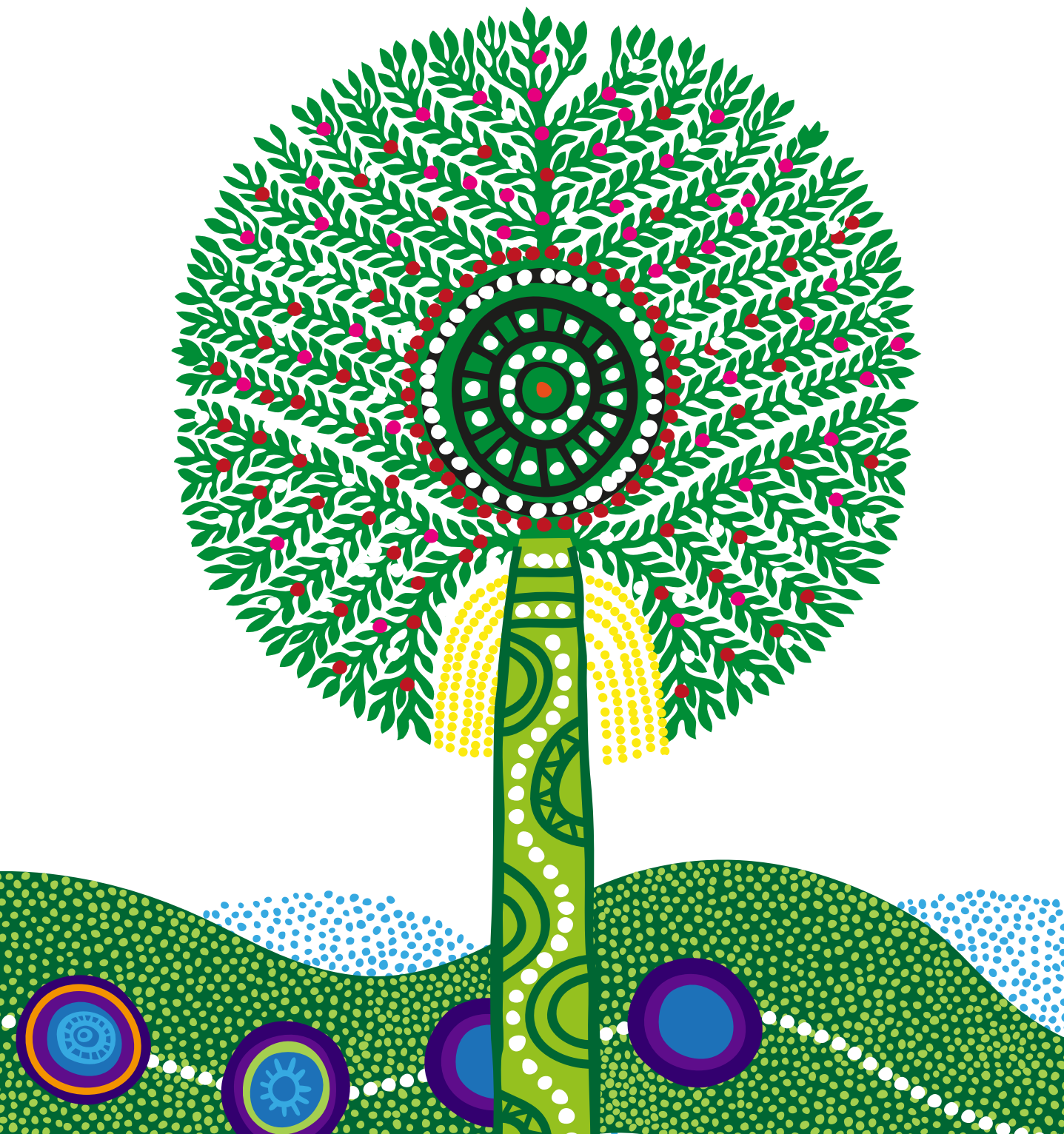


# Bringing Them Home 20 years on:

an action plan for healing

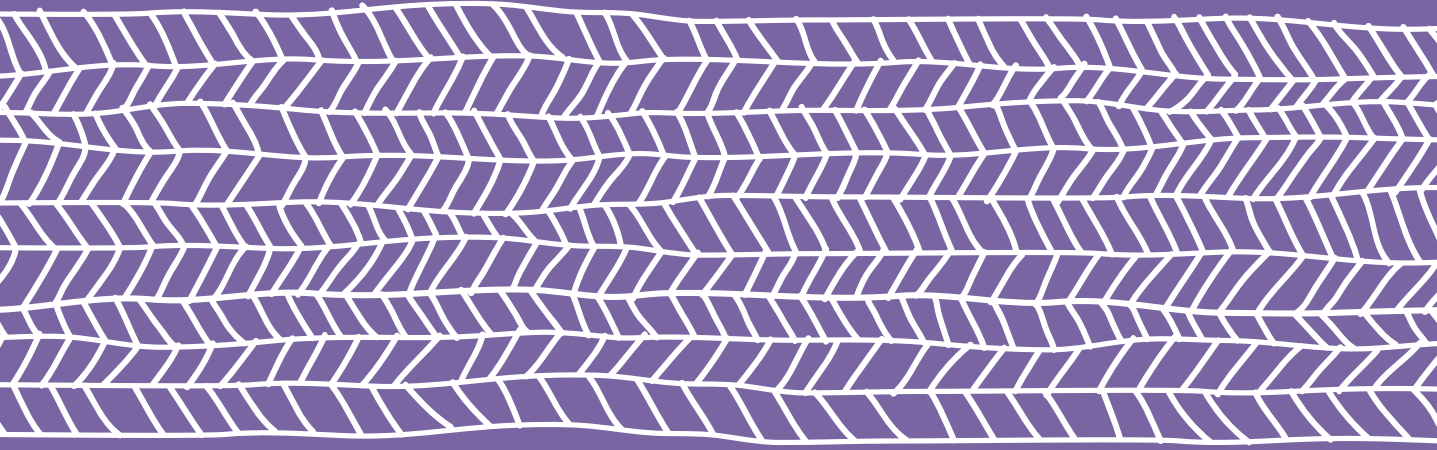




# **Bringing Them Home 20 years on:**

an action plan for healing

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Healing Foundation**



We acknowledge Stolen Generations members across Australia, including those who have passed on, for their courage in sharing their stories and wisdom in the Bringing Them Home report.

This report, written by Pat Anderson and Edward Tilton, was guided by the Healing Foundation's Stolen Generations Reference Committee. The Committee's efforts were central to ensuring that this report reflects the experience of Stolen Generations and for forming the critical recommendations to bring about change in Australia.

We acknowledge and thank all other contributors who were consulted for this report.



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*...the past is very much with us today, in the continuing devastation of the lives of Indigenous Australians. That devastation cannot be addressed unless the whole community listens with an open heart and mind to the stories of what has happened in the past and, having listened and understood, commits itself to reconciliation.*

Extract from the 1997 Bringing Them Home report



# Executive summary

On 26 May 1997 the landmark Bringing Them Home report was tabled in Federal Parliament. The report was the result of a national inquiry that investigated the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. This marked a pivotal moment in the healing journey of many Stolen Generations members. It was the first time their stories—stories of being taken from their families—were acknowledged in such a way.

It was also the first time it was formally reported that what governments did to these children was inhumane and the impact has been lifelong.

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been affected by the Stolen Generations. The resulting trauma has been passed down to children and grandchildren, contributing to many of the issues faced in Indigenous communities, including family violence, substance abuse and self harm.

Two decades on and the majority of the Bringing Them Home recommendations have not yet been implemented. For many Stolen Generations members, this has created additional trauma and distress.

Failure to act has caused a ripple effect to current generations. We are now seeing an increase in Aboriginal people in jails, suicide is on the rise and more children are being removed.

Addressing the underlying trauma of these issues through healing is the only way to create meaningful and lasting change.

Commemorative events, like the 20th anniversary of the Bringing Them Home report, are an important part of the healing process, for Stolen Generations members, their families and the broader community. In order to change, you have to remember.

The anniversary presents an opportunity to reset—to secure sustainable support to help reduce the impact of trauma. This report makes three key recommendations:

- 1 A comprehensive assessment of the contemporary and emerging needs of Stolen Generations members, including needs-based funding and a financial redress scheme.
- 2 A national study into intergenerational trauma to ensure that there is real change for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the future.
- 3 An appropriate policy response that is based on the principles underlying the 1997 Bringing Them Home report.

While this report might primarily detail the response from government to the Bringing Them Home report, it is not a report to government about government. This is a report for everyone, and outlines as a whole how we can actively support healing for Stolen Generations and their descendants. There needs to be commitment to making change. We all have a responsibility to do this together.

The price of not acting on the recommendations means an increased burden for Australia as a whole. It's time for action. We need to address the unfinished business—for the sake of our Elders, our young ones, for our entire communities and all Australians.

# Background

In 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Bringing Them Home (BTH) report was made public. The report was a significant milestone for the Stolen Generations members, their families, and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It was also important for Australia as a whole. In the testimonies it recorded and the recommendations it made, the Bringing Them Home report provided a basis for addressing the rights and needs of Stolen Generations members and for progressing reconciliation based on a genuine acknowledgement of Australia's past.

Despite progress in some areas, there has never been a collaborative and systematic attempt to address the recommendations the report made. Most have never been implemented.

To coincide with the 20th anniversary of the release of the Bringing Them Home report in 2017, the Healing Foundation commissioned this review to revisit the principles and its recommendations of the report, and to examine their advancement in the contemporary policy landscape.<sup>1</sup>

This review outlines a plan of action to meet the continuing and emerging needs and rights of Stolen Generations members and their families, based on the priorities of the Stolen Generations, the evidence of the effects of the failure to implement the Bringing Them Home recommendations, the report's recommendations and underlying principles, namely:

- self-determination
- non-discrimination
- cultural renewal
- coherent policy base
- provision of adequate resources.

This review is intended to mark the start of a conversation led by Stolen Generations members to inform the continuing process of acknowledging and making reparation for the wrongs of the past.

