



HealingFoundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

# DAUANILGAW

*Dauanilgaw Dhoeynidhay  
Healing Forum Report*

**Dauan Island  
Healing Forum Report**

# The Healing Foundation

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that provides a platform to amplify the voices and lived experience of Stolen Generations survivors and their families.

We work with communities to create a place of safety, providing an environment for Stolen Generations survivors and their families to speak for themselves, tell their own stories, and be in charge of their own healing.

We promote trauma-aware, healing-informed practice to help government, policymakers, and workforces understand their role in intergenerational healing.

By addressing unresolved trauma in First Nations communities – trauma that was caused by colonisation and actions like the forced removal of children – we are walking alongside communities on the path to healing.

We are governed by a First Nations Board and Executive and guided in our work by our Stolen Generations and Youth Reference Groups.

Our work honours our First Nations ancestors to ensure our future generations continue to thrive for the next 60,000 years.



# Mura Kosker Sorority

Mura Kosker Sorority is the peak women's organisation in the Torres Strait Region, protecting and promoting the rights of women, children and families. We provide programs and services that improve the social, emotional, educational, economic, cultural, spiritual, health and welfare needs of women, children and their dependents. We are a regional community controlled organisation that provides services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.





# Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by The Healing Foundation for the Dauan Island community to review the content and use it for further yarning about the issues and solutions that matter most to them.

We would like to acknowledge community members living with the impacts of intergenerational trauma, who generously shared their stories, thoughts, insights and concerns to ensure the report is an honest reflection of their lived experience.

This report acknowledges the vision of Milton and Louisa Savage, who for almost a decade have sought to have healing forums take place in the Torres Strait. We also acknowledge the lands, Traditional Owners, Elders (past, present and emerging) of Dauan Island and the courage of the community to have a conversation centered on trauma and healing.

Further, this report acknowledges Patrick Mooka, who after attending a healing forum on lama Island had the vision to initiate a healing forum on Dauan. Accordingly, the report acknowledges the significant efforts and commitment of the reference group to ensure the forum could still take place during a year in which our families and communities have been so affected by COVID-19. Reference group members were:

- Patrick Mooka
- Abi Mooka
- Patricia Mooka
- Geraldine Elisela
- Cr. Torenzo Elisala
- Jackson Ahwang (Mura Kosker Sorority)
- Rodney Mabo (Mura Kosker Sorority)
- Yuriko Nakachi (Mura Kosker Sorority)
- Olice Whap (Mura Kosker Sorority)
- Frank Cook (The Healing Foundation)
- Nancy Jeffrey (The Healing Foundation).

The Dauan Healing Forum was established through a partnership between The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation and Mura Kosker Sorority.





# Introduction

In May 2012, The Healing Foundation held a healing forum on Horn Island in the Torres Strait. More than 30 participants from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, including government and non-government agencies, came together to discuss healing needs and start a healing process to deal with the pain caused by the impacts of colonisation in the region.

This was followed by The Healing Foundation's Torres Strait Healing Gathering, Iling Sidaun, in May 2014. More than 60 community members from across the Torres Straits attended the gathering, and more than 600 people from across Island communities contributed to its design.

The gathering was an opportunity for community members to share their stories, identify the causes of disharmony in the community, articulate healing needs and aspirations and suggest ways to achieve their healing objectives.

The input from these two gatherings, along with significant further consultation across the Islands, informed the development of the Torres Strait and Kaurareg Aboriginal People's Healing Strategy, launched in 2015. The Healing Strategy had five key areas:

- child safety and wellbeing
- community safety
- spiritual healing
- self-determination
- leadership and governance.

In 2017, The Healing Foundation formed a partnership with Mura Kosker Sorority to further the healing priorities outlined in the healing strategy, by implementing community healing forums across three Island communities at a local level.

Torres Strait communities were invited through an expression of interest to nominate to host their own healing forum. The successful Islands were Kaurareg Island (Thursday Island), Iama Island and Masig Island. The community healing forums were a place for constructive dialogue between a diverse range of key stakeholders, including community members, leaders, Elders and representatives of government and non-government agencies.

After the success of the 2018 forums, the communities on Kerriri, Dauan and Saibai Islands were keen to partner with The Healing Foundation and Mura Kosker to hold their own healing forums. These were scheduled for June/July 2020 but were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They took place in a COVID-safe environment in September 2020.



All community healing forums that have taken place in the Torres Strait have aimed to build:

- Strong community leadership and governance that fosters pride in Torres Strait and Kaurareg Aboriginal peoples' spirituality and culture.
- A self-determined community with the skills, capacity and support to proactively promote and ensure community and child safety and wellbeing.

