



HealingFoundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

TRAINING &  
EDUCATION

VOLUME  
1

*Journey to Healing*

JUNE – NOVEMBER 2012

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## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

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

Established on the first anniversary of the Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Healing Foundation works to address the profound legacy of pain and hurt of our people caused by colonisation, forced removals and other past government policies.

Building culturally strong community programs, designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview, the Healing Foundation is improving the wellbeing of our people by:

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

The initial priorities of the Healing Foundation were established in June 2010. They include:

- ◆ defining what healing means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ◆ acknowledging the intergenerational impact of trauma on families and communities
- ◆ developing links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous healing models
- ◆ working with young people to build strong spirits and connections to culture
- ◆ supporting Stolen Generations survivors
- ◆ developing programs relevant to men and boys
- ◆ building on the work women have done to unite and heal families and communities.

## Background to the 'Training and Education – Journey to Healing' projects

In February 2011, the Healing Foundation undertook a needs analysis, including a community survey, to guide the development of our training and education area. As part of the development of this area, a funding round was initiated to assist community to strengthen their capacity around trauma.

The primary purpose of the training and education funding round was to provide community education and work place training opportunities to develop skills for understanding and managing the outcomes of trauma. Community education grants of up to a maximum of \$40,000 per year for 2 years were available for activities such as information sessions, yarning circles and the development of culturally specific resource materials such as DVDs, brochures and training materials. Workforce development grants of up to a maximum of \$70,000 per year for two years were available for accredited and non-accredited training for staff in the social and emotional wellbeing workforce, including mental health workers, domestic and family violence workers, child protection workers, health workers and correctional centre staff.

In February 2012, following an open-tender funding process, the Healing Foundation awarded funds to 47 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-driven projects to deliver training to communities and workforce. Of the 47 projects, 16 were funded to undertake community education activities, 6 to undertake workforce development activities, and 25 to undertake both community education and workforce development activities in their communities.

The funded projects support work in urban, regional and remote areas of Australia and across all States and Territories. Figures 1 and 2 below outline the geographic spread of the projects. Figure 3 below outlines the target group of the funded projects.

