

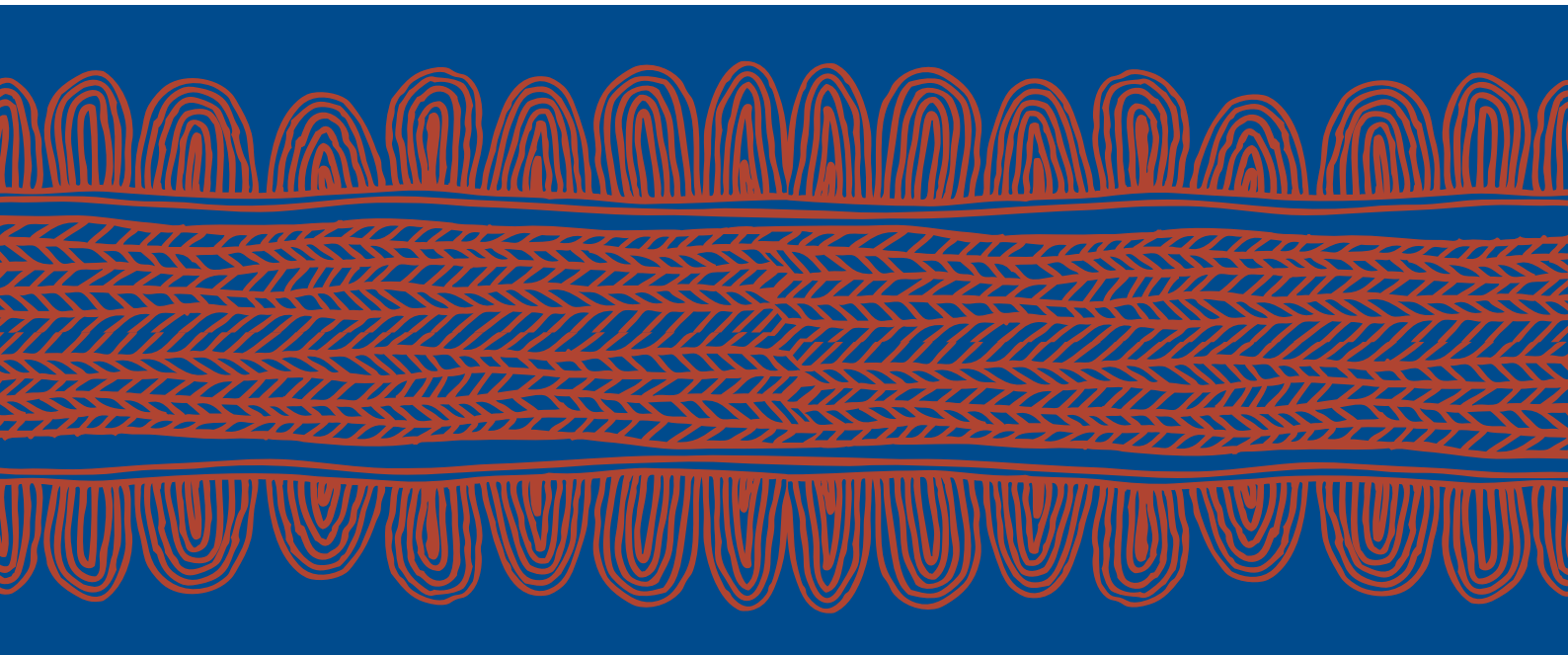


**Healing**Foundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

# ***STRONG MEN STRONG COMMUNITIES***

***Darwin town communities  
developmental evaluation***



## Acknowledgement

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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.

The *Strong Men Strong Communities* project is dedicated to enhancing the healing for the Indigenous men of the Darwin town communities. It signifies a recognition of the need for healing in our men.

In identifying what works in the development of the *Strong Men Strong Communities* project the Healing Foundation commissioned Social Compass to undertake an evaluation of the work so far. In undertaking the evaluation, the team journeyed with the men from co-design to implementation with final field visits in March and April 2016.

The evaluation team listened to many individual, family and community stories and we were honoured by the welcome and openness of the men, their families and communities. In ‘translating’ these stories into a form for inclusion into an evaluation report, the team has sought to respect both the story and the story-teller.

To the Traditional Owners, Elders and community members in each community, we hope we respected your land and country and that we walked lightly on it on the occasions we were there.



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## Executive Summary

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This evaluation examines the impact of the *Strong Men Strong Communities* men's healing project in the Darwin town communities of Amangal, Acacia, Belyuen, One Mile Dam, Bagot, Knuckey's Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village over a two year period.

The project is a partnership between the Healing Foundation and the Darwin Aboriginal & Islander Women's Shelter Indigenous Men's Service (DAIWS IMS), supported by the Commonwealth Government.

Despite the many ongoing challenges faced by men in each of the communities including significant levels of trauma, poverty and inadequate infrastructure, there have been a number of positive developments since the project commenced in January 2014.

Across the seven communities there has been an increase in participants' confidence and self-esteem and men are reporting improved coping skills, enabling them to seek support and better deal with stressors in their families and communities. Men have increased their use of medical services and are seeking out counselling, alcohol and other drug support programs and healing services.

As healing emerges in the communities some of the senior men are beginning to take on advisory and senior roles and younger men are starting to attend the program.

Sixty nine men participated in the project altogether and eight men found employment or commenced training over the period.

The project develops men's healing leadership with a focus on assisting the men to improve their social and emotional wellbeing. The men are addressing issues like alcohol and other drug use, unemployment and violence by increasing access to culturally appropriate support services, building relationships and supporting emerging leadership through activities to enhance their skills.

The evaluation attributes the project's success in part to the way it has been co-designed in partnership with men in each community, which has seen the men take ownership of it. In each location men were involved in identifying key issues affecting their communities and solutions to these issues, which then guided the design of their local activities.

A strong auspicing organisation and a trusted long term project officer were also found to be critical to the project's sustainability. The project officer provided regular individual and group mentoring throughout the period.

If the *Strong Men Strong Communities* program is to continue, a permanent location is required. A safe place where men can find relief and reconnect to themselves, each other and their communities is essential to healing. Ideally an appropriate space would be created within each community but currently the greatest need is for a common men's space at an appropriate Darwin location that can be accessed by all participating communities.

With many men from the Darwin town communities struggling with social and emotional issues and requiring long term support and mentoring, there is also a dire need for an integrated and incorporated men's service beyond the scope of this project. Such a service could also operate as a referral or diversionary program within the justice system.