The objectives of the community healing forums were to:

- Support the community to create and lead healing opportunities.
- Establish a healing network with champions and leaders that are recognised as the key interface between community and service providers.
- Empower the community to understand, access and exchange information with services that can support mutually beneficial healing outcomes.
- Embed healing within government and non-government initiatives already being provided.

This report outlines the key findings from the Dauan Island Healing Forum, which took place on 23 September 2020. There, 30 people representing community and agencies came together to talk about healing needs and solutions.

## Setting the scene for culturally safe yarning

Dauan Island is approximately 2.85 kilometres long and 2.7 kilometres wide. It is five kilometres west of Saibai Island and 11 kilometres south of Papua New Guinea. Dauan forms part of the North Western Islands group of the Torres Strait. Boigu and Saibai Islands make up the remainder of the group. Strong kinship and trade ties continue to exist between the peoples of Dauan, Boigu and Saibai and coastal Papuan communities.

Creating a culturally safe space for yarning and conversations is a critical element of healing forums. This can be done through cultural ceremony, cultural performances, acknowledgments and Welcomes to Country.

The Healing Foundation Portfolio/Project Lead Frank Cook guided participants in a Sibwanan/Omar ceremony the day before the healing forum took place. The Sibwanan/Omar ceremony is an old ceremony that was customary in the Torres Strait for how Island communities sought permission to enter other communities. The ceremony was extinguished when the Torres Strait Islands were colonised.

When healing forums took place in the Torres Strait during 2018, the community and The Healing Foundation saw an important opportunity to reinstate a cultural ceremony that returned the power to the Elders and the community, and this important tradition was reinstated.

It was determined from that all future forums in the Torres Strait would commence with a Sibwanan/Omar Ceremony.

The ceremony begins by the laying down of a mat, as a place for meeting, and the exchange of gifts. This provides permission from the Elders to The Healing Foundation to 'come and work amongst us'. It formally welcomes those from outside the community to come and work with the community and recognises them as friends who are no longer strangers. It is a one-off ceremony for present and all future visits.

The Dauan people led the Sibwanan-Omar ceremony, and presented The Healing Foundation and Mura Kosker Sorority with gifts before and after the forum.



First, the young children of Dauan presented the visitors with a peeled young coconut as a welcome gift to enter their community. Later, the community confirmed the welcome and permission, and thanked the visitors for sharing the skills and knowledge that would assist the community to take steps forward in their healing journey. The gift is a symbol of gratitude that demonstrates that The Healing Foundation is welcome to return to continue to work with the Dauan community, to assist in achieving balance and harmony.

The artefact, with two leaves (which are Yam leaves), represents the Dhoeybaw tribe, which rules the Dauan Island community. The five families that make up the Dhoeybaw tribe are represented by the five corner stars. It was carved by Mr John Mooka in September 2020.

All visitors were accorded permission to be in the community and receive protection from the Elders, and with this a culturally safe environment was secured and the forum formally commenced with introductions from representatives of Mura Kosker Sorority and The Healing Foundation.



*"Today we have an opportunity to set a platform for the kids. Today we are planting a seed; a seed that grows. We are relaxed, but time and tide waits for nobody. It's time to take control and have a voice ... This forum is a vehicle for our voice and we need to make the most of it ... what's in your heart is what you should speak. It's our time to come together."*

## Key findings

The healing conversation that took place at the Dauan Healing Forum centred on three key questions:

- What are the issues that are most concerning or hurting our community (for young people, families and community)?
- What are the community-based healing solutions that best address these concerns?
- How can service providers most help the communities to establish these healing solutions?

Yarning circles took place for each question. Three groups were formed – one for children, one for the women of the Dauan community and one for the men of the Dauan community.

*“Healing the past, we have to heal today and begin the journey ... from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational healing.”*



## The voice of the children

### Issues and concerns

The children of Dauan came together and suggested the following as the issues that most concern them:

- They feel sad when someone passes away.
- They worry about being bullied or seeing someone being bullied.
- Family violence in the community.
- They feel isolated living on Dauan, especially with no ferry.
- There are too few cultural activities for them to be part of.
- Playing basketball without a hoop.
- When older kids leave for school.
- Pollution in the ocean.
- When animals of the ocean are found dead.
- The poor sewerage on Dauan.