## PROJECTS BY LOCALITY

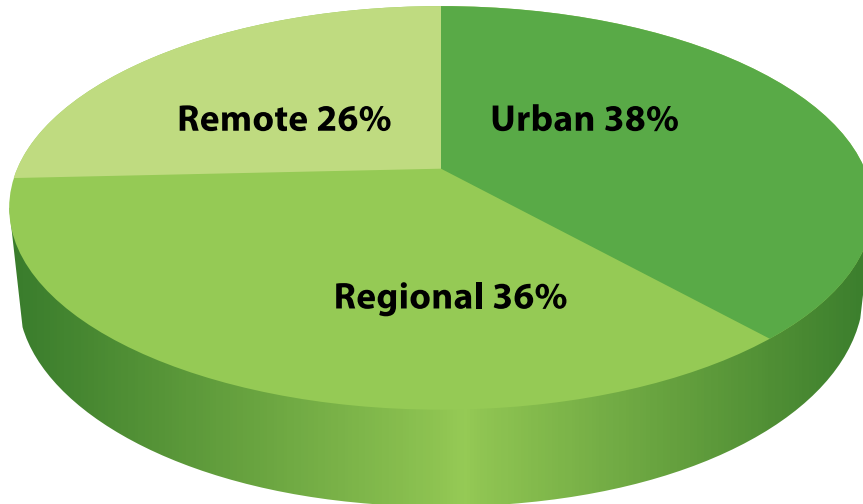
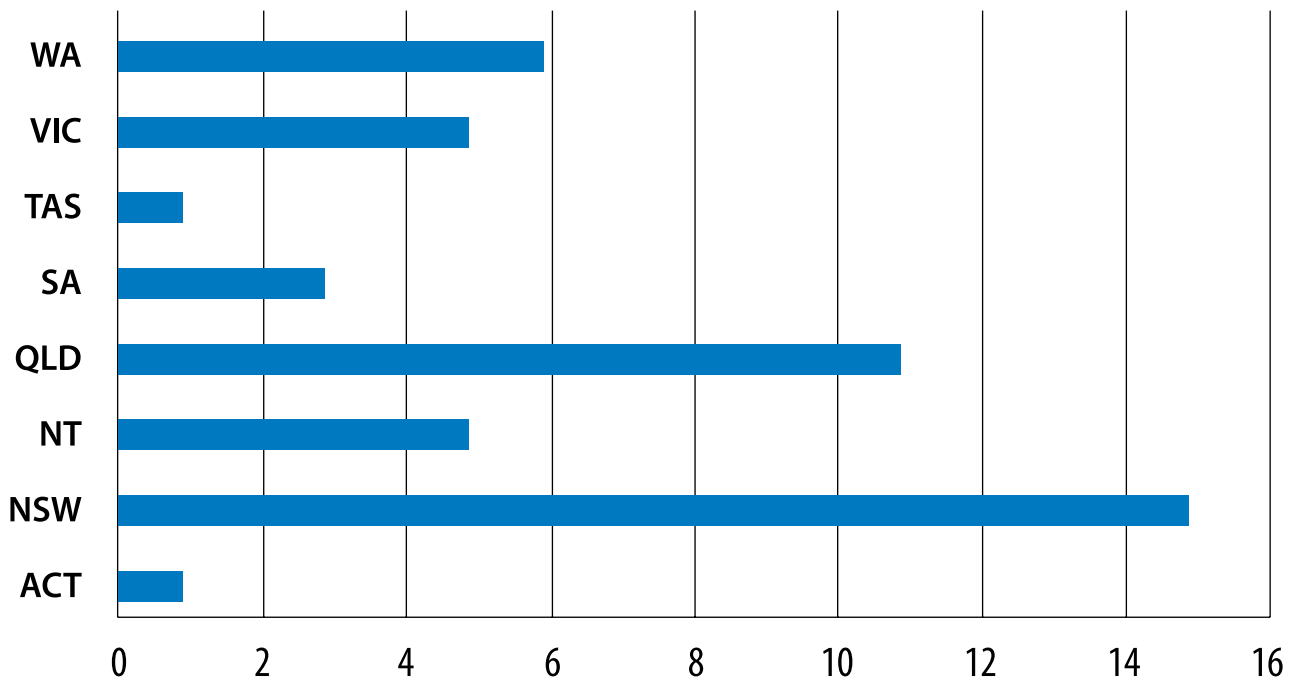
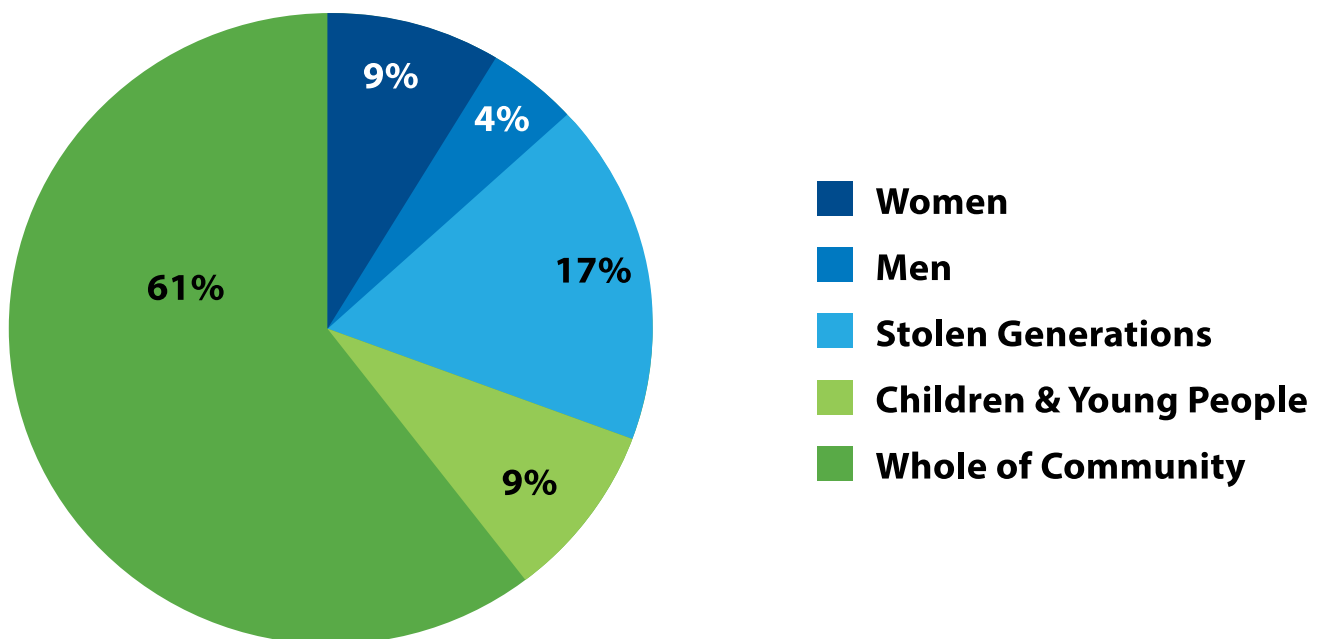