# The Stolen Generations

## The forcible removal of children

The effects of colonisation on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia have been catastrophic. The histories of colonisation are highly diverse, unfolding at different times and in locally and regionally specific ways. Nevertheless, the common experience for Indigenous people was one of devastation caused by introduced disease, frontier violence, dispossession from land and its resources, and the disruption and suppression of traditional cultures.

Added to these factors was the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. These children have become known as the Stolen Generations. The practice of removal became a systematic part of the policy of assimilation adopted by all Australian governments in the 20th century, and while the number of children forcibly removed under this policy is not known, the estimate provided by the work of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families was that:

*... between one in three and one in 10 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970. In certain regions and in certain periods the figure was undoubtedly much greater than one in 10. In that time not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal... Most families have been affected, in one or more generations, by the forcible removal of one or more children.<sup>2</sup>*


Children were moved to institutions run by churches and non-government organisations, adopted by non-Indigenous families, or placed with non-Aboriginal households to work as domestic servants and farm hands. Many children suffered very harsh, degrading treatment (including sexual abuse), limited or no contact with families, and were frequently indoctrinated to believe in the inferiority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture.

## The campaign for recognition

Laws supporting the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on the basis of race were repealed across Australia by the 1970s. As self-determination replaced assimilation as the dominant policy approach, the Stolen Generations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations began to force a re-appraisal of the practice of forcible removal. In 1995 this led to the Australian Government asking the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to carry out a national inquiry to:

- examine the past laws, practices and policies of forcible separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and their effects
- identify what should be done in response, including any changes in current laws, practices and policies with a focus on locating and reunifying families
- examine the justification for any compensation for those affected by the forcible separations
- look at then current laws, policies and practices affecting the placement and care of Indigenous children.





*The laws of those times  
are still impacting on  
our people today ...  
it is time to finish  
this business*

# The Bringing Them Home report

The Inquiry held extensive consultations across Australia, taking evidence from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, government and church representatives, foster and adoptive parents, health professionals, academics, and police, as well as receiving hundreds of written submissions. The final report of the Inquiry was tabled in the Australian Parliament on 26 May 1997.

The report extensively documented the experience of the Stolen Generations, finding that a deliberate policy of assimilation underlay the removal process and that:

*the forcible removal of Indigenous children was a gross violation of their human rights. It ... was an act of genocide contrary to the Convention on Genocide ratified by Australia in 1949.<sup>3</sup>*

It concluded that those affected had a right to reparations, including an acknowledgment of the truth and an apology; guarantees these human rights would not be breached again; the return of what had been lost where possible; rehabilitation; and compensation. The report also made findings about the contemporary removal of children from their families.

## Principles

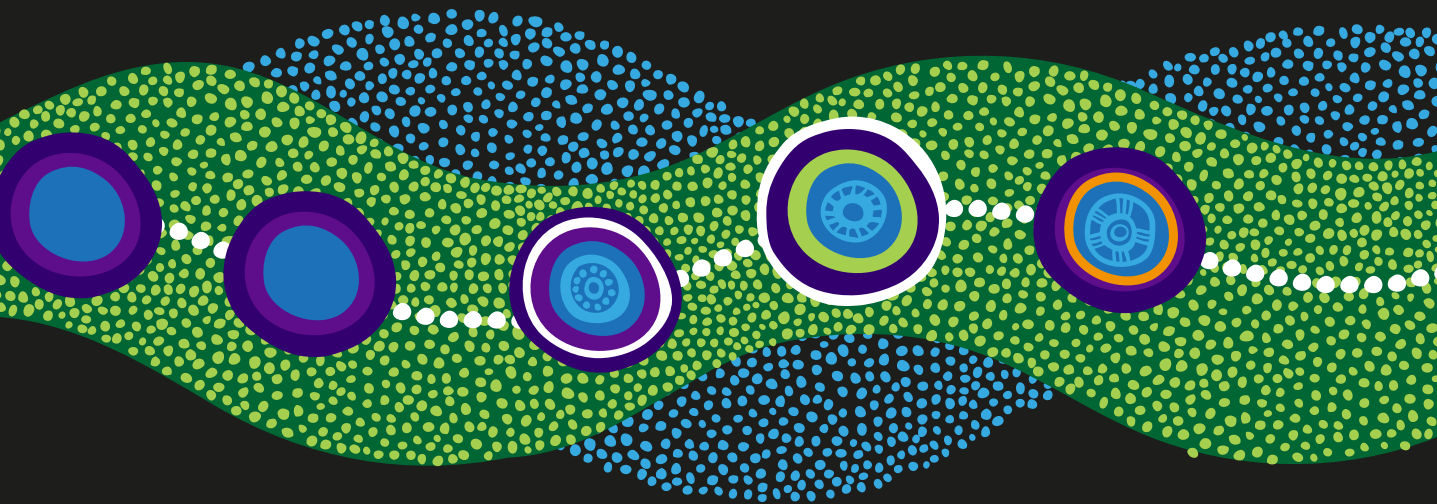
The Bringing Them Home report proposed a set of key principles to underlie government responses to those affected by the forcible removal of children<sup>4</sup>:

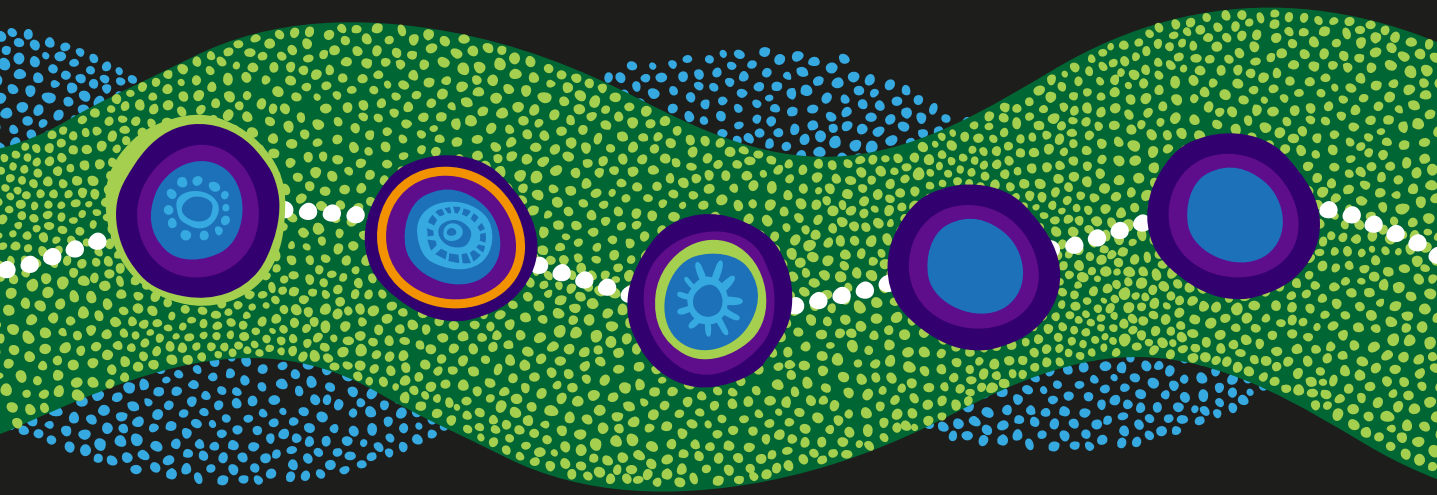
1. Self-determination – the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Stolen Generations members and their families to exercise autonomy in their own affairs and make their own decisions.
2. Non-discrimination – the right to be free of racial discrimination, and to be able to access services which are appropriate to their particular needs.
3. Cultural renewal – the right to participate in cultural activities, recognising the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the need to repair the damaged family and cultural ties resulting from the removal of children.
4. A coherent policy base – the need for an agreed set of services to begin the process of healing and redress, with agreed objectives and goals.
5. Adequate resources – appropriate funding to enable services to address the diverse effects of removal on individuals, families and communities.

## Recommendations

Stemming from its findings and founded on those principles, the report made 54 recommendations:

- acknowledgment and formal apology with all parliaments, police forces and churches to acknowledge, apologise and make reparation for past wrongs
- reparation for people who were forcibly removed including monetary compensation through a national compensation fund
- records, family tracing and reunion, including funding community-based Link-Up services to help families reconnect, and the establishment of records taskforces
- rehabilitation for survivors of forcible removal, including local healing and wellbeing approaches
- education and training, including a National Sorry Day and the inclusion of compulsory modules on the Stolen Generations in school curricula
- guarantees against repetition, including the implementation of self-determination approaches to the well-being of Indigenous children and young people
- addressing contemporary separation, with national standards legislation to ensure compliance with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle
- a national process for coordination and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations.





*Finally the truth was out there*

# Responding to Bringing Them Home

## The Australian Government response, 1997 – 2007

Following the tabling of the report, the immediate response of the Australian Government of the day was to reject many of the key principles and recommendations linked to them, in particular the need for a formal apology and for reparations. However, the government did provide funding (\$63 million over four years) including for regional social and emotional wellbeing centres, counselling positions, Link-Up services, culture and language maintenance programs, and family support and parenting programs.<sup>5</sup> Much of this funding was made permanent in 2001-2002, initially as part of the Department of Health's budget and more recently within the Indigenous Advancement Strategy under the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

While the Bringing Them Home recommendations for a national process for monitoring implementation were not agreed to, between 2000 and 2007 there were a number of attempts to evaluate the government response to the report. The results of these inquiries were generally highly critical, finding that the Australian Government's response in particular had been under-funded, badly directed, poorly coordinated, and insufficiently targeted to the needs of the Stolen Generations.<sup>6</sup> In 2007, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner reflected on the decade since the report was made public:

*For Aboriginal people, the years since the Bringing Them Home report have been filled with great hope as well as lost opportunities. While there have been positive developments and initiatives, many opportunities for governments to work with our communities and advance the goal of national reconciliation have been lost. Ten years on, the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report still stand as the starting point for a national reconciliation process.<sup>7</sup>*

## Evaluation of Bringing Them Home and Indigenous Mental Health Programs (2007)

The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health within the then Department of Health and Ageing commissioned Urbis Keys Young to carry out an evaluation of the implementation of the Link-Up program, the Bringing Them Home counsellors program, the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Regional Centre Program, and the funding of mental health service delivery projects in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