### Healing solutions

The children of Dauan also provided their own healing solutions to the issues and concerns raised:

- A good health service needs to be established on Dauan.
- There needs to be counselling available for Dauan families.
- When you are bullied there needs to be an adult who is safe to tell.
- When getting bullied you have to try to walk away or ignore it.
- If you see violence you can tell or talk to other family members.
- You can contact families via phone or visit family members.
- Ask Uncles to take us out on cultural activities.
- Ask community to help clean up the island and put signs up that say 'Don't litter'!
- Dauan should have sewerage.

### Comments

The children, and the adults (noted below), spoke about the sense of isolation and there not being a ferry service from Dauan to other islands. They noted the existence of a jetty/pontoon that had been recently constructed to accommodate a ferry, but that was currently deemed unsafe and needed maintenance work.

In reference to playing basketball without a hoop, there is an excellent basketball court but no hoop at either end of the court. This contribute to the lack of formal/organised sporting and recreational activities for young people on the island.

## The voice of the women

### Issues and concerns

For the women at the forum, there were a number of priorities that were of immediate concern.

#### Housing:

- There is known to be asbestos in a number of homes on the island.
- It is felt that there is a conflict of interest when houses are being allocated to families.
- There is a lack of understanding and education on how to keep homes healthy and well-maintained.
- Rents are problematic when the rent is \$200+ when on Centrelink, but \$600+ as soon as the tenant is employed.
- Lack of adequate sewerage creates substantial environmental and health issues.

#### Strengthening families and community:

- There is a lack of resources and supports for families.
- There is nothing for young mums and dads in the community.
- Families do not know what services are available in Dauan.
- Parents can be confused about raising children – Western versus traditional ways.
- Families and young people are not engaged or do not engage in community forums.
- Alcohol addictions and issues affect families being healthy and strong.
- The high cost of living impacts all the community but has a particular effect on young families.
- Parents get blamed (by service providers) for their children's bad behaviour.

#### Transportation:

- Having no transportation leaves the community isolated and vulnerable.
- There are safety issues for children and families when they transport children to school from Dauan via small, local and private boats.

#### Education, employment and training:

- There are too few employment opportunities.
- There is no local enterprise or locally run businesses to support local employment and training.
- Young school leavers have to go for further studies and need support to determine how they can access and complete such studies.

#### The women noted two additional concerns:

- The church not being accessible, which was causing divisions.
- The Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) not working closely enough with the Regional Council and the community.

## Healing solutions

The women at the forum identified the following healing solutions to address the issues and concerns raised.

### Housing:

- There needs to be more transparency around housing allocation.
- There needs to be a 10-year housing strategy for Dauan or the broader region.
- Organise a meeting with the Council to discuss their process of allocation of houses.
- Ensure the process is then made public so the whole community is aware of how homes are allocated.

### Services:

- Organise interagency meetings that the community can attend to promote collaboration and define roles and responsibilities.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of each of the service providers.
- Bring service providers together to ensure they work more collaboratively.
- Establish a Dauan service provider community directory.

### Culture:

- Engage Elders to guide families in the cultural ways of rearing children.
- Develop more cultural activities such as yarnning circles, music and dancing.

### Transport:

- Gain support to fix the jetty and pontoon and then establish Dauan's own ferry service.
- Seek subsidies for transport services (ferry, chopper).

- Develop a regional hub transport strategy incorporating Boigu and Saibai Islands.

### Strengthening families and community:

- Develop a family support strategy that works to increase family capacities to parent well.
- Organise Friday-night community gatherings/meetings.
- Secure a community venue to host church events with everyone together.
- More education on effects of alcohol and more policing or control of consumption.

### Education, employment and training:

- Develop surveys to research what jobs are available in the community and across the Torres Strait.
- Survey the community to gauge interests – see what people want, what business leads to more jobs, and what the current skills and qualifications are.
- Establish community gardens to grow our own food and develop a community business.

## Comments

The women present in the forum talked about giving people back their cultural authority and that there did not seem to be a unified voice in and across the governance groups. Further, in dealing with the issues that emerged from alcohol misuse, there needed to be increased policing, since policing between 8:00am and 5:00pm Monday to Friday left people and families unsafe at times.



*“How do we get essential services out here? We have been neglected and left aside and we have accepted this as the norm ... as our norm.”*

## The voice of the men

### Issues and concerns

For the men at the forum the yarning circle determined that current governance arrangements were causing division and concern in the community.

Lost opportunities for local business development and concerns regarding service provision were also highlighted.