Figure 2

## PROJECTS BY STATE



## PROJECTS BY TARGET GROUP



**Figure 3**

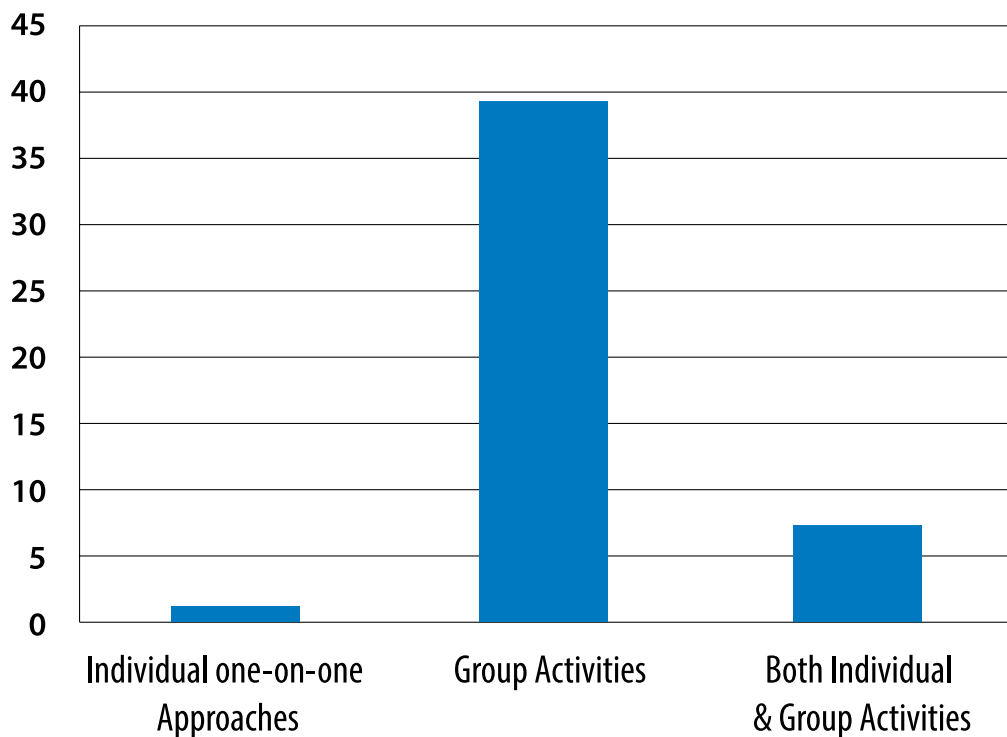
Project activities include:

- ◆ professional development training in culturally-based trauma-informed care for both Indigenous workers and non-Indigenous workers who see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients
- ◆ cultural renewal and revitalisation activities as a focus to discuss and address the profound loss and grief in our communities
- ◆ healing camps on country
- ◆ Stolen Generations yarning circles, peer group support, and healing gatherings
- ◆ men’s and women’s gatherings and yarning circles
- ◆ individual and group counselling
- ◆ life skills programs focusing on prevention, resilience and recovery from trauma
- ◆ development of culturally-specific resources and training materials to heal trauma, grief and loss
- ◆ training in conflict mediation, suicide prevention, mental health first aid and lateral violence prevention

While individual-based approaches were used occasionally by the projects in this funding round, the great majority of projects focussed on group-based activities and treatments such as yarning circles, workshops and camps. Figure 4 below shows the breakdown of projects depending upon whether they utilised individual approaches, group activities or both.

