



HealingFoundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

OUR MEN OUR HEALING

Creating hope, respect and reconnection

EVALUATION REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2015



This report evaluates the implementation and early development of *Our Men Our Healing*, three pilot men's healing projects in the remote Northern Territory communities of Maningrida, Ngukurr and Wurrumiyanga from 2013 to 2015.

Key statistics

- 14 Indigenous men have been employed in the program
- 448 men have consistently and directly participated in program activities, with many more attending community events run by the men
- Almost 40 per cent of participants have been under the age of 18
- All three communities have delivered counselling services, family support, advocacy and cultural brokerage, case management and coordination, cultural day trips (e.g. fishing trips), camps and group programs, yarning groups and community events and celebrations

In remote areas community level trauma and intergenerational suffering, geographical isolation and inconsistent delivery of support services have led to negative outcomes for communities. Men in these communities acknowledge their uncertainty about their traditional role and disengagement from culture and identity. The result has been devastating for men, their families and their communities. The negative outcomes include disempowerment and low self-esteem, alcohol and other drug use, family and domestic violence, unemployment and economic disadvantage, incarceration and recidivism and self-harm and suicide.

Our Men Our Healing is designed to strengthen, support and empower Aboriginal men through cultural, education and therapeutic healing activities. It assists men to engage more effectively with support services, increase their confidence and capacity to gain meaningful employment and overcome issues such as family and domestic violence, alcohol and other drug use, self-harm, incarceration and poor health and social and emotional wellbeing.

By putting into practice culturally sound methodologies and approaches *Our Men Our Healing* aims to re-establish holistic wellbeing allowing men to see themselves as:

1. nurturers who are nurturing and growing their children strong and healthy
2. teachers who are teaching and taking care of cultural knowledge
3. protectors who are protecting and caring for their families and keeping their communities safe.

This evaluation finds strong evidence that the program is already creating significant and sustained change at the community, family and individual levels at each site.

Key program achievements include:

- a reported decrease in incidence of family and domestic violence and less violence generally in communities
- reduced observable rates of self-harm and suicide during the life of the program in two of the communities
- at Wurrumiyanga where the program has been running the longest, a reported 50 per cent reduction in the number of men registered with the NT Department of Correctional Services and a significant reduction in rates of recidivism and reoffending over the life of the program
- women feeling safer and more supported by the men in their families and communities
- increased health and emotional wellbeing among men in the communities and increased leadership as men take responsibility for their past, present and future
- an increased re-emergence of cultural celebrations and ceremonies, some of which had not occurred in the communities for decades.



Many of the men do not reoffend and the pleasing thing is that many of the men still stay in the program and the change is remarkable ... there has been an amazing transformation in the last couple of years (Service Provider)

Critical factors in the success of *Our Men Our Healing* include:

- projects designed and run by the men, with support, allow them to lead the way in their own healing. Co-design ensures community ownership and a continued commitment to local needs, culture and knowledge systems
- connection to country, culture and identity increase empowerment and confidence to: take the cultural lead with younger men, provide increased safety for families and take up employment
- focus on holistic wellbeing taking into account the social, spiritual and emotional needs of the men
- a safe men's space for healing, meetings, activities etc
- support of an auspicing organisation in each community
- extensive community engagement and consultation before the projects were implemented, to assess local needs, gaps in existing healing efforts and how the community wanted the men's healing project to run.

There has been so much work put in. There was a time there where we had 21 suicides in one year and in the last 12 months we have only had one. Most of the difference is being seen in the last 18 months to two years (Service Provider)

Of these factors co-design is seen as the most significant. Co-design ensures:

- ownership and agency within the solutions and design of each of the programs including the development of program logics
- continued commitment to the needs, solutions and activities being developed by the men for the men
- men address how they view themselves and this becomes a key driver for change as the men became the agents of change
- men are given tools and resources to support the program while at the same time have culture and knowledge system acknowledged, valued, respected and incorporated. This leads to increased confidence of sustained support and that the “solutions would work best if the men owned them and took responsibility for them.”

Young boys 16 to 20 have started singing ceremony song as they are realising on the men's camps that culture is important with the Elders saying how important it is ... they have to know story and song for country ... since the program started and got underway the men have been wanting to learn and sing the old songs

Within the co-design work eight healing themes were identified to strengthen and keep safe men's spirits, families, culture, communities and roles. These include education, employment, healing, identity, law, relationships, resources and safety. All of these are outcomes of the *Our Men Our Healing* program.

The program has enabled men from Wurrumiyanga, Maningrida and Ngukurr to take ownership of the challenges and the solutions, and the resulting change is so significant that women, other community members and service providers are persuaded by it.

In a relatively short time a sense of disengagement, disconnection, and a feeling of being disempowered with a loss of hope has – for some men – been replaced by reconnection, empowerment, responsibility, ownership and hope.

It is clear that as a result of men healing and strengthening themselves and others, families and communities are beginning to heal at each of the three sites. There is a strong certainty that this change can be sustained over time at community, family and individual levels.

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Men have found their connections where they can go and feel safe, whereas before they would have stayed home and become more stressed but are realising there is more help at the centre for men ... men are showing more good leadership within their families and the community.

ARTIST - KEVIN BAXTER



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