It found that the funded organisations (Link-Ups, ACCHOs and others) had delivered a number of important achievements but faced a number of limitations, including a lack of focus on first generation Stolen Generations survivors, variable skills and qualifications of staff, a lack of consistency in service delivery, and limited geographical coverage. More broadly it found that:

*The Government's response to the Bringing Them Home report has been insufficiently documented, poorly coordinated and insufficiently targeted to meet the needs of the Stolen Generations, as concluded by reports examining this issue. This is consistent with the findings of this evaluation. There has been insufficient prioritisation of the needs of first generation Stolen Generations members.<sup>8</sup>*

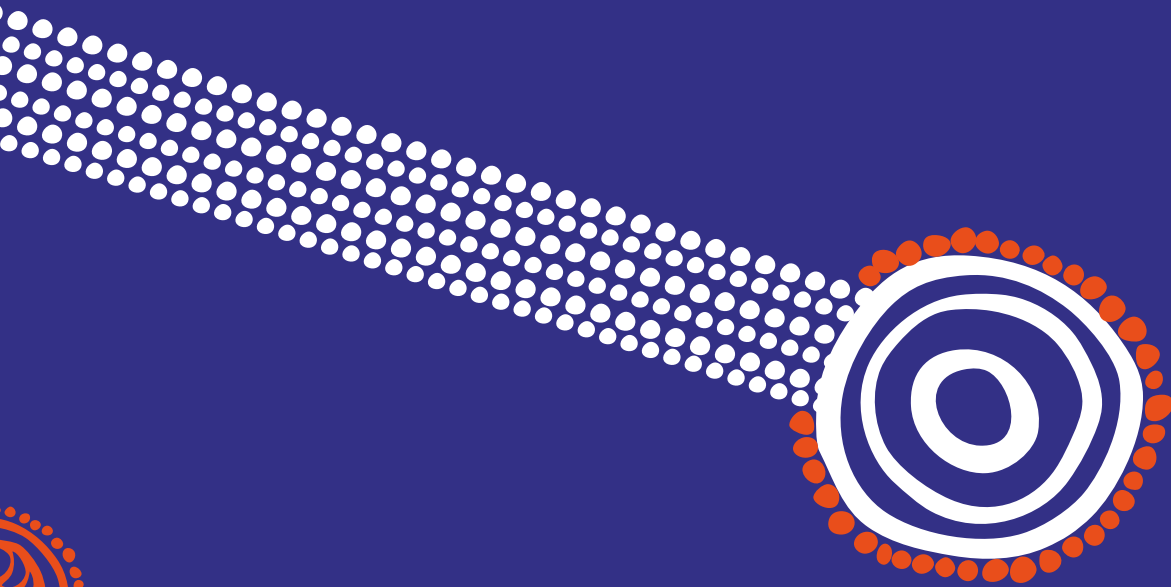
## The Apology (2008) and beyond

Under a new Australian Government, the Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples was passed by the Australian Parliament on 13 February 2008. As well as delivering on one of Bringing Them Home's central, unfulfilled recommendations, the Apology also marked a shift in the policy response back towards some of its underlying principles. It also led to the establishment of the Healing Foundation. However, the Australian Government continued to oppose establishing national processes for compensation, and continued a response based on funding of services, though once again these were often aimed at the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, rather than the Stolen Generations in particular.

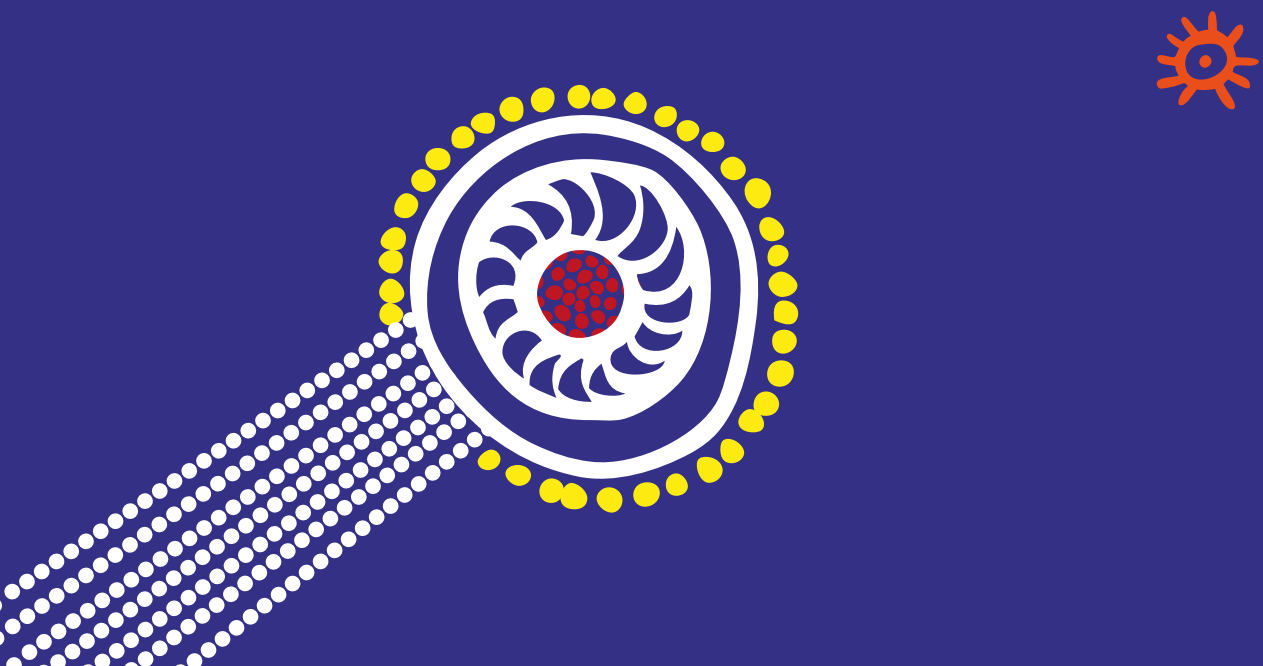
In the absence of any formal monitoring process, two non-government agencies have recently carried out their own assessment of the response to the Bringing Them Home report.<sup>9</sup> These found very limited implementation of the recommendations: less than one in 10 were identified as having been fully implemented.

The Bringing Them Home report created some positive change: it provided the opportunity for Stolen Generations members to put their stories on the public record; it led to the Apology; it foreshadowed a greater focus on social and emotional wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and it led to increased support for Link-Up services and the establishment of the Healing Foundation.

However, the great majority of its recommendations have yet to be implemented, and the principles that underlay them are yet to form a coherent basis for a national response to the historical trauma suffered by the Stolen Generations. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, Bringing Them Home remains unfinished business.



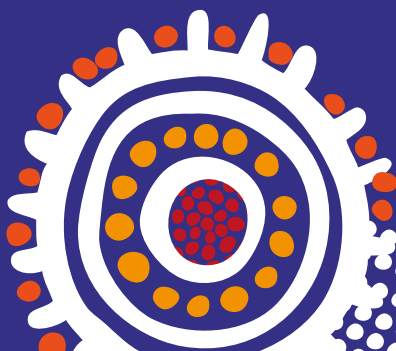
*The work still hasn't been done,*







*it's unfinished business*



## Tom Calma



### Let the healing begin

Today is an historic day.

It's the day our leaders—across the political spectrum—have chosen dignity, hope and respect as the guiding principles for the relationship with our first nations' peoples.

Through one direct act, Parliament has acknowledged the existence and the impacts of the past policies and practices of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families.

And by doing so, has paid respect to the Stolen Generations. For their suffering and their loss. For their resilience. And ultimately, for their dignity.

...The introductory words of the 1997 Bringing Them Home report remind us of this. It reads:

...the past is very much with us today, in the continuing devastation of the lives of Indigenous Australians. That devastation cannot be addressed unless the whole community listens with an open heart and mind to the stories of what has happened in the past and, having listened and understood, commits itself to reconciliation.

By acknowledging and paying respect, Parliament has now laid the foundations for healing to take place and for a reconciled Australia in which everyone belongs.

For today is not just about the Stolen Generations—it is about every Australian.

Today's actions enable every single one of us to move forward together—with joint aspirations and a national story that contains a shared past and future.

**Formal Response on behalf of the Stolen Generations to the Parliament of Australia's National Apology by Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 13 February 2008.**

# Why action is needed now

## The number of people affected

It's difficult to say exactly how many children were taken from their families or how many Stolen Generations members are still alive today. The Bringing Them Home report estimated that a minimum of one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period up to 1970. This estimate is consistent with the most recent evidence available, which found that 12 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 45 years in 2008 had personally been removed from their family by 'welfare, as part of government policy or taken away to a mission'.<sup>10</sup> Applying this proportion to the latest publicly available figures on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population suggests around 14,700 Stolen Generations members.<sup>11</sup> While this number is falling as older members pass away, a proportion of the seven per cent of people aged 15 to 44 in 2008 who reported being taken away would also be Stolen Generations. Therefore, when we start to consider the wider impact, a realistic estimate for the number of Stolen Generations members would be 15,000 people, at minimum.

A further 38 per cent of people surveyed in 2008 reported having immediate family who had been removed. This means an additional 160,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people directly affected by the policies of forcible removal.<sup>12</sup> These figures are rough estimates, but give a broad picture of the scale of the issue.

## Continuing effects on the Stolen Generations

The failure to implement the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report is reflected in a wide range of negative outcomes.

A recent study examined the health and wellbeing status of those who had been removed themselves and those who had parents, grandparents/great-grandparents or siblings who had been removed. This group, the Stolen Generations and their immediate family and descendants:

*... are around 50 per cent more likely to have been charged by police, 30 per cent less likely to report being in good health, 15 per cent more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels and 10 per cent less likely to be employed.<sup>13</sup>*

The comparison data utilised to undertake this research was other Indigenous people across Australia. Given that we already know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have poorer health and social outcomes than the general Australian population this indicates extreme vulnerability for Stolen Generations and their descendants.

On an individual level, there is the personal cost to those who came forward to the Inquiry, often at the risk of being re-traumatised through sharing and retelling their stories. They took this risk on the trust that it would lead to significant change. Many of these people ended their lives without that trust being repaid.