Figure 4

## PROJECTS BY APPROACH



## Project achievements

Key achievements in this reporting period included the following:

- ◆ 136 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in 47 projects.
- ◆ 1659 children, young people, families, men, women and Elders participated in training and education activities
- ◆ 38% of support services in project communities report an increase in the use of their services following the training
- ◆ 86% of workforce training participants report an increased understanding and ability to respond to people experiencing trauma, loss and grief

## The role of training and education in the healing journey

The trauma experienced by Indigenous people as a result of colonisation and subsequent policies, such as the forced removal of children, has had devastating consequences. The disruption of our culture and the negative impacts on the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has had lasting negative effects, passed from generation to generation. .

Yet many of our people have not had opportunities to reflect on how historical events and how trauma impacts on their everyday lives. Understanding trauma is the critical first step in a pathway to healing. When communities have the opportunity to identify and understand the impacts of trauma on individuals, families, and communities, they are empowered to imagine a hopeful future. Through participating in these 47 projects, communities are breaking the intergenerational cycle of trauma and creating an environment for healing.

### **Creation of a trauma-informed workforce**

Through these projects, the Healing Foundation is also supporting the creation of a trauma-informed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce who understand the impacts of trauma on our people and who have increased skills and expertise to respond to this trauma.

If we are to effectively respond to the deep hurt and pain many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced, we must adapt our responses to make use of the promising research coming out of the trauma field. There is increasing evidence that services that adopt a trauma-informed approach, incorporate recent learnings about the physical and psychological effects of trauma, and that respect and draw on the ancient wisdom of Indigenous cultures are most successful in facilitating healing and recovery (van der Kolk 2007).

Trauma informed services are based on a deep understanding of trauma and the impact trauma has on individuals, families and communities. The core principles of delivering trauma-informed services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are:

- ◆ Informed by an understanding of trauma and its impact on individuals, families and community groups
- ◆ Promote safety by creating spaces which physical and emotionally safe for healing to occur
- ◆ Ensure cultural competence of staff and delivery of culturally appropriate service activities
- ◆ Ensure self-determination by supporting client control over the design of the service
- ◆ Share power and decision making across all levels of the organisation
- ◆ Integrate care by bringing services together to provide holistic support for clients
- ◆ Support positive relationship building
- ◆ Enable recovery by adopting a strength-based approach

(Adapted from Atkinson, in press)

Through the workforce development activities, the projects are supporting the development of trauma-informed services by facilitating the opportunity for organisations to adopt these principles and equipping workforce members with the knowledge and skills to provide trauma-informed support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

***“Trauma is an ongoing aspect of Aboriginal life. Training about trauma goes a long way on the journey of healing”***

***– Community survey respondent***

## **Data analysis**

At the end of each reporting period, data collected from funded projects provides information about each project’s performance in line with its service agreement with the Healing Foundation. As part of this process, projects also provide data on agreed national outcomes and associated indicators. This data and the case studies provide a picture of the training and education work, its effectiveness and how it contributes to the healing agenda. An external evaluation of the funding round has also been commissioned. This evaluation will review all 47 projects, with 5 projects selected for in-depth evaluation.

## Performance reporting data

Table 1 summarises the performance reporting data collected from the 47 active funded projects between 1 June and 30 November 2012.

Indigenous employment outcomes	136
Total number of participants	1659
Total number of services delivered	120
Participant satisfaction	91 %

Table 1: Performance reporting data, June- November 2012

On average, approximately 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed per project during June to November 2012. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed as paid staff, training facilitators, cultural consultants and contractors.

An average of 35 workers and community members per project received training that builds skills in the management of trauma. On average, each project provided 2-3 training services, such as workshops, formal training, yarning circles and peer support groups. Satisfaction rates amongst participants