The results this program is achieving against enormous odds demonstrates how partnering with communities to address local issues can create a platform for success.

The men's strong engagement in the program's development ensured they took responsibility for both the delivery and the results. They have a greater stake in the program's success because the program belongs to them.

This is something governments and service providers around Australia can learn from in addressing the issues facing our communities.



## Introduction

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Since being established in 2009, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation (Healing Foundation hereafter) has maintained a focus on the link between colonisation, past government practices and the breakdown of cultural knowledge systems, which have caused unresolved trauma and pain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Opportunities for more positive cycles and outcomes get frustrated by group trauma and intergenerational suffering, geographical isolation and inconsistent delivery of support services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men themselves have acknowledged their uncertainty about their traditional role and their disengagement from both their culture and identity. The result has seen:

- Poor social, spiritual, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- Disempowerment and low self-esteem
- Unemployment and economic disadvantage
- Substance use and misuse
- Child and family abuse, neglect and breakdown
- Lateral and sexual community violence
- Incarceration and reoffending
- Self-harm and suicide.

By putting into practice culturally sound methodologies and approaches, the Healing Foundation has sought to work with men to re-establish / rebuild holistic wellbeing in culturally safe ways. The intent has been to reconnect men in their communities to culturally significant places as (in their own words):

- Nurturers who are nurturing and growing their children strong and healthy
- Teachers who are teaching and taking care of cultural knowledge
- Protectors who are protecting and caring for their families and keeping their communities safe.

The Healing Foundation has funded a number of men's healing projects across Australia, designed and developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The main aim of these projects has been to support men to access healing services and to strengthen men's social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Many of these projects are working in a holistic manner to re-engage men in building a constructive and positive role in their families and communities.

In 2013 the then Commonwealth Department of Indigenous Affairs Indigenous Co-ordination Centre in Darwin approached the Healing Foundation to assist with the implementation of a Strong Men Strong Communities Project in the Darwin town communities with a focus on healing and leadership. The Healing Foundation formed a partnership with the Darwin Aboriginal & Islander Women's Shelter Indigenous Men's Service (DAIWS IMS) to design and deliver the project in seven Darwin Town Communities being: Amangal, Acacia, Belyuen, One Mile Dam, Bagot, Knuckey's Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village.

Subsequently project funding totalling \$300,000 was split between the Healing Foundation and DAIWS IMS. An agreement was reached for the Healing Foundation to assist in designing and developing the program logic for the project and for DAIWS to employ a Project Officer to implement the project in the communities. The agreement also provided for the Healing Foundation to create an opportunity for men in the various sites to come together in a leadership and healing capacity and discuss what issues were causing disharmony and imbalance in their communities. The outcome was for the men to come up with solutions that would form the design of their own locally based programs.

While many projects for men have taken a mainstream approach and attempted to overlay a cultural knowledge base, they have met with limited success. The Healing Foundation has learnt that what is required for success is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world view to design, develop and implement effective strategies in engaging men in complex contexts. The Healing Foundation has established a bank of evidence that suggests utilising the strength of culture to build strong programmatic design is enabling communities to begin the complex and difficult process of healing. This includes providing them with the opportunities to address many painful subjects and to implement strategies of change.

Strong Men Strong Communities seeks to do this in by:

- **Local knowledge - local context:** The experiences and impacts of colonisation and government policies (past and present) on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people vary from community to community. It is therefore essential that in addressing the present challenges of trauma for communities, consideration needs to be given to the local experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Service provision and responses therefore need to be provided at a localised level, to be able to explore the specific needs and experiences of communities. Service provision also needs to be led by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, to manage their own healing, as experts in how their specific communities were affected by past government policies.
- **Cultural frameworks:** The Project aimed to utilise cultural frameworks and practices to provide a safe space for participants to explore trauma. Cultural activities including; holding yarning circles, using traditional art and holding meetings on country are all examples of how cultural practice is used as a means to 'hold' participants whilst addressing complex issues. These cultural activities help to create a cultural identity and enable participants to feel grounded in the strength of their cultural knowledge whilst exploring personal and community experiences.
- **Growing and strengthening capacity:** Growing a local workforce that is able to respond effectively to the many issues confronting communities is an essential enabler to creating change. Many of the activities are also designed to support the local workforce to gain a greater insight into their own trauma and managing this effectively. Distinctively for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations there is the added complexity that the workforce also has a lived experience of trauma both personally and professionally within their kinship group and community. The project must be designed to build the resilience of the workforce and help the community to enhance their leadership skills to better manage the complex outcomes of trauma within the community.

*Strong Men Strong Communities* therefore had a focus on development and strengthening men's social and emotional wellbeing, leadership in their family and community and protectors and carers of their family and community safety. The goals of the program were:

- Strong men positively engaged with their families and communities
- Strong men engaged in activities
- Reported enhanced community functioning and safety

*Strong Men Strong Communities* has aimed, in design and implementation, to incorporate the elements and drivers of quality healing programs.

The project aimed to do this by:

- Appointing a Project Officer to be auspiced by DAIWS
- Engagement of men in each inner urban community to determine what key issues are and their solutions to building strong men
- Engagement of other services for support and input
- Development of an appropriate strategy in relation to holding a consolidated healing forum
- Implementation of small men's projects in each community to enable the outcomes from the healing forum to be sustained and support the men in building their leadership
- Evaluation Framework developed and implemented over the life of the project.

In July 2014 the *Strong Men Strong Communities* project commenced with the appointment of a Project Officer. Importantly, Social Compass was commissioned in late 2015 to undertake an evaluation of the Strong Men Strong Communities project. Dr John Prince, who had journeyed with this and other men's healing programs in the Northern Territory, and Nathan Leitch from Social Compass undertook two separate trips to interview the men from the communities and other key stakeholders associated with the program.

This evaluation report is based on a methodology that is inclusive of document analysis, interviews and participant observations at two of the six healing workshops /camps (December 2014 and April 2016). The following sections of this report give an account of the development and chronology of the project development and implementation. This is a story of perseverance and healing – one that is not yet complete.



## 1. Early Days

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In late July 2014, a group of key thinkers came together to begin the development of a men's healing program for the Darwin Town Communities. This began with the development of program design and establishing a program logic that would drive the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program. By early August 2014, there was a logic framework in place (see Diagram 1) and the Project Officer had commenced consultations with each of the communities.