There have also been ongoing health and social effects for the Stolen Generations and their families. They have significantly poorer physical health and over double the rates of mental illness and alcohol abuse compared to that suffered by those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were not removed. They have also, on average, received a poorer education and are more likely to be unemployed.<sup>14</sup>

The educational and economic consequences of forcible removal are important to note, given the ideology holding that the removal of children was so that they could get an education and 'get ahead' in mainstream society. The effects have clearly been the opposite: on average, the Stolen Generations have received a poorer education and are more likely to be unemployed than those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were not removed.

The breakdown of family and social structures caused by removal decimated communities. It deeply impacted Stolen Generations members. They did not know where to go to seek support for anything; they no longer belonged to a community, held no memories of belonging to one and were not able to draw on the strengths of a community to help them. This disempowered Stolen Generations members in being able to take action and seek assistance resulting in many members feeling isolated and distressed. There has also been a considerable community impact in terms of trauma experienced by those that were left behind with many of their parents, grandparents and family members never recovering from the distress of losing their children.

In all of the focus on healing there has been extremely limited focus on healing the relationship between Stolen Generations and their communities and this has fed lateral violence resulting in increasing isolation.

## Intergenerational trauma

The trauma that people suffered removed their right to parent freely and receive support to care safely for their children.

Many people suffered by not being able to show love to their families and lost the enjoyment of accepting the love of their children. They lost the right to love their children and were frightened to accept love. Many of them suffered in silence and sacrificed their own wellbeing to keep their families together. Sometimes they stayed in more difficult circumstances, such as marriages, where there was violence, as they could not tolerate their families being broken up again, their children growing up without a mother and a father.

This also meant that many did not seek support for any of their problems, including their own mental health for fear of being judged unfit parents and their children being taken. Men often missed out on being fathers as they sought to use any means to dull the pain such as alcohol use.

As well as the negative effects felt by Stolen Generations members, the failure to address the trauma created through forced removal policies has led to widespread problems throughout the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The increasing levels of contemporary child removal from Aboriginal families was an issue that the Bringing Them Home report canvassed in depth. Numerous participants acknowledged that while the intent of child removal practices today is different to that experienced by the Stolen Generations, the effect is potentially the same: a loss of identity and the exacerbation of intergenerational trauma. The failure to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles described at length in the Bringing Them Home recommendations was a particular concern for the organisations consulted in the development of this report.

The Bringing Them Home report found that in 1993 two per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (nationally) were in care, almost seven and a half times the rate for non-Indigenous children (page 372). The latest figures (for 2015) show a worsening situation: over five per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in care, almost 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2016).

It is well-established that adverse experiences in childhood can have lifelong effects, including mental ill health, physical illness, poor educational and employment outcomes, addiction, relationship difficulties, and increased contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>15</sup> What is emerging now is the evidence that such traumatic experiences:

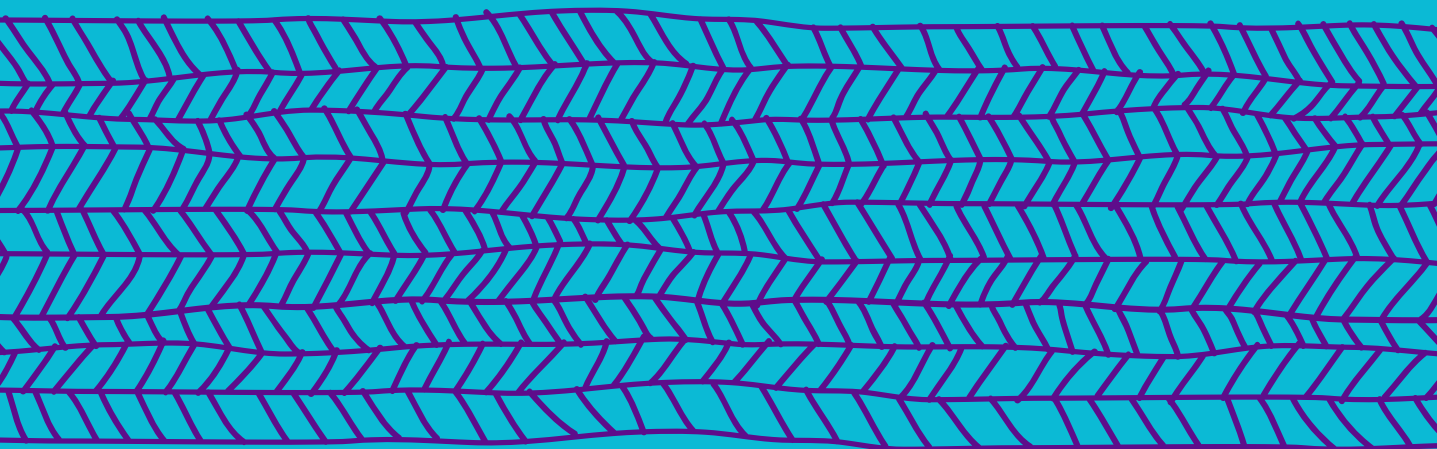
*can be transferred from the first generation of survivors that have experienced (or witnessed) it directly in the past to the second and further generations of descendants of the survivors ... [this] intergenerational trauma ... is defined as the subjective experiencing and remembering of events in the mind of an individual or the life of a community, passed from adults to children in cyclic processes as 'cumulative emotional and psychological wounding'.<sup>16</sup>*

Evidence for intergenerational trauma includes the testimonies and experience of the Stolen Generations themselves, particularly as recorded in the Bringing Them Home report which has many heart-rending reflections on the lasting effects of trauma in their own families' lives.

There are also the differential health and social outcomes experienced by the Stolen Generations and their descendants: those who have been removed themselves or whose immediate family were removed are significantly more likely to be in contact with the police, have alcohol and gambling problems, have poorer mental health and social skills or have children with increased risks of emotional and behavioural difficulties.<sup>17</sup>

There is also powerful evidence for the effects of intergenerational trauma in a number of key indicators of wellbeing in contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life that are strongly linked to the experience of unresolved intergenerational trauma, such as the high and rising rates of the contemporary removal of children from their families, the incarceration of young people, and family violence.

*Mothers still live in fear that  
their children are going to be  
taken from them*



## Florence Onus



Florence Onus is a descendant of the Birri-Gubba and Kairi/Bidjara clans of north-east Queensland.

She is the fourth generation of women from her family to be forcibly removed from land, culture and family.

"My grandmother and my mother were both trained and sent out as domestic servants on properties. They weren't allowed to speak their native language or practice cultural ceremonies, or they would be severely punished," Florence said.

"And then I became part of the Stolen Generations when I was removed from my family to be raised in a white foster home."

Her two older sisters were sent to Rockhampton to live with nuns, while Florence and her two other siblings went to Townsville foster homes. There, Florence spent most of her childhood.

"I embarked on my healing journey when at 21 my mother attempted suicide and I became her full time carer and together we began the journey of healing."

"It wasn't until I started doing my own research and had access to policies that I truly realised that my mother was suffering from the impacts of intergenerational trauma."

Florence has four adult daughters and she is a grandmother. She is passionate about breaking the cycle of trauma through healing, education, cultural identity and spiritual nurturing.

Florence is an educator and an advocate for social justice. Her maternal grandfather died in custody in the early 60s following his arrest as an agitator.

Florence has carried on his fight for social justice, with a particular focus on the impact of Black Deaths in Custody and Stolen Generation issues.

"There needs to be an increase in healing resources for the Stolen Generations and our families to heal from the trauma, pain and suffering that we're still dealing with today," she said.



## Truth and healing

Underpinning all of the policies that led to the forced removal of Indigenous children was a subscription to racism, including institutional racism.

The origin of the trauma has been the dispossession, exclusion and discrimination suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and experienced in particular by the Stolen Generations through being taken from their families and communities. Added to this is the ongoing experience of racism. This can be on a personal level (surveys show that the experience of racism is almost universally reported amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people<sup>18</sup>) or on a systemic level through practices and policies which disadvantage and marginalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being structured into how institutions operate.<sup>19</sup> There is a strong association between these experiences of racism and poor mental health and drug use. For people bearing a burden of trauma, it is also re-traumatising and can become a barrier to healing.

Racism can be countered by truth-telling. This is one of the most important outcomes of what has occurred from the Bringing Them Home report for Stolen Generations survivors. However, the legacy of these times continues to play out within our society and we still battle the continuous impact of institutional racism in our efforts to get the right policies to lead and develop change for Stolen Generations members and their families.

## Bringing Them Home: a missed opportunity

By documenting a part of Australia's history that was previously ignored, the Bringing Them Home report provided a basis for genuine reconciliation, and for addressing issues of identity, trust and the experience of racism that continue to strongly affect the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia today.

The report made recommendations for addressing the needs of Stolen Generations members and their families, as well as other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regarding language; culture and history; mental health; the contemporary removal of children; and self-determination. It charted a way forward based on justice, on the healing of past hurts, and of breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

There is no way of knowing what the contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world would look like had there been a concerted effort to implement the Bringing Them Home vision for the future. But it is clear that the failure to properly implement this vision represents a significantly missed opportunity to address trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to provide a basis for genuine reconciliation in Australia.

# An action plan for making things right

While we note that both federal and state governments over the past 20 years have made responses to the Bringing Them Home report it has been neither adequate in resources or the commitment required to create real change.

The 20th anniversary of Bringing Them Home, in 2017, represents an important opportunity to revisit the continuing needs and rights of Stolen Generations members and their families, and to recommit to the original recommendations. Stolen Generations members are aging, and there is an urgent need to ensure they, and their families, don't face further trauma by a failure to achieve justice in their lifetime.

This review provides a set of actions to help Stolen Generations members reach some peace, and to meet their continuing and emerging needs, along with the future needs of their families.

- **Action one – comprehensive response for Stolen Generations:** Ensuring the holistic needs of the Stolen Generations are met, including dedicated needs-based funding and a universal, culturally safe and trauma-informed financial redress scheme.
- **Action two – healing intergenerational trauma:** Addressing the serious, widespread, and worsening effects of unresolved intergenerational trauma arising from the processes of colonisation and from the forcible removal of children, as the driver of many health, social and wellbeing issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including the Stolen Generations, their families and descendants.
- **Action three – creating an environment for change:** Creating a policy response to the rights and needs of Stolen Generations members and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is based on the principles underlying Bringing Them Home as a basis for reconciliation in Australia.