#### Governance:

- Council elections need to address some perceived favoritism and possibly nepotism in the way they are held and the outcomes they bring.
- There is a sense of underrepresentation across the five families that make up the Dhoeybaw tribe.
- There needs to be a changed mindset if local council to be culturally informed.
- Community member not informed by PBC representatives about what it is doing.
- Poor accountability regarding the plans, actions and strategies of the PBC.

#### Economic development:

- There needs to be sustainable eco-tourism developed: small scale at premium prices.
- Investors never own the facility – retains traditional ownership – leased to investors.

#### Service providers:

- Community does not know who they are or what they offer.
- Community does not know when they are visiting and therefore do not access the services.
- They often just come and consult to tick a box.
- Not culturally or trauma-informed.

## Healing solutions

The healing solutions that the men at the forum suggested were broad in scope but with a particular focus on governance.

### Governance:

- Support system to provide governance training and succession planning between outgoing and incoming council members.
- Formal leadership and corporate governance training that is accredited and culturally informed.
- Understand and build awareness of the bridge between Western and cultural governance values.
- Lobby the Electoral Commission to equalise different governance systems/values.
- Develop strategies to build servant leadership – our leaders should be the highest servants of the community.
- Increase the transparency of the PBC.
- PBC to report more directly to community.
- Form a local decision-making body, for example a Council of Elders.

### Economic development:

- Develop a sustainable employment strategy with a focus on young school leavers.
- Build capacity of local construction tradespeople.
- Advocate for changes to the State Government Procurement Policy to enable local small business investors to increase market share.
- Establish a high-level steering committee to advance the voice of communities in enterprise development.

### Service providers:

- Spend time on the ground and with the community.
- As a principle, listen to learn not listen to respond.
- Make sure consultations are at a time that is accessible to the whole community.
- Definitely no fly in/fly out recruitment and training.
- Place-based employment for service providers.

*“... Service providers don't dot the 'i's or cross the 't's, and when they do come, they refuse to listen to our voice and hear our cry.”*

## Priority actions and next steps

The following table presents the healing solutions that were discussed at the forum. Participants were keen to have these presented in the report with opportunities for them to further discuss who could lead each action once the report was provided to the community.

Priority healing solutions/actions	Community champion(s)	Stakeholders/partners
<b>Families and communities</b>	Establish a good health service on Dauan	
	Ensure there is family counselling available on Dauan	
	Establish a program where Elders engage with families and teach them in the cultural ways of rearing children	
	Develop a range of cultural activities to engage families and young people – yarning, dancing, song, art etc.	
	Develop a family support strategy that works to increase family capacities to parent well	
	Education for families on the negative impacts of alcohol	
<b>Housing</b>	Establish a 10-year housing strategy for Dauan and/or the region, that includes processes for allocation, builds, needs and aspirations	

Priority healing solutions/actions	Community champion(s)	Stakeholders/partners
<b>Employment and training</b>	Develop surveys to research what jobs are available in the community and across the Torres Strait	
	Survey the community to gauge interests – see what people want, what business leads to more jobs and what the current skills and qualifications are	
	Establish community gardens to grow our own food and develop a community business	
<b>Economic development</b>	Develop a sustainable employment strategy with a focus on young school leavers	
	Build capacity of local construction tradespeople	
	Advocate for changes to the State Government Procurement Policy to enable local small business investors to increase market share	
<b>Service providers</b>	Establish service provider interagency meetings and build collaborative partnerships	
	Develop a service provider community directory	
	Develop service providers community protocols with guiding principles for engagement, consultation, practice and evaluation	

## Priority actions and next steps (continued)

Priority healing solutions/actions	Community champion(s)	Stakeholders/partners
<b>Transport</b>	Advocate to fix the jetty and pontoon and then establish Dauan's own ferry service	
	Advocate subsidies for transport services (ferry, chopper)	
	Develop a regional hub transport strategy that incorporates Boigu and Saibai Islands	
<b>Governance</b>	Access and provide governance training and succession planning between outgoing and incoming council members	
	Formal leadership and corporate governance training that is accredited and culturally informed	
	Understand and build awareness of the difference and the bridge between Western and cultural governance values	
	Lobby the Electoral Commission to equalise different governance systems/values	
	Develop strategies to build servant leadership, where leaders understand they are the highest servants of/to the community	
	Build a process to increase the transparency and accountability of the PBC to the community	
	Form a local decision-making body, for example a Council of Elders	





*“So we have talked about the things that need to happen but what can we do for ourselves?*

*What are WE going to do? We have to believe we can do it.*

*My grandfather built the church with no funding, but he got the bricks and he got the cement and he built it. It’s about empowerment.*

*How is the report going to be used and how are we going to use it?”*