In the early stages of the implementation the Project Officer consistently consulted with the town communities (as he did throughout the life of the project) and visited each community to explain the project goals, survey community needs and aspirations, and gauge support for the project. Bagot, Knuckeyes Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village demonstrated the strongest interest and regular meetings and activities were underway by September 2014.

A Reference Group was also established with representatives from the community to provide support and guidance for the project. The Reference Group members were:

- Michael Torres (DAIWS)
- Steven Torres-Carne (Healing Foundation)
- Coss Tambling Bagot Community
- Lyle Cooper (Bagot Community)
- Tony Lee (Larrakia Nation)
- Ash Dargan (Larrakia Nation).

The aim was for the Reference Group to meet monthly to discuss the project goals and activities and future directions. In the first three months more than thirty five (35) men from the town communities were engaged in meetings and activities. Over these months the Project Officer also had 20 meetings with Darwin based service providers and local stakeholders to discuss the project and explore how they could be involved and support the outcomes of the project. These included Larrakia Nation, Black Dog Institute, Department of Health (Men's Policy) and local employment agencies.

As consultations progressed, the aim was to have a men's workshop at Crab Claw Island in early December (2014) with representation from each of the seven Darwin Town Communities and support provided for the men to develop community specific action plans for implementation of projects in their communities. The action plans were to be aligned with the project objectives and outcomes as articulated within the Program Logic developed at the key thinker's workshop in late July. The Crab Claw Workshop was a critical milestone in the development and implementation phases of the project. A copy of the Program Logic is available in appendix 2.



## 2. “A Big Conversation” : Crab Claw Leaders Workshop

As noted, during the early stages of engagement, and through the local consultations, men from the Darwin Town Communities expressed significant interest in the idea of holding their own healing and leadership workshop and using this to develop their programs from the ground up.

Over 20 men attended the two-day workshop with additional attendees from other agencies working in the area of supporting Indigenous families (see Appendix 1 for attendees). While there was acceptance for attendees from all communities, the designated Kulaluk & Minmarama men failed to attend and later informed the Project Officer that they had car problems. Two of their community representatives (Helen Secretary and Mark Hopkins) later advised the Project Officer that they no longer wished to be a part of, or involved in, the project and to allocate their share of the project funds to the Bagot Community. The change in position was due to, or affected by, the commercial marine venture project occurring in the community.

During the two days the men explored three key questions:

- Who are we as men and what is our role?
- What are the things you see in your community that are causing disharmony and imbalance?
- What are the solutions to, or how do you restore, harmony and balance within your communities?

The findings from the workshop record the courage and honesty with which the men discussed personal and community issues and challenges. It was clear over the two days that the men took ownership of these challenges while knowing such challenges are located in colonisation and government practices over two centuries.

At the very commencement of the workshop, the facilitator reminded the group that:

***Everyone here is unique and special but no-one is perfect. We learn to think and feel and behave. Little fella is going to watch you and learn from you. Mothers want to see their boys learn from honorable men. This is serious business and we did not come to talk nonsense ... it's a big conversation***

In order to locate the group and discussions in a positive setting the group was asked “What makes us happy as men”? The two primary themes were family and story/culture - though it should be noted that for many men these two themes were intertwined and mentioned together. While family and culture are the strongest themes to emerge from this session, it is clear that the challenges men and families face is more affecting. Indeed, the very things that make our men laugh are most profoundly seen to be broken and / or lost.

When the group explored what the role(s) of men are / should be, key themes that emerged were looking after family (young and old), being a role model, respecting Elders, country and culture, making a stand and advocating, maintaining kinship, and being a provider and peace-maker.

As these responses were explored, a major theme regarding what men enjoyed doing most and what was important emerged. Overwhelmingly men like to teach the children in their communities about “culture”, “foods are out there in the bush”, “how to make hunting tools and techniques”, “knowledge”. Our men want to “watch our kids grow” and “guide our kids in the right direction”. As one participant asked however, “how can these things that have been broken be restored?”

The workshop highlighted that the men from the Darwin Town Communities want to pass on knowledge of kinship and culture that builds respect. They want to be role models for the generations to come and recognize that there needs to be more respect and understanding of / for Elders. There was recognition that currently, these linkages and roles were broken down and were aspirational rather than reality.

Finally, each of the communities explored two key questions and presented their findings back to the wider group. These were:

- 1. What is causing disharmony and imbalance in your community?**
- 2. What might be some solutions you can work on to address or restore the disharmony and imbalance?**

The following provides brief summaries of the responses for each community.

### ***Amangal***

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There was a single representative from Amangal - strong and courageous young man keen to see better things for himself and his community. Key causes of disharmony were thought to be alcohol use and abuse and unemployment. Solutions included getting people into work, visits from service providers to support or mentor and transition men into work/training and men's group activities (hunting, fishing, bbq's & yarning).

### ***Acacia***

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The men from Acacia were much more focused on social issues with support and solutions coming in the form of their own healing processes and support from agencies such as the Northern Land Council and government departments. Each needed to lead to a restoration of kinship and increased acknowledgement, recognition and respect of Elders. There was also some concern about employment and maintenance issues such as experienced at One Mile Dam community.

### ***Belyuen***

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For the men from Belyuen the challenges ranged from infrastructure, social, cultural and employment. The solutions focused on repairing some sport and recreation infrastructure, developing a men's group, bringing back culture and healing through ceremony, Elders reconnecting with and teaching the young people and men, tackling alcohol abuse and fighting through workshops and other supports, training, leadership and employment training, and creation of new employment opportunities.

### ***One Mile Dam***

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For the men from One Mile Dam, the key challenges were mostly around infrastructure. The need for better maintenance of existing infrastructure and the need for new infrastructure. Overall, the men wanted to strengthen existing programs and look to network with other communities (Ironbark and Bagot).

### ***Bagot***

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The key issues in the community were drugs and alcohol, boredom and nothing to do, violence and fighting and child protection and parenting issues, unemployment and education. The Bagot suggested key actions need to be focused on primary health, mental health, men's places and spaces, sports and recreation, employment, events and activities and vehicles and equipment.

### ***Knuckey's Lagoon***

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The men from Knuckey's Lagoon noted that there was uncertainty regarding land title and this led to an important discussion across all groups about the general uncertainty regarding the West Australian Government's statement about closing 150 remote communities. Most men felt there might be some intention in the NT to target the Darwin Town Communities in a similar way. Collectively, the men suggested there was a need to build strategies that resist such a challenge.