## Action one: comprehensive response for Stolen Generations

The Bringing Them Home report made a case for a comprehensive package of reparations to the Stolen Generations, including acknowledgment and apology, guarantees against repetition, restitution, rehabilitation and monetary compensation (financial redress). As documented above, such reparation has only been partly made.

### 1. Meeting the healing needs of the Stolen Generations

#### Assessing the level of need

There are an estimated 175,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are either Stolen Generations themselves or directly affected by the processes of forcible removal (see 'the number of people affected', p19). Given the negative social, health and wellbeing effects of removal, this represents a substantial level of need within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It may also be the case that the Stolen Generations are experiencing accumulating levels of disadvantage as new needs emerge or intensify, for example due to the fact that they are ageing, or as a result of the non-implementation of the Bringing Them Home recommendations.

A national needs assessment process is therefore required. This will document the contemporary experience of Stolen Generations members and their families, identify their existing and emerging needs, describe the appropriate service models to meet those needs and recommend funding reforms to support those services, including a dedicated needs-based Australian Government funding stream.<sup>20</sup>

## Dedicated needs-based funding

The Bringing Them Home report recognised adequate resourcing as a key principle to underpin government responses to the Stolen Generations. However, the Australian Government's response to Bringing Them Home has not maintained a focus on their specific needs and no dedicated funding stream has provided services to them. The Bringing Them Home counsellor positions originally funded in 1997 are now expected to provide general social and emotional wellbeing services for the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The lack of focus on the specific needs of Stolen Generations members and their families is exacerbated by the large amount of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and social support services now being funnelled by the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) to non-Indigenous NGOs, and in some cases to church-run organisations. This is creating barriers for Stolen Generations members and their descendants to access services because in a number of cases the services are provided by the same churches who ran the institutions where the children were forcibly removed and traumatised.

Consideration should be given to funding for community-healing responses to assist Stolen Generations members create renewed connections to the places they are now living. This could take the form of healing forums that the Healing Foundation has been leading throughout the country. These forums are enabling communities to reflect on the negative impact of colonisation and to create solutions that bring harmony and balance back to community relationships.

For example, funding that has been provided both under the New South Wales and South Australian compensation schemes has allowed for direct funding to Stolen Generations and their families for healing. This has included a pool of funding that can be accessed for collective healing initiatives that include memorials, healing centres, healing camps and groups, reunions of institutions. This is enabling Stolen Generations and their families to access healing that is meaningful to them and chosen by them—thereby implementing one of the key principles of the Bringing Them Home report, self-determination.

## Doreen Webster



Doreen Webster is a Barkindji woman, born in Wilcannia, in the north west of New South Wales.

"I remember happy times with my parents before I was taken. My dad worked on a station. I loved it. I had a younger sister. She was a baby when she was taken."

Doreen and her brother John were taken to the local police station and locked up in cell. The next day she was put on a train to Sydney, where at Central Station, Doreen was separated from her brother.

"A man was waiting there for my brother, from Kinchela Boys Home. I said 'Where are you going?' And I was pulling at him, trying to pull him back," she said. "Here I am on the station, a little eight year old, screaming and crying because they were taking my brother away."

Doreen was taken to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.

"When I got up to Cootamundra I was thinking, 'What's going on here? Where am I?' I had no idea where I was or what was happening to me. I was screaming for my mum and dad. When we got there we were treated so cruelly—so cruelly," Doreen said.

She recalls the matron asking a police officer to punish her.

"I was sitting down on the ground and he got me by the hair of the head and just pulled me up, straight up to my feet—lifted me off the ground and stood me on my feet—and then he stood on my foot. I had no shoes on. I was screaming out in agony. It was just horrifying. I used to run away all the time," she said.

Doreen is now a vocal advocate of appropriate aged care for the Stolen Generations. On the 20th anniversary of the Bringing Them Home report, she wants the survivors of Cootamundra, and the infamous Kinchela Boys Home, to have their own joint aged care facility, so they can spend their last years together.

"For when we get older, a place where we can be. We are family, we are sisters to the Kinchela boys. They are brothers to us. And there is a closeness. That is our family."

## Developing a trauma informed public policy environment

Appropriate support for Stolen Generations members and their descendants cannot be provided without a good understanding of the historical and living trauma that they are experiencing.


Inadequate education about this history is impairing the ability of governments, service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to effectively meet their needs. While trauma limits the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage confidently with mainstream health and welfare services.

Existing training does not support police, welfare services, health and mental health providers and institutions such as aged care facilities to respond effectively to the increasing distress Stolen Generations and their descendants might experience by coming into contact with these services, often agents of harm from their past.

In addition, trauma informed training that is currently available does not cover the trauma experienced by our Stolen Generations members and their families, and often does not come from a cultural perspective.

The development of a suite of trauma training packages that are designed with Stolen Generations survivors would ensure governments, professionals and services are learning the skills and the means to respond effectively to Stolen Generations survivors without causing more harm.

Trauma-informed organisations use a strengths-based approach based on an understanding of the impact of trauma; emphasise the physical, psychological, and emotional safety of clients and staff; and help people affected by trauma to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.<sup>21</sup>



*People need to go  
through healing  
themselves before  
they can help others*

## 2. Supporting healing approaches

Since the Bringing Them Home report was tabled two decades ago, considerable knowledge about healing approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been developed. Evidence shows that such approaches can lead to improved resilience, mental health, and reduced risk of disease. The creation of healing centres in Canada, in response to the intergenerational impacts of child removal practices there, has led to significant reductions in socially damaging problems including suicide.<sup>22</sup>

The Canadian Healing Foundation was provided over \$800 million to lead their healing responses and this allowed significant effort across the country to achieve these outcomes. They also did this work within the context of a treaty that politically supported funding and progressive policy initiatives that enabled self-determination for Aboriginal communities.

Healing approaches are diverse, responding to the particular needs of the communities in which they are embedded. However they generally aim to build individual, family and community capacity through western methodologies and traditional healing. Continuing and expanding support for healing approaches, and sharing the theory and evidence for their effectiveness, is important to address the traumatic legacy of the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

Healing centres are an important new approach for Stolen Generations members and their descendants. For many of our Stolen Generations who have nowhere to call home they are creating a place of healing and renewal and helping to support members to have a culturally safe place to seek sanctuary and support.

An example of this is the healing centre at Kinchela. Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation was established by the survivors of Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home, a 'home' run by the NSW Government for over 50 years.

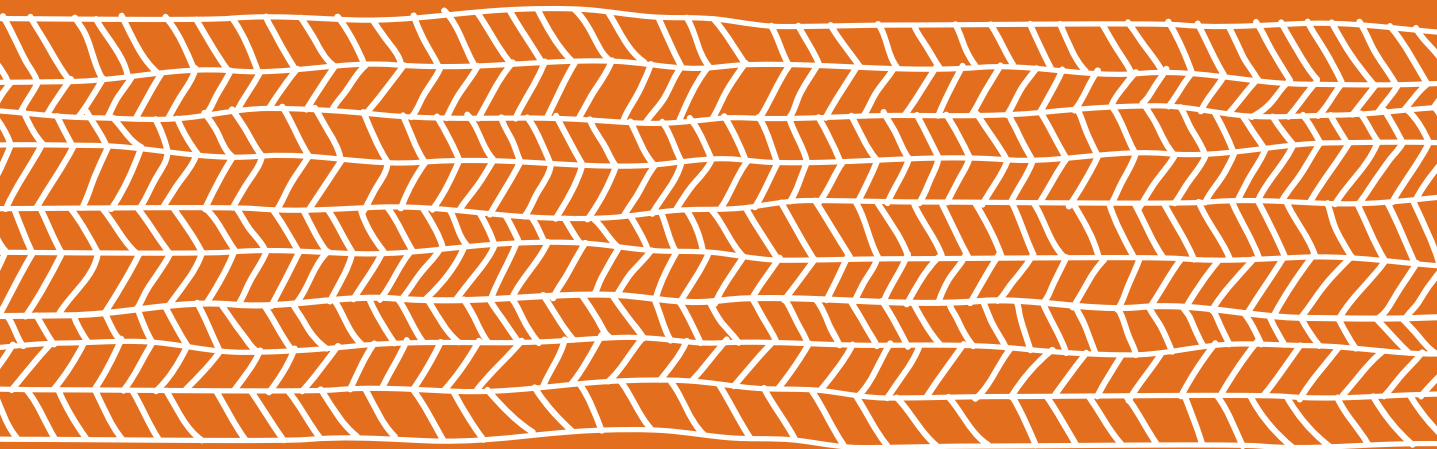
Led by survivors and their families, the Corporation encourages and supports sustainable healing programs that address the legacy of physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse experienced by the survivors as well as the intergenerational trauma experienced by their descendants.

Currently the Corporation is developing concepts and plans for a museum on the site of the home and a healing centre at South West Rocks, a place where the boys felt safe during their time at Kinchela.

The concept for the healing centre includes governance structures and government training, program design, management and evaluation for programs to be run at the centre. This would also include the archiving of cultural knowledge and materials to preserve historical records, including oral histories.



*No records often means  
no reunion*



Kinchela Boys Home inflicted significant pain on survivors, their families and communities, and they need a safe place where they can gather and support each other as a fundamental part of the healing process. The healing centre will provide a retreat for the community, a safe place to participate in reunions and workshops, and offer ways to reconnect families and reclaim cultural heritage.

