of management support they need.** The Healing Foundation has learned to tailor and balance its support resources between activity development, implementation and contract management. Critical to this is attracting and retaining staff with the right attitude, skills and experience. It also means maintaining a responsive organisational structure.
- ▶ **Intensively interactional program support takes more time.** Maintaining current levels of flexible and responsive support to community projects and programs means ongoing and careful attention needs to be paid to the Healing Foundation's staffing levels and mix.
- ▶ **Attracting and retaining staff in regional and remote areas is difficult.** The local resources needed for effective community engagement, and project implementation and evaluation must be considered when developing funding rounds and funding agreements.
- ▶ **Resourcing for healing needs to maximise sustainability.** Because the Healing Foundation cannot provide ongoing funding at a project level, it must carefully develop programs that have high levels of embedded sustainability. Examples include seeding innovation in healing practice, and funding gaps in current government responses. At the same time, the Healing Foundation works with State and Territory and Federal governments in increasing recurrent resourcing for evident needs and uses this evidence to strategically direct efforts in fundraising from the corporate and philanthropic sectors.
- ▶ **Growing recognition of healing calls for extending healing resources.** As its reputation spreads, there is an increasing call on the Healing Foundation for healing resources. And so it is challenged to recognise the national scope of healing aspirations, to support communities in these, and to ensure equity in distributing resources and extending reach.
- ▶ **Practice must be informed by evidence.** Essentially, future programs must continue to incorporate the elements of quality healing programs and emerging evidence to maximise the effectiveness of funding and enable quality healing environments for communities.

### Reflections on sustainability : more than a program

The question of sustainable outcomes from *Our Healing Our Solutions* is not a one dimensional consideration. It is true that organisations needed to demonstrate in their tenders and Service Delivery Plans that their concepts offered sustainability around project activities. Despite that, there is appreciable evidence that partners found that the time-limited nature of the funding *challenged sustainability*, and compromised longevity of their healing work. That is a reasonable concern in project-based funding models. But it doesn't tell the whole story, as one partner organisation points out by asking: *what aspect of sustainability are we measuring?* There are, indeed, ranges of ways in which *Our Healing Our Solutions* might have precipitated a sustainable healing journey – any true measurement of which would need multivariate and longitudinal study from a pre-program baseline.

### Beyond *Our Healing Our Solutions* : opportunities for sustaining healing

- ▶ Sustaining project activities – were projects able to create ongoing opportunities on the basis of their healing seed funding?
- ▶ Sustaining outcomes for individuals – did the healing activities trigger an understanding and therefore virtuous cycle of healing?
- ▶ Sustaining outcomes in community capacity – has the healing work left healing skills that can be capably and locally applied?
- ▶ Sustaining participation in healing – do individuals now uphold the cultural importance of healing and seek opportunities for that?
- ▶ Sustaining unintended outcomes – what healing seeds have been planted that will grow beyond the changes anticipated by each project?

*Healing does not appear to be linear nor time-bound.*

The Healing Foundation recognises the limitations that came with *Our Healing Our Solutions* as their first program<sup>15</sup> and upholds the principle that healing programs can only be contributors to catalysing positive change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives. It is not the programs that are the driving force, but the people themselves.

Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the driving force in their own healing has pointed the Healing Foundation to addressing the need for more coordinated healing effort at local levels. This is about:

- ▶ localising healing practices that work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working on this by developing a community healing strategy
- ▶ partnering to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community sector and grow the seeds of healing work that have been germinating nationally for new ways of responding, especially for peoples of our Stolen Generations
- ▶ continuing to work with State, Territory and Federal Governments, and business and philanthropic organisations, so that the story of healing raises awareness and uncovers future funding opportunities for healing
- ▶ ensuring that the evidence for what works for healing is embedded in strategies and policies so that research, evaluation and program development align to coherent effort.

<sup>15</sup> Specifically, that the program was not purposively designed and was restricted in formal evidence to underpin program logic, or a more enduring theory of change, both of which help to gear funding to sustaining long term outcomes.



## Our healing our solutions : the beginning of our healing journey

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This review has looked broadly and deeply at *Our Healing Our Solutions* and the evidence for healing that it has produced. But what does it mean for future healing programs? It means that the success of *Our Healing Our Solutions* reflects a great need for healing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also highlights a palpable capacity and desire to heal, and the benefits of self-led, -owned and -enacted cultural and traditional healing practices. These practices are reconnecting people to their spiritual place in cultural identity, country, and community. In short, wellbeing.

Once again, the Healing Foundation acknowledges the hard work and dedication of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved in *Our Healing Our Solutions*. It is their healing stories and journeys upon which we have reflected. We also remember and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have walked the healing journey before these, those who walk alongside and those still to join.

The healing story of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is their story to tell – now and for generations to come. In ending the story of *Our Healing Our Solutions*, indeed the review, we are being called to hear the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' message on their historic capacity for continual renewal. This healing story is just beginning.

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