### ***Palmerston Indigenous Village***

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Drug and alcohol abuse and misuse was seen to be common and the role of the Government Business Manager needed to be better defined. Further, Palmerston Indigenous Village needed more support to increase employment.

Importantly, the Healing Foundation’s approach to healing is guided by eight themes that emerge from international literature to strengthen and keep safe men’s spirits, families, culture, communities and roles. The eight themes are education, employment, health, identity, law, relationships, resources and safety. Each is represented and were salient themes during the two day workshop as men articulated the following aspirations:

- Take their place as strong learners and teachers (education)
- See employment enhanced in their communities so they could take their place as strong providers
- Ensure good primary and mental health is secure so they can take their place as strong men
- Have identity strengthened as a means to being stronger in themselves and their place as leaders
- Take their place as positive role models (law) in the community
- See relationships strengthened so they can take their place as nurturers
- Secure additional resources secured so they are empowered in their various roles
- Have safer communities so they can take their place as protectors.

These themes emerged unprompted from the two-day discussions and affirm the development and direction for a national men’s healing program. In exploring and mapping the needs, exploring possible interventions, building an understanding of the local context, and assessing the extent to which local support for the program can be mobilized, the workshop provided the basis for local, ground up program development within and across the Darwin Town Communities.

The men concluded the workshop with a set of actions for moving the Strong Men Strong Communities Program forward. These are outlined in the next section. The actions are small steps to securing essential resources and establishing safe referral mechanisms, setting up reporting and evaluation frameworks, and expectations for outcomes.

A key action resulting from the workshop was to form a Town Communities Leadership Group (TCLG) from the members of the Crab Claw group and set up a process for meeting regularly (one or two representatives per community). The TCLG would advocate for the town communities and invite people out to talk to the group to address key needs (e.g. employment, alcohol use / misuse).

Further, the TCLG would develop a Town Communities Employment Strategy looking at existing jobs and skills and how there can be a better match with employer demands. Finally, the TCLG would hold Men’s Camps and / or meetings inclusive of all communities and focused on healing and leadership.

As a result of the workshop, each community was to develop Implementation Plans to strengthen and support men’s aspirations, inlaying activities for success in skills training and effective mentoring and development, and tying these in with other supporting agencies (i.e. employment services).

### 3. From Aspirations to Reality

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Follow the Crab Claw Workshop, DAIWS Indigenous Men's Service arranged a leadership meeting with the town communities. This took place in April 15th 2015 in Berrimah. The Senior Men's Outreach Worker from DAIWS facilitated the meeting and the Project Officer had been consistently visiting the communities between the Crab Claw Workshop and the April meeting. The formation of the TCLG was again discussed, though it was noted that a number of the men that had attended the Crab Claw Workshop had moved on and were not present at this meeting.

There were nine (9) men from Bagot, Knuckey's Lagoon, Palmerston Indigenous Village, Acacia, One Mile Dam attending this meeting. The mobility of the group and the loss of a few of the men had made the establishment of the TCLG difficult.

The Project Officer discovered that since the Crab Claw workshop a number of issues were affecting the men and their communities. Four men had gone to jail, two were in lock up, others were experiencing male to male family violence, female to female family violence, female family members being locked up or sent to prison, alcohol and other drug problems and family conflicts. Indeed the constant instability in the Darwin Town Communities had meant that there was only a small number of men attending workshops consistently. The aim was to maintain a pool of men to participate in activities and workshops and form a smaller leadership group than anticipated. A key strength of the project was noted, being the full time Project Officer who was able to visit the town communities regularly meeting with the men, gaining their trust, discussing their issues, and arranging other agencies to visit and inform them of their programs and services.

The leadership meeting also undertook some planning for the forthcoming workshops / camps. Indeed, the group considerable time discussing the goals of the leadership healing workshops and planned locations and dates when most men could attend. Possible areas of focus were deemed to be: leadership training, culture and healing activities; alcohol & other drugs education; conflict resolution and mediation and problem solving. There was an agreement to proceed with the following service providers who could deliver these program:

- Jack Bullman: Facilitator and leading session on leadership
- Danila Dilba: Alcohol awareness education and cannabis and tobacco awareness education)
- Ash Dargan: Healing activities, yarning and music meditation each day
- Relationships Australia: Counselling, mediation, conflict resolution, law and separation.

#### Jack Bullman – Facilitator provided the following comments with regard to the May 2015 workshop

*This camp focused on leadership training for the men. These men gathered to transfer knowledge that occurs at such gatherings, learn from their peers, and to work through issues in a safe and supporting environment. The camp had an eight goal focus. The program featured discussions about relationships, alcohol and drug information, cultural activities and yarning sessions. Mibbinbah uses these camps as a part of their efforts to assist with the overall health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and as a part of their strategy to support positive behavior through creating safe spaces for males.*

*A key element within the gathering was the bringing together of diverse groups of Indigenous men: health providers, men's groups/sheds and coordinators. What united the discussions and deliberations was an underlying concern about the current critical status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health and wellbeing. As some men seek to improve the health of other Indigenous men through providing health and other services, others seek to improve the knowledge base for this and related work as well as focusing on a range of other issues affecting their families and communities.*

*The sessions were well attended. The agenda was flexible and we were able to integrate sessions around creating safe spaces, we utilised key concepts of listening, yarning and actioning.*

Some of the key action steps that arose from this gathering were working in collaboration to host the Darwin Men's Interagency Network Meeting at alternative communities starting with the Bagot community on the 12th of June.

Beyond this leadership workshop, the Project Officer continued to make weekly visits to the communities and provide activities to the men – particular at Acacia, One Mile Dam, Bagot, Kunckey's Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village – working closely with the men and networking with service providers and local businesses. Informal partnerships were formed with Relationships Australia, Danila Dilba, AMITY, Black Dog INC, Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation, Yilli Housing, Larrakia Nation and the Heart Foundation. Indigenous workers from each of these organisations were encouraged to participate in the workshops, camps and activities.

The number of men attending each of the weekly activities varied from community to community - from a single person to 10. Issues of poverty, poor living conditions, unemployment, family violence, alcohol and other drug misuse and trauma continued to loom large. Further, it became clear to the men themselves that most required healing programs and to begin the healing journey before they could be trained as fully functional leaders. At this stage, feedback from participants was that they were learning a lot, sessions were interesting and the trainers were good. Commitments to change were being made.