### **3. Ensuring Stolen Generations have a voice in service delivery**

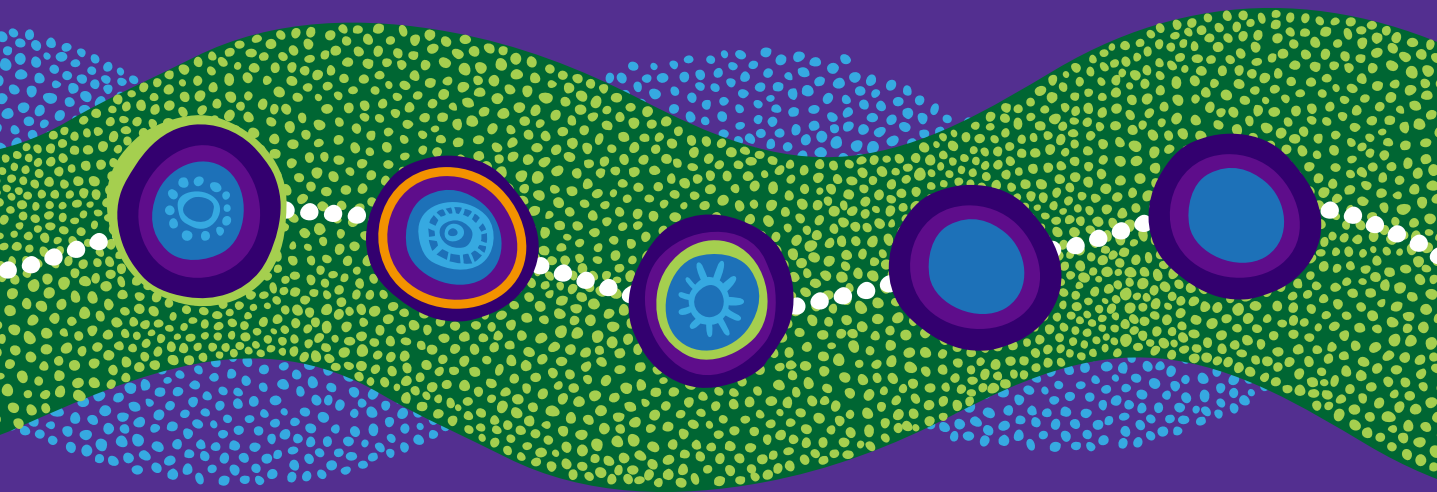
Over time, the focus of the Australian Government's Bringing Them Home counselling funding provided in response to the report has shifted away from the specific needs of the Stolen Generations towards the social and emotional wellbeing needs of the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The recent transfer of funding to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy has contributed to this process. States and territories also need to investigate their responses and ensure they are in line with supporting Stolen Generations to have self-determination within healing processes that are funded and supported.

As well as a dedicated funding stream for Stolen Generations organisations, formal governance mechanisms are required for organisations with Stolen Generations clients to ensure that Stolen Generations members have input into the design and delivery of their services. This will assist organisations to meet the specific service needs of Stolen Generations and their families.

For example, organisations that provide services for Stolen Generations, that are not specific Stolen Generations led organisations, can establish mechanisms such as reference groups to ensure that Stolen Generations members service needs are adequately met.

### **4. Reporting on the needs of the Stolen Generations**

Currently, many government reporting processes do not specifically include sections on the Stolen Generations. The specific needs of the Stolen Generations should be included in key government reports and strategies to maintain a national focus on their needs and how these are being met over time.



*Australians are being denied  
a part of their history*

## Ian Hamm



Ian Hamm is a Yorta Yorta man from Shepparton in central Victoria. In 1964, he was separated from his family when he was three weeks old. He grew up just 50 kilometres away from them, unaware of their existence.

That changed when he went to college and met an Aboriginal education officer who asked him if he knew where he came from. Ian replied his birth name was Andrew James. The person said: "Yeah. I think I know who you are. I'll get back to you."

Six months later a worker from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency visited Ian in Bendigo. She told him his birth family, the James family, was a big Aboriginal family in Shepparton. Ian then realised he'd already met some of his birth family, but was unaware of their relationship.

"It blows you away. She told me I was one of five, 'you have two sisters and two brothers'. And I asked about my mother. She said my mother died in 1966, when I was two," he said.

"I've only got a few photos of my mum. It's enormously frustrating when people say to me I'm like my mother. I don't know what that means. It puts into perspective where you fit in. Or don't fit in as the case may be," he said. "The hard part of this is I didn't meet any of them until I was in my twenties. You've only known each other as adults," Ian said.

"It will be the same for anybody who's been through this experience, the thing that's the most confronting, the one that you live with every day. That you've had to start a relationship as an adult. How do you create those relationships? How do you make them work?"

He described the uncertainty of identity he felt as the only Aboriginal man growing up in Yarrawonga.

"People would tell me I'm Aboriginal, but what does that mean? My only source of information was what people told me and what I saw on television. This is the '60s and the '70s, and that wasn't great."

Over the years, moving forward has had its own challenges, especially in finding a way of getting on with things. "When I say heal, for me, I don't think you get over it, you just get used to it. It's how I get by."

Ian says he's largely made peace with his past, but it's more like a cessation of hostilities than a lasting peace.

"There are days when sometimes it just gets to me. I get this overwhelming sense of sadness. And I know exactly what it is. It's that 'where do I fit in'."

## 5. Access to records

The Bringing Them Home report looked specifically at access to individual and family records of the Stolen Generations as a vital part of assisting in the process of locating and reunifying families. Despite the Australian Government's response to Bringing Them Home prioritising family reunion, problems accessing records have persisted. A review of access to records at all levels of government, including states and territories, and non-government agencies is needed and the implementation of the report's recommendations is required.

## 6. Education

The Bringing Them Home report identified education as an important part of the reparation process; with awareness of the history of child removal key to preventing the repetition of such human rights violations. Despite some progress, for example the inclusion of information about the Stolen Generations in the national curriculum, 83 per cent of Australians believe it is important to know more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.<sup>23</sup> Education about the history of the Stolen Generations therefore remains important, starting with early learning centres and schools, continuing up to professional training of those who may work with, or make decisions affecting, Stolen Generations members and their families. The Healing Foundation has been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum writers to develop classroom resources for K-9. This has been supported by a number of peak bodies who have recommended that all state education departments support further development of these learning tools. State and territory education departments can show leadership by ensuring that these resources are used by teachers throughout their education systems.

## 7. Financial redress

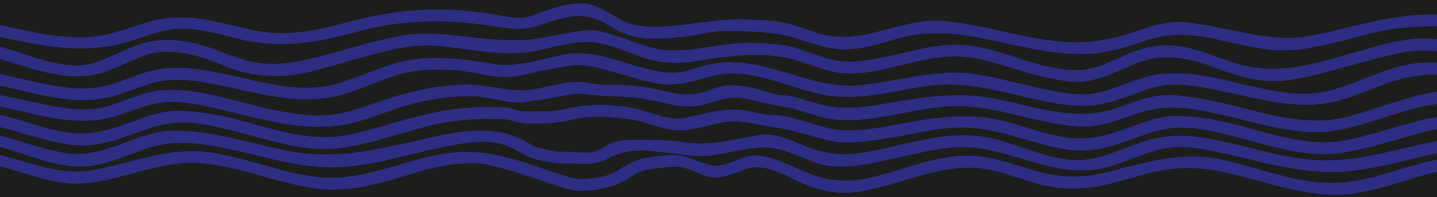
The Bringing Them Home report made monetary compensation a central component of redress for Stolen Generations members and their families. It is not the intent of this report to say who is responsible for providing monetary compensation, but it must be addressed by all levels of government across the country.

A universal, safe and culturally appropriate scheme for financial redress is justified as acknowledgement of past wrongs; as redress for health and social disadvantage resulting from removal; as financial assistance given the lifelong socioeconomic effects of forcible removal; and as acknowledgement that native title and land rights schemes have not significantly advantaged the Stolen Generations due to their removal from family and country.

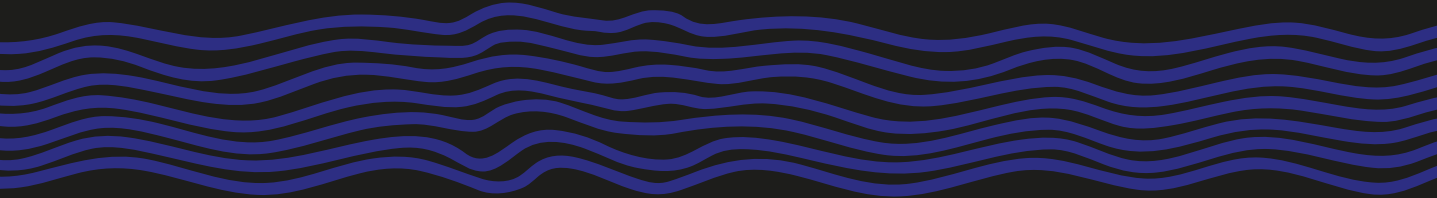
Despite the Bringing Them Home recommendations—and a later Senate Inquiry recommending the establishment of a reparations tribunal to address the provision of monetary compensation<sup>24</sup>—the Australian Government has consistently refused to establish a national scheme, arguing that responsibility for compensation lies with the institutions involved and/or state and territory governments. The lack of a national process for compensation means that the adversarial court system remains the only avenue for most Stolen Generations members to seek financial compensation for the wrongs done to them.

The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has recommended the establishment of a redress scheme for all those who have been sexually abused while in institutional care.<sup>25</sup> The Australian Government has in this case recognised the importance of a nationally consistent process for redress including monetary compensation, and has agreed to lead the development of such an approach.<sup>26</sup> This provides an important opportunity to advocate for the Australian Government to adopt a similar responsibility in relation to redress for the Stolen Generations. As acknowledged in the Bringing Them Home report itself, reparation processes need to minimise the risk of re-traumatising people who are applying for financial redress.

There is also a lot of distress from some Stolen Generations members that if they die before any compensation becomes available their families may miss out. To date, no nationally implemented redress scheme has addressed this issue and most have explicitly stated they will not provide compensation to deceased descendants. While this is probably considered complex, a policy should be developed to address this and could be part of the national needs assessment. Failure to address it is causing ongoing trauma in these families, as they feel their family member is forgotten and their pain overlooked.



*If they don't put compensation  
in place across the country,  
they're just going to continue  
to lose credibility*



## Action two: healing intergenerational trauma

### 1. A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trauma strategy

Given the widespread, serious effects of unresolved intergenerational trauma, a national strategy on addressing intergenerational trauma is needed. Such a strategy should link to existing national strategies, in particular the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.

A national strategy to address trauma and appropriately resource healing would acknowledge and respect the cultural knowledge and expertise of Stolen Generations members and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and endorse the principles underpinning the Bringing Them Home report.