It had become evident that the men from the Darwin Town Communities required long term support and mentoring to improve their social and emotional well-being with a focus on:

- **Healing Activities:** including trauma, healing, yarning circles, counselling, breathe and relax exercises, music meditation, art activities, manual arts / work, bush walking, camping, cultural activities and self-esteem building.
- **Drug Education:** including alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, ice awareness education
- **Relationships and Communication Education:** including respectful relationships, abusive relationships, communication in relationships, managing anger, problem solving, life planning
- **Parenting:** including parenting skills, husband & wife relationship, parent and child relationship, guidance, safety, healthy families, home budgeting etc.
- **Health and Hygiene:** Including healthy living, healthy food and nutrition, hygiene, living skills cooking, cleaning, home budgeting
- **Pre-employment program:** including adult numeracy and literacy, career and training advice and job ready training
- **Mentoring programs:** since many of the men have had no father figure in their life and could be supported through positive role modelling.

The Project Officer continued to schedule visits to the Darwin Town Communities on a fortnightly basis. Men's activities were scheduled such as meetings, outings, mentoring, and manual work. The men were picked up for a music workshop each Friday in Berrimah. Sixty eight men were involved in these activities over six month period. Further, four workshops / camps for the men were organised being:

- **Cultural Healing Workshop** (12 - 14th August 2015) where 18 community men attended along with four service providers.
- **Education and Healing Workshop** (2nd - 4th November 2015) where 21 community attended and seven service providers.
- **Back to Country Camp** (16th - 18th November) where 29 community men attended
- **Strong Men Strong Communities** (18th - 19th April) where 40 community men attended.

The men gave positive feedback for all the workshops and camps and they requested more activities of this type as it helped them heal from past traumas, learn more regarding healthy relationships and working towards healthy living.

The number of men attending all activities has varied as men have come and gone and returned to communities. Sixty per cent of attendees can be described as regular in they attended the majority of activities and workshops. Some men attended up to five weekly sessions and then went way for a few weeks before returning to the program and activities.

The Project Officer continued to provide individual mentoring and group meetings. This type of long term support was deemed during the evaluation to be critical to the maintenance and sustainability of the program. It strengthened and built self-esteem. The next section provides the key themes from the document analysis, participant observations and interviews with the men.



## 4. Findings

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The findings outlined here are based on Social Compass reviewing the documents associated with the Strong Men Strong Communities program and participant observation at a number of workshops. In March and April 2016, Social Compass spent time with the men from the Darwin Town Communities and listened to their stories regarding the impact the program in their lives, families and communities.

The findings are based on their stories. These stories also allow for both the outcomes of the Program Logic designed by the men and the elements of a quality healing program to be reviewed. It should be noted that this evaluation does not seek to provide findings on a community-by-community basis. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to determine outcomes and impacts in each community. It takes a more collective view but notes that all communities have a group of committed men.

### Deeper Stories

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***It is hard to keep going and work together, we are all angry and there is more healing we have to do. Jealousy, funerals and prison are the main things in our life but we want to change and we have to change***

It is clear from the previous section that the men, their families and the communities are “*living and moving within past and present grief and waiting for more to come*”. The levels of trauma within and across the Darwin Town Communities is significant and has not in any way diminished over the life of this program. As with men’s healing programs in other places, sorrow and loss has meant that the men feel disconnected from, or unable to take up, their (traditional) roles as nurturers, protectors, providers, teachers and carers.

During field visits for this evaluation, there were many communities that could not participate nor could the evaluators visit the communities due to Sorry Business. There is a relentlessness to the loss of family and communities members that is felt acutely by the men participating in the program. Importantly, some of the significant Elders, community leaders and members has passed during the life of the program. Young and old have passed in often very tragic and painful circumstances.

Further, at the initial workshop at Crab Claw, the men identified the lack of infrastructure and service support into the communities and while this seems like a common issue for remote communities, for communities in and around Darwin it seems especially surprising and for the men it is unacceptable. The lack of such infrastructure and services leads to further trauma and impacts on the health and wellbeing of all community members.

Within the Darwin Town Communities the men have a sense of disconnection from culture and tribal lore / law and a breaking down of cultural practices and traditions. At the early workshops the men spoke of limited opportunities for transfer of cultural knowledge, lack of cultural activities and healing programs, high levels of FDV and increased and unacceptable rates of interaction with the legal / justice system and high AOD use and misuse and poor health and wellbeing. There were also challenges in relation to family and relationship problems.

While *Strong Men Strong Communities* had an explicit aim to build leadership, the levels of trauma and grief in the community have not allowed such leadership to emerge early or quickly. There was healing to be done and the physical, psychological and emotional needs of the men needed to be supported. While the workshops were able, in part, to address these needs and challenges and provide some tools for managing them, it was the support of the Project Officer that provided the ongoing support that allowed the men to maintain ‘contact’ with the program and each other.

As the Project Officer has provided continuity and the impact of the many dozens of trips he made to communities, the BBQs he has cooked, and the sandwiches he has made are hard to measure. However, having a person, program or policy maintaining connection and reconnection is a rare thing in these particular communities and the value should not be underestimated:

***Jason comes out and sees us, tells us what is going on and takes some of us to places where we can chat and have a feed and just relax. It gives me a break from all that is going on in community and in my head***

At times the Project Officer has had to meet the most basic needs as “sometimes we just need a good feed ... there are a lot of hungry people in these communities”. As the subsequent sections highlight, even in this challenging context of basic needs and substantial trauma, healing can still happen and when it does things change.

## ***Doing It Together***

As the men and the program itself have faced challenges along the way, the ownership of the program by the men for the men (and their communities) also contributed to the maintenance of the program. By establishing a process of co-design there has been a continued commitment to the needs, solutions and activities being developed by the men for the men. While DAIWS and the Project Officer provided significant resources, support and leadership, co-design has allowed the men to take charge of their needs and activities and become their own agents of change:

***It’s true we needed some help and some funding but this is about us as men taking charge. We have a long way to go and it won’t be easy but we are all in this together and together we are stronger than before***

Indeed, as men described their presence and absence from community, there was a consistent reference to the men’s program and the “need to re-engage with program” to get themselves “back on track”. This was not as a program provided by someone else or another agency but as their own program.

In developing the program through a process of co-design, the development of the Program Logic and Action Plans seems to have less value at this stage in terms of outcomes being met than being a mechanism for the aspirations of the men to be articulated – that is, it gave the men a focus for conversation. This becomes important as men moved in and out of the program and seems to have made re-engagement much easier with the key features of the program remaining constant.