Such a strategy would:

- address the challenges of building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capability within and across diverse organisations, communities and locations
- support the funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver healing responses to Stolen Generations and their families
- provide a platform for integrating responses to the historical and continuing impact of trauma for both Stolen Generations and their descendants
- set out principles and processes for collaboration at both policy and service levels
- acknowledge the broader social, economic and political processes required to address collective trauma and make links with initiatives to address socio-economic disadvantage and promote reconciliation
- provide a culturally appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to support the effective implementation of healing responses, promote continuous improvement and improve outcomes for Stolen Generations and their families
- identify key government and non-government stakeholders to support the development and implementation of the national strategy.



## Michael Welsh



Michael Welsh is a Wailwan man from Coonamble in New South Wales. He was eight when he and his brother Barry were taken from his mother and five of his siblings.

Michael was told that his other brothers and sisters would follow on the next train. He knew it was a lie.

He was taken to the notorious Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home. An institution near Kempsey on the New South Wales mid north coast, Kinchela was renowned for its physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse of aboriginal children.

The children weren't allowed to use names. Instead they were given numbers. Michael was number 36.

Michael said the aim of Kinchela "was to degrade us and set us up for reprogramming our brains".

For decades afterwards, Michael struggled with the trauma he experienced at Kinchela. He finally reached a stage where he couldn't hold the pain back any longer.

He made contact with the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), an organisation established by Kinchela survivors to support them and their descendants.

"When we get together as a group of brothers who've gone through that place, it feels good. The fear that was there is not there anymore," Michael said.

Michael is passionate about ending the cycle of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"I'm not the only one who feels this pain, I've got eight children and they all feel the same," he said.

"We do not want this hate to go to our children or to our grandchildren and great grandchildren."

"Our children need to be connected to this healing process too. Our journey's almost over, our children's journeys are only just beginning."

## 2. Addressing contemporary child removal

The original Inquiry was asked to look at the legacy of removal through examining the contemporary removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. Today's removal of children and the processes related to removal are different to the experience of the Stolen Generations who had no legislation, rights or ability to make complaint about what occurred to them. The effects in perpetuating intergenerational trauma and undermining the identity of children are similar.

This is particularly true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are removed from their families and placed in environments that do not support their identity. Despite the fact that all Australian jurisdictions have now adopted the Indigenous Child Placement Principles in legislation (as recommended by the Bringing Them Home report), only two-thirds (66 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families are placed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environments. In some jurisdictions it is much less.<sup>27</sup>

Addressing the rising numbers of children being removed from their families, and the limited application of the Indigenous Child Placement Principles is complex, but a vital part of bringing the cycle of intergenerational trauma to an end. This may include the setting of targets for the reduction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families to be included in the 'Close the Gap' measures.

However, it should be noted that many states and territories are making gains in this area. For example, Queensland is implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led family and child wellbeing centres across the state to ensure holistic supports for families within a culturally safe, trauma informed model. These models are being designed, developed and implemented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the state.

Victoria has started implementing the transfer of guardianship of Aboriginal children in care to Aboriginal agencies. This means for the first time Aboriginal people will be in charge of making the decisions over the future of their own children without ongoing state intervention. Meanwhile, New South Wales has begun the transfer of all children in out of home care from non-Indigenous NGO's to Aboriginal-run agencies across the state. This has a training and development plan attached to support the development of Aboriginal agencies and their success.

These are promising examples of change occurring but they need sustained implementation over time. Long-term vision and commitment to these initiatives, along with bi-partisan support, is needed to create the scale and impact that is required to reduce the growing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

### **3. Adequate mental health, social and emotional wellbeing funding**

The Report of the National Review of Mental Health Programs and Services found numerous barriers to social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including a lack of a clear funding processes for preferred community controlled, culturally capable models of care.<sup>28</sup> Secure and dedicated funding for such mental health and social and emotional wellbeing services for the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is therefore critical, in recognition of the widespread social and emotional wellbeing and mental health issues prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the inappropriate nature of many mainstream service responses.

### **4. Describing the intergenerational experience of trauma**

There is a lack of research about how the specific experiences of Stolen Generations members relate to general descriptions of trauma as experienced by survivors of other human rights abuses such as forced adoption, torture, or genocide. Research is needed to establish the specific effects of intergenerational trauma amongst the Stolen Generations. Such research needs to involve, at all stages, Stolen Generations members and their families.

## Richard Campbell



Richard Campbell is a Dunghutti/Gumbayngirr man from Bowraville on the New South Wales mid north coast.

At Richard's Catholic School the nuns thwarted several attempts by the Aboriginal Protection Board to remove the Aboriginal kids. Then on October 12, 1966 the school was caught unaware.

"All of a sudden they grabbed our younger sisters. Threw them in the back of the car, you could hear them screaming," Richard remembered.

He and his older brother were also forced into the waiting police car. The five children were taken to court, where they were charged with neglect.

"We weren't neglected! We had a life. We had culture, we had language. We had a way of living."

Richard and his brother were taken to the notoriously cruel Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home where their identities were systematically stripped from them. Richard said they were given numbers, not names, and were severely punished if they used their Aboriginal language.

"We were told not to speak it. And not to look for your parents because they're dead. And they sayin' you're not Richard Campbell, you're now number 28. And you are not black, you are white."

Richard suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse in Kinchela. He says trauma followed all the boys out of the institution.

"So the next step for us was incarceration in a bigger jail .. straight into Long Bay, Goulburn, Grafton Gaol .. you could see them travel through their lives, through drugs, alcohol, stealing, things like that."

Richard is now Secretary of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, and has only recently begun to tell his story. He is deeply distressed about the continued removal of Aboriginal kids into out of home care, including four of his own grandchildren.

Richard wants governments to stop taking Aboriginal children away from their families, and offer more support to Indigenous parents. He says intergenerational trauma must be better understood.

"Time is not on our side. We have lost four men this year alone and this ... means they cannot be part of their families' healing ... who are left living with the pain of questions unanswered."

## Action three: create an environment for change

The Bringing Them Home report called for a coherent policy response to the needs of the Stolen Generations and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The recent Senate Inquiry into the Indigenous Advancement Strategy found, current policy and funding processes are marked by a lack of consultation, rushed processes with poor transparency, significant administrative challenges for community organisations, uncertainty for providers, and gaps in service delivery.<sup>29</sup> Such findings are strongly supported by almost universal experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations working to 'close the gap'.<sup>30</sup>

### 1. A return to underlying principles

The Bringing Them Home report recognised that:

*The history we have documented has had a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of Indigenous communities. ... An adequate response to this history and its effects will challenge the sensitivity, the goodwill and the creativity of all governments. It requires a whole-of-government policy response with immediate targets, long-term objectives and a continuing commitment.*<sup>31</sup>

This is a challenge that Australian governments have not yet met, despite some successes such as the delivery of apologies from all governments.

Any meaningful government response to the rights and needs of the Stolen Generations must return to and be explicitly based on the principles that underpinned the Bringing Them Home report: self-determination, non-discrimination, cultural renewal, a coherent policy base and adequate resources.

The principles outlined in the original report were from international human rights agreements to which Australia is a signatory. This includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Since 1997, additional weight has been given to these principles by Australia's ratification of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which contains several articles of specific relevance to the Stolen Generations including Article 8 (the right of Indigenous Peoples not to be subjected to forced assimilation, and to have access to redress where such actions occur) and Article 19 (the right of Indigenous Peoples to be consulted and to consent before the adoption of legislation or policies affecting them).<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Truth, healing and reconciliation

The Bringing Them Home report was founded on the knowledge that true reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians depended on a truthful examination of a painful and unjust past.

In this way, although it did not use the term itself, the Inquiry operated as a 'truth commission', one of many set up around the world from the 1980s onwards to investigate and come to terms with nations' past human rights violations. While government responses to such truth commissions have frequently been disappointing, they nevertheless have had positive effects, for example through the mobilisation of political demands around their recommendations; through a continued struggle for accountability and reparations; and through becoming a focal point for national conversations about history, power and justice.<sup>33</sup>

Consistent with this international experience, and despite the poor government record of implementation, Bringing Them Home has been a major and lasting achievement. Almost 20 years on, implementation of the report's recommendations remains a crucial step on the path to genuine reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. In recommending a new and more comprehensive Australian Government response to the Bringing Them Home report, Reconciliation Australia found that:

*Australia's lack of historical acceptance is a potential barrier to reconciliation. Until we accept our past, make amends for injustices and pledge to ensure that these wrongs are never repeated, Australia will not achieve true reconciliation ... There is a continued perception by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that past wrongs have not been righted. This is a major barrier to reconciliation. The data supports this perception and shows that efforts to repair past wrongs have been slow, piecemeal, largely ignored, or are getting worse.<sup>34</sup>*

The 20th anniversary of the release of the Bringing Them Home report in 2017 represents an important opportunity to revisit the continuing rights and needs of the Stolen Generations, and to recommit to the implementation of the recommendations made in 1997 as a basis for true reconciliation in Australia.

### 3. Monitoring and accountability

The Australian Government rejected the model for monitoring the implementation of its recommendations made by the Bringing Them Home report. No sustained system was ever put in place. This has undoubtedly contributed to the poor record of implementation of the report's recommendations. This goes beyond the Bringing Them Home report with the non-implementation of key Inquiry recommendations a dominant theme over many years:

*In the past 25 years—a generation in fact—we have had the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Bringing Them Home report and Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge: the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. These reports, and numerous other Coroner and Social Justice Reports, have made over 400 recommendations, most of which have either been partially implemented for short term periods or ignored altogether.<sup>35</sup>*

This would suggest a national dialogue is needed on creating sustainable structures to monitor the implementation of recommendations from systemic inquiries into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, including the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report.

## Lorraine Peeters



Lorraine Peeters is a Gamilaroi and Wailwun woman from Wailwan country in central west New South Wales.

At the age of four she was forcibly taken from her family in Brewarrina. Along with hundreds of other girls she was placed in the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.

"We were brainwashed to act, speak, dress and think white and we were punished if we didn't," said Aunty Lorraine. "We were not allowed to talk in our language or about culture or about our families. It wasn't until I was in my fifties that I suffered a mental health issue, trauma. There was an Aboriginal person inside, screaming to get out."