That said, it is clear that even with the challenges the men and the program faced, many of the short (12 month) outcomes and medium term (2 years) outcomes developed by the men in the Program Logic have been achieved or are on their way to being achieved:

### **1. Short Term Outcomes (the first 12 months)**

- Men are look forward to participating in culturally appropriate activities
- There has been enhanced support provided to men from SEWB services
- More men are seeking SEWB support and feeling supported
- More men are empowered and job ready or working
- More men have a stronger identity, reconnecting to and respecting culture
- There is more positive communication within community and participation by men

## 2. Medium Term Outcomes (across 2 years)

- Cultural healing activities are actively being sought by men
- There are increased referrals and uptake by the men of support services
- Men are reporting improved coping skills enabling them to seek support and deal with stressors in their families and communities
- The needs of men are being addressed through collaborative service provision
- There is some increase in stronger men (mind, body, heart, spirit and culture) with greater connection to mainstream and Indigenous worlds
- More men are employed or trained or seeking work – **over the life of the program 8 men have found employment and / or enter training.**

The outcomes within the Program Logic that cannot be determined or measured within this evaluation are the levels of AOD use, FDV, the degree to which families are safer, less ACID use and interactions with the legal service. The scope of the evaluation did not allow for baseline data to be collected and then measured. However, there are anecdotal stories of improvements within the cohort of men that regularly participated in the program. Commitments to change across some of these issues and the fact that employment is being secured is suggestive of such change.

Indeed, reflections from the men and others suggests there are some men taking on leadership or advisory roles and this is seen as good role modelling as some of the younger men that are starting to attend the program are watching:

*“some of these young fellas look at me as a leader so I am going to be that leader”.*

More commentary is provided below on the higher levels of change contained in the logic framework.

### *The Impact of DAIWS and the Project Officer*

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While previous sections have credited the men with ownership of the program, the evaluation finds strong evidence for the program's success and maintenance being attributed in part to a strong auspicing organisation and the role of the Project Officer. The men talk strongly about the support they have received from DAIWS – indirectly – and the Project Officer in particular. For both the organisation and the Project Officer, the relationships that have needed to be managed, keeping momentum going when momentum seems to be being lost, and coordination of community visits and activities, have proved demanding.

This has at times been acutely felt, but without DAIWS and Jason Hampton persisting in their commitment to the program, the *Strong Men Strong Communities* Program would surely have atrophied. The organisation and the individual have continued to hold the men and program when at times the local challenges were deemed too much for some (men and communities).

Indeed, sometimes the men just need to be enfolded in their trauma and grief with human contact they would not otherwise have had. Prior to one of the field visits, one young man had held his father as he passed away. The *Strong Men Strong Communities* program in the days that followed allowed this young man to travel with the Project Officer and the evaluator to communities where family lived and Sorry Business could be done. In a moment when this young man, who was in residential rehabilitation, was wondering “*what will I do now and where will I go*” the program enabled him to go to family and community and do cultural business he would not have otherwise been able to do. Business that for him and his family needed to be done to reduce trauma and increase healing.

These moments and disturbances to the men's lives and the program cannot be quantified or measured in any scientific way, nonetheless they need to be accounted for in a developmental evaluation process. They reduce trauma and grief and therefore diminish the potential negative outcomes of such trauma and grief.

Finally, DAIWS maintains within the program many of the requirements for a quality healing program. That is, DAIWS ensures the program maintains a focus on local issues, local leadership drives the program, western methodologies and Indigenous healing practices are present and the program maintains – though not always successfully due to local issues – a proactive rather than reactive focus.

As with previous evaluations of men’s healing programs, a strong auspicing organisations and a Project Officer that can maintain the program during difficult times are critical to program success at the individual and community levels.

### **One Place One Space**

Previous evaluations of men’s healing program have also highlighted the value of a place / space for men to meet. These become places of recreation and relaxation but also places where men can cool off, run healing programs and have a place that belongs to them and is for them. This is deemed to be one of the most critical success factors of men’s healing programs. The absence of a common space / location is also one of the risk factors for a program’s sustainability since men need a place to find both relief and reconnect – to themselves, each other and their communities.

The most common locations that the men’s healing program has taken place – other than in the communities during the Project Officer’s visits - have been Crab Claw Island and the BBQ area in the public park at East Point. This undermines and under-values the men’s program.

If the *Strong Men Strong Communities* program is to be maintained – and it is the recommendation of this evaluation that it does - a permanent location for the program needs to be provided. Ideally such a space would be available within communities but more pressing from an overall program perspective is a common men’s space at an appropriate location within Darwin and that is available for all participating communities to use.

There is need for a feasibility study to be undertaken to scope and determine the model, location, costs, service demand and service delivery models (including referral services) and governance of a men’s healing / gathering place. The study should consider men’s spaces in the participating communities as well as a common space / location for the program in Darwin:

***It’s been great going to Crab Claw and we go out to East Point and all that but it would be great to have our place. A place where we can run programs and everyone knows where to go when something goes wrong ... a place that keeps us right.***





## The Role of Service Providers

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The Strong Men Strong Communities program has sought from inception to partner with local service providers. This has been a strong part of the program and relationships have been built with the following organisations:

- Relationships Australia
- Danila Dilba
- AMITY
- Black Dog Inc.
- Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation
- Yilli Housing
- Larrakia Nation
- Heart Foundation
- Saltbush
- Strong Bella

These service providers have most often presented at the formal forums and informed the men of the services they provide as well as providing sessions during the workshops on AOD and FDV education, leadership.

Overall, the service providers interviewed were supportive of the program and valued to opportunity to connect with the men. Trust has been built over time but partnerships are known to be resource intensive and need investment to work well. The Project Officer holds the primary responsibility for the management of the partnerships. Key findings from interviews with service providers were:

- Crab Claw was an excellent location for the workshops and for service providers to present
- While the venue was seen as positive, there was also a recommendation to rotate locations for workshops between venues that are suitable for saltwater and freshwater people / communities
- Service providers felt and acknowledged the workload of the Project Officer and need for additional support
- There was a reinforcement of the lack of basic services into communities and the high levels of distress, trauma and need – *“people starving and hunger is an issue and there is complexity in community with drugs and alcohol and overcrowding and all this leads to conflict”*
- All service providers suggested the number of services presenting at workshops could be expanded (e.g. include rehabilitation centres, credit unions, money management etc.)
- The program provides connections from services to men and from the men to services where such connections could not / would not have been otherwise made.

It is clear within the evaluation that with more resourcing the connection and referral processes could be enhanced. This would be done through a strengthened planning and strategic process with wrap around services developed and provided. However, the evaluation finds that there is limited capacity within the program to develop this as more immediate needs and demands are being met.

## A Quality Healing Program

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As the commencement of this report (page 5), the elements of a quality healing program were identified. The table below makes some estimation of the degree to which the Strong Men Strong Communities Program meets the elements of a quality healing program. While the ‘review’ of the elements suggests most elements are in place, as the commentary points out, this is happening to varying degree according to context and community.

The section that follows (‘Evidence and Knowledge Creation’) considers the findings from the Strong Men Strong Communities program adds the existing research and knowledge from evaluations of previous men’s healing programs in the NT, prior to conclusions being drawn from the evaluation.



ELEMENTS OF QUALITY HEALING PROGRAMS	DRIVERS OF QUALITY HEALING PROGRAMS	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Developed to address issues in the local community	Responding to needs identified by the community and enjoying its support	Y	While the program has faced challenges, it is still responding to local needs and has local community support. As noted below, there is much of the needs that is immediate and therefore the program has some reactive rather than proactive elements.
Driven by local leadership	Involving Elders and growing from local culture and values	Y	This is one of the strongest elements of the program and the involvement of community leadership has been and remains present. There is an increasing challenge for the involvement of Elders with a number of significant community leaders passing on.
Have a developed theory and evidence base	Utilising existing theory to inform the program base	Y	This men’s program is built on the learnings from the Our Men Our Healing program. This program is part of an expanding theory and evidence base about what makes quality men’s healing programs and the changes that can be effected when done well.
Combine western methodologies and Indigenous healing	Safe place for healing to occur and incorporating spirituality and providing networks within and external to community	Yes and no	There is still a need for the Strong Men Strong Communities Program to have an appropriate and permanent safe place for healing to occur. However, the networking within and external to community is one of the strongest elements of the program.
Understand and impact of colonisation and trans-generational trauma and grief	Recognising the impacts of colonisation and trans-generational trauma	Y	There is significant understanding and recognition of the impacts of colonisation and trauma within the program. The reality of both are the lived experiences of the men, their families and communities. There is a need to strengthen this element of the program and understanding and recognition from mainstream service providers and government agencies.
Build individual, family and community capacity	Building skills, and providing community empowerment and sufficient long term resources	Somewhat	The opportunities for capacity building across the individual, family and community levels has been limited by the fact that the program has needed to concentrate on immediate needs. Nonetheless, five men have gained employment and a number of others have volunteered for assisting with addictions.
Proactive rather than reactive	Principles of social justice and human rights and providing training, peer support and mentoring	Yes and no	As above, opportunity for long-term planning has been limited by meeting immediate needs. However, the elements and drivers have been part of the short and medium term planning arrangements and having workshops has ensured there a milestones along the way that support training, peer support and mentoring.
Incorporates strong evaluation frameworks	Ongoing reflective evaluation from the beginning of the program and embedding sustainability	Y	The development of the Program Logic and efforts to establish action plans has ensured consideration and focus for a reflective and developmental evaluation process has been embedded in the development and implementation of the program.

## 5. Evidence and Knowledge Creation

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The Strong Men Strong Communities program is built on the learnings from the Our Men Our Healing program that was piloted in Maningrida, Ngukurr and Wurrumiyanga. Accordingly, Strong Men Strong Communities is part of an expanding theory and evidence base about what makes quality men's healing programs and the changes that can be effected when done well. It adds to theory and evidence about what works well, in what circumstances, and for whom.

The evaluation of Our Men Our Healing highlighted a program operating in different but equally challenging local contexts. Each of these communities had much in common with the seven Darwin Town Communities that are the focus of this review:

- Communities often lack of a place / space and other resources for men to meet, cool off and share story and belonging
- Communities generally had a disconnection from, and respect for, culture and tribal lore and a breaking down of cultural practices and traditions (especially but not exclusively for young men in the community) prior to the program being established
- There were limited opportunities in communities for the transfer or re-education of cultural knowledge from Elders to young men
- Communities lacked cultural activities, healing programs and resources for men (e.g. counsellors, mentors and men's cultural healing and therapeutic programs)
- High levels of FDV and increased and unacceptable rates of interaction with the legal / justice system and high AOD use and misuse and poor health and wellbeing existed among men in all communities
- Communities had a high prevalence of family and relationship problems that effected not only families but the community / communities more broadly
- There is past and present grief, sorrow and loss whereby men feel disconnected from, or unable to take up, their (traditional) roles as nurturers, protectors, providers, teachers and carers.

Through the process of co-design, both Our Men Our Healing and Strong Men Strong Communities have seen men take ownership of the challenges and the solutions. Across the 10 communities that make up the two programs there are obviously local contexts that mean there are variations within success. However, this evaluation strengthens the findings from the Our Men Our Healing evaluation. That is, success of men's healing programs needs to be grounded in the following key factors.

1. The more elements of a quality healing program that are present the higher the chance of sustained change. In the Darwin Town Communities most of these elements were present (see previous section). It is clear that with these factors as the base of the development of the program, other critical success factors can emerge within and across programs.
2. The process of co-design has growing importance and the evidence more strongly points to co-design securing ownership and agency within the solutions and design of programs. There was a continued commitment to the needs, solutions and activities being developed by the men for the men. Co-design allowed the men to address how they viewed themselves and that this would be the key driver for change as the men became the agents of change. This is a significant finding within both *Our Men Our Healing* and *Strong Men Strong Communities*.

Notably, within the co-design work healing themes are identified to strengthen and keep safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's spirits, families, culture, communities and roles. Our Men Our Healing and Strong Men Strong Communities identified education, employment, healing, identity, law, relationships, resources and safety as important and all can be evidenced in each program to some degree. In the Darwin Town Communities – despite the limitations of resources and infrastructure - there is emerging evidence of men taking their place as learners and teachers, as strong providers and leaders and taking their place as protectors and overcoming the issues, addictions and challenges that had taken away their ability to be protectors.

3. The presence of a strong auspicing organisation that provides support and legitimacy to the program is critical to success – at least in the early stages. These organisations act as brokers and facilitators to a wider range of partnerships where other service providers are informed and engaged. They provide both resources (financial and non-financial) and opportunities from which agency and capacity for men can be enhanced. This level of support can be through infrastructure, service integration and critically in the case of the Darwin Town Communities, individuals from which capacity and sustainability can be built. Auspicing organisations that are fully engaged and respected within the community support sustained change.