As a result of undertaking her own healing journey, Lorraine developed the Marumali Program™, which is based on the Marumali Journey of Healing Model. It's a unique program to increase the quality of support available to Stolen Generations members.

"When you've been through as much as we have, the trauma can easily be reactivated by those who don't understand it. To prevent this, trauma-informed training should be mandatory for everyone working with our mob, especially Stolen Generations members and their families, as recommended by the Bringing them Home report."

Lorraine works with survivors, service providers and health practitioners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates within correctional centres—delivering the program to more than 3000 participants.

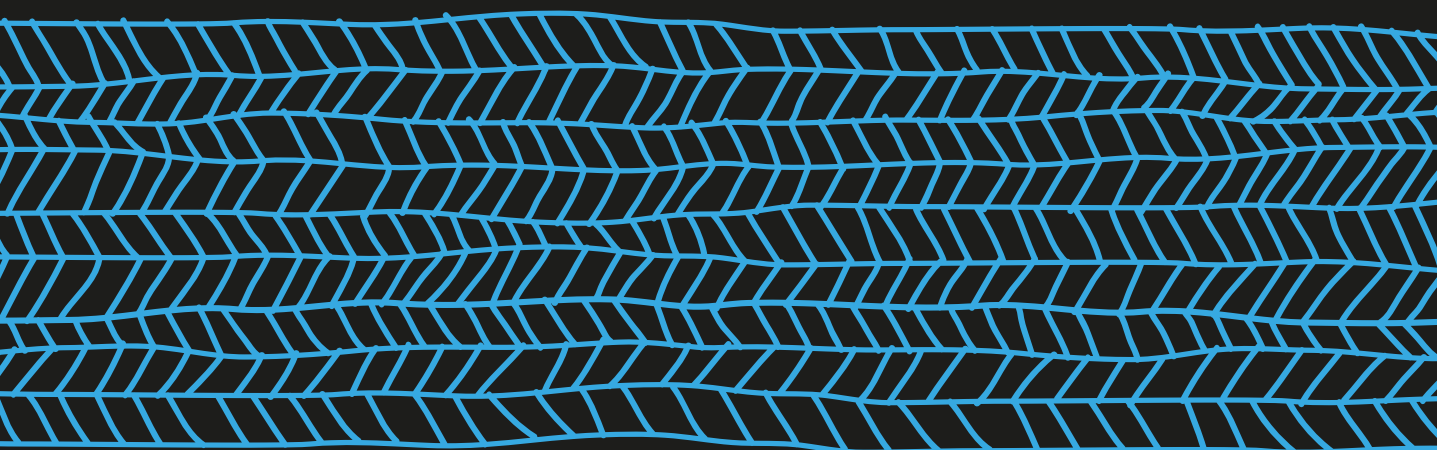
Lorraine says Western style counselling is not appropriate for the Stolen Generations. "Collective healing is so important for institutionalised people, you don't have to tell or explain your story to anybody, we just know the trauma that everyone has experienced."

Lorraine played a key role in the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations, presenting the Prime Minister with a glass coolamon, a vessel traditionally used to carry babies, as a symbol of hope.

Lorraine says on the 20th anniversary of the Bringing Them Home report Australia needs to understand it's not just the Stolen Generations that have been affected by trauma.

"Behaviour is learnt. If my children are watching me have anxiety, fear, drinking issues to numb the pain, that behaviour is learnt by little people. That will continue. We have to revisit the recommendations that haven't been implemented," she said.





# Appendix 1: key themes and recommendations from the Bringing Them Home report

Theme	Key elements	Reccs.
<b>Acknowledgment and Apology</b>	All parliaments, police forces and churches acknowledge, apologise and make reparation for past wrongs	5 a – b and 6
<b>Reparation</b>	<p>Reparation should be made to people who were forcibly removed, family members, communities and descendants</p> <p>Monetary compensation be provided through a national compensation fund</p>	3, 4, 14, 15, 16 a and b, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 41
<b>Records, Family Tracing and Reunion</b>	<p>Funding Indigenous agencies to record, preserve and provide access to Indigenous testimonies</p> <p>Funding Indigenous community-based family and reunion services (Link-Ups) to provide tracing and reunion services</p> <p>Record taskforces be established to assist with accessing records under minimum access standards</p>	1, 11, 13, 21, 22 a – b, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29 a – b, 30 a – b, 31, 38 a – b – c and 39
<b>Rehabilitation</b>	<p>All services and programs provided for survivors of forcible removal to emphasise local healing and wellbeing perspectives</p> <p>Funding for preventative and primary mental health be directed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based services</p> <p>Funding for parenting and family wellbeing programs to relevant Indigenous organisations</p>	32, 33 a – b – c, 36 and 40

Theme	Key elements	Reccs.
<b>Education and Training</b>	<p>Arrange for a National Sorry Day each year</p> <p>Ensure primary and secondary school curricula include compulsory modules on the history and effects of forcible removal</p> <p>Professionals working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities receiving training about the history and effects of forcible removal</p> <p>Undergraduates and trainees in relevant professions receiving training about the history and effects of forcible removal</p> <p>Expand the funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, culture and history centres</p>	7, 8 a – b, 9 a – b, 12, 28, 34 and 35
<b>Guarantees Against Repetition</b>	<p>Adequate funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and mental services to establish preventative mental health programs in prisons and detention centres</p> <p>National framework legislation for the implementation of self-determination in relation to the well-being of Indigenous children and young people</p>	37, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53 and 54
<b>Contemporary Separation</b>	National-standards legislation provide that the placement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child must conform with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle	51 and 52
<b>Consultation, Monitoring and Coordination</b>	<p>COAG develop a process for the implementation of the recommendations</p> <p>A National Inquiry audit unit in HREOC be established to monitor implementation of the recommendations with an annual report to COAG</p> <p>All Governments to provide information to the National Inquiry audit unit annually</p>	2 a – d

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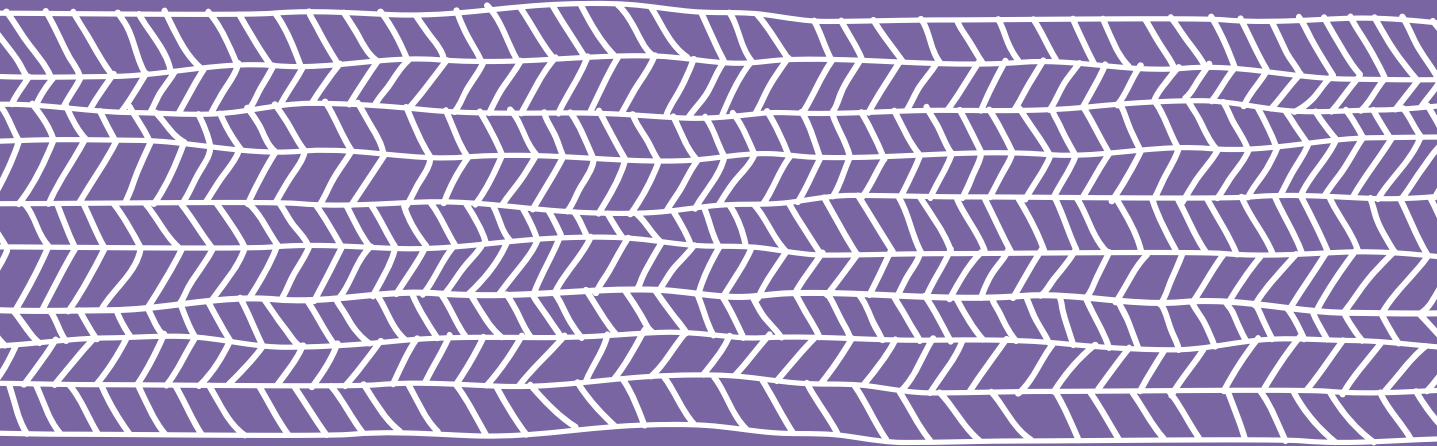
# Notes

- 1 The Review was carried out by Edward Tilton and Pat Anderson AO with the guidance of senior staff at the Healing Foundation and the leadership of the Foundation's Stolen Generations Reference Group. Conducted between June and October 2016, it was informed by consultations with Stolen Generations organisations, beginning with the Stolen Generations Reference Group. While time and resource constraints meant that it was not possible to carry out consultations at the community level, the consultation process included a sample of Stolen Generations organisations across Australia.
- 2 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (1997a). Bringing Them Home. Sydney, Spinney. page 31
- 3 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (1997b). Bringing Them Home: Community Guide, HREOC. page 10
- 4 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (1997a). Bringing Them Home. Sydney, Spinney. page 276-280
- 5 Ministerial Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (2003). Evaluation of Responses to Bringing Them Home Report: Final Report, Success Works.
- 6 See for example Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee (2000). Healing: A Legacy of Generations – The report of the inquiry into the federal government's implementation of recommendations made by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 'Bringing Them Home'. Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia. page 281 Wilczynski A, Reed-Gilbert K, Milward K, Tayler B, Fear J and Schwartzkoff J (2007). Evaluation of Bringing Them Home and Indigenous Mental Health Programs. Canberra, Report prepared by Urbis Keys Young for the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing. page 27
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- 8 Wilczynski A, Reed-Gilbert K, Milward K, Tayler B, Fear J and Schwartzkoff J (2007). Evaluation of Bringing Them Home and Indigenous Mental Health Programs. Canberra, Report prepared by Urbis Keys Young for the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing.
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- 10 Figures from the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2011). "4704.0 – The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010." Retrieved 25 August 2016, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter470Oct+2010>.
- 11 According to the 2011 Census figures, there were an estimated 122,435 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 45 years or older at that time. See Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2013). "3238.0.55.001 – Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011." Retrieved 25 August 2016, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>.

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- 13 2008 NATSISS figures in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2011). "4704.0 – The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010." Retrieved 25 August 2016, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter470Oct+2010>. In 2011, there were an estimated 429,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 or over. See Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2013). "3238.0.55.001 – Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011." Retrieved 25 August 2016, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>.
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- 20 The needs assessment could also provide an updated estimate of the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were either forcibly removed, or directly affected by the forcible removal of a family member, using the 2014 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and figures from the 2016 Census which are not publically available at the time of writing).
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- 35 Ibid. page 5











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