4. While the presence of an auspicing organisation is important, so too is the presence / identification of individual leadership within communities that can be enhanced and utilised to build capacity within other individuals and the group, families and community ensures the ongoing success of the program.

In all the men's healing programs key individuals have emerged as leaders who then become drivers for the program. These are local men who are or become respected across the community - though it might not have always been this way. These men initially can carry a heavy burden and support for them is critical. Such support can simply be recognition of the changes they are endeavoring to make at both the individual and community levels.

5. The evaluation of *Our Men Our Healing* and *Strong Men Strong Communities* makes a very clear finding that a men's healing program needs a space for men to meet. Without such a place / space the program essentially has no home and can therefore stall. As noted below, going out on country can also be part of a wider culturally safe space but an established space within the community is critical.

6. *Strong Men Strong Communities* supports previous evaluations that reinforce the importance for the men of reconnecting to culture and country. This has not been easy to establish and maintain for the men from the Darwin Town Communities but even yarning together at East Point and reflecting and connecting to a place became important – as inadequate as this location was for the program.

The sense of reconnection is a salient theme in the stories men told both in the Darwin Town Communities and Maningrida, Ngukurr and Wurrumiyanga. In every case where reconnection is emerging so too are practices that had been lost or had not been present in communities for a number of years. Increased cultural celebrations and ceremonies are often observed and commented on by women and service providers.

7. A critical element in any men's healing program is the inclusion of women. The evaluations find the importance of women needing to be informed and supportive of the program since they reveal themselves within the evaluations to be more than interested observers. They have carried the burden of the men's disconnection to land and culture and have a stake in men's reconnection.

## 6. Conclusions

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While the evidence-base outlined above demonstrates the strengthening of conclusions from across men's healing programs, in terms of this review, strong men and strong communities cannot emerge unless men have strong bodies and basic community (material) needs are being met. With such high levels of poverty, low levels of basic needs being met and poor infrastructure in each of the communities, there are conditions that undermine building long-term, sustainable outcomes.

This program has needed, and continues, to concentrate on healing and this review adds to the evidence base and concludes healing has to commence before leadership can be developed and established and there needs to be a commitment to a long and slow healing process. As healing emerges, there is evidence of some of the senior men taking on advisory and senior roles and younger men starting to attend the program.

A key success of the program involves gaining trust and building respectful relationships and with the support offered by DAIWS and the Project Officer, this has empowered the men to seek help where previously they were reluctant.

Confidence and self-esteem are improving, and this is leading to the men now using the medical services more, and some seeking counselling, AOD support programs and healing services. The workshops have been a great success with the men learning new skills to address their issues. The workshops addressed many issues such as healthy relationships and safe families education, alcohol & other drugs education, men's health, problem solving, and how to de-stress, relax and be calm through music meditation, art, recreation and cultural activities.

The workshops have led to the Men's Training Program being established at Batchelor Institute. Upon successful completion of the program participants will receive a Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways FSK20113 and the opportunity to continue study in the areas of Community Services or Family Wellbeing. Specifically the program will lead to:

- Increased respect for self and others
- Enhanced parenting skills
- Increased capacity to deal with strong emotions
- Increased English literacy and numeracy skills
- Improved understanding of legal rights and responsibilities
- Increased awareness of suicide prevention
- Improved ability to communicate and work with others
- Improved computer skills
- Increased knowledge of support agencies and local services, and how to access them

Work is being undertaken to link the *Strong Men Strong Communities* program to the *Certificate II*.

Men were willing and confident to talk about their health and wellbeing, and have genuine hope for improving their lives. Indeed, there are examples of men giving up alcohol and seeking (some securing) employment. However, there are still many men from the Darwin Town Communities struggling with social and emotional issues and who require long term support and mentoring. Funerals continue to affect communities and Sorry Business interrupts participant attendance. The program has much more to achieve.

The challenge of establishing men's meeting spaces in each community challenges and will continue to challenge program outcomes. There needs to be a commitment from government to fund infrastructure (such as a men's sheds) in communities for men's programs.

Indeed, in terms of moving forward, there needs to be a commitment (in policy and funding) for the establishment of an integrated and incorporated men's service. This can be used as a referral / diversion program within the justice system. There are published cost – benefit analysis' that provide a compelling business case for such a program.

In the end, the families and communities that make up the Darwin Town Communities continue to advocate for improved living conditions and enhanced services. The evaluation of the *Strong Men Strong Communities* program strengthens the evidence base that suggests when men heal communities become stronger. This evaluation strengthens the evidence with regard to the conditions under which such healing best occurs.

<b>Appendix 1: Crab Claw Leaders Workshop Participants</b>		
<p><b>Amangal</b> Chris McGregor Robert Russle</p>	<p><b>Accacia</b> Keith Jeffrey Allen Stephensen</p>	<p><b>Belyuen</b> Anthony Moreen Stevie Brown Lyndon Lawrence Davin Rogers Gary Timber</p>
<p><b>One Mile Dam</b> Brendon Timber Phillip Tchmut Terrence Mardi Freddy Timber</p>	<p><b>Bagot Community</b> Joshua Poulson Peter Murray Ross Fejo-Frith Robert Patterson</p>	<p><b>Knuckeyes Lagoon</b> Ronny Aghenu Phillip Jangala Andrew Anderson</p>
<p><b>Palmerston Indigenous Village</b> Phillip Goodman Darryl Tambling Leroy Tambling Daryl Tambling</p>	<p><b>Kulaluk/Minmarama</b> (no show) Project Officer informed by community leaders that they are no longer interested in SMSC project, as they are interested in development project near Minmarama</p>	<p><b>Cultural Reps &amp; Support</b> Robert Mills (Larrakia) Tony Lee (Larrakia)</p>
<p><b>Support Persons</b> Jason Hampton and Michael Torres (DAIWS Indigenous Men’s Service) Steven Torres-Carne (Healing Foundation) Ash Dargen (Black Dog Institute) Robert Lewis (Amity House)</p>	<p><b>Other Agency reps</b> Eddie McKenzie (Relationships Australia - Family Relationship Centre) Greg Smith (Heart Foundation) Timmy Duggan (Heart Foundation) Kelvin Gardner (Ironbark)</p>	
<p><b>Facilitator:</b> Grant Sarra</p> <p><b>Report Writer:</b> Dr. John Prince (Social Compass)</p>		





# Appendix 2: Logic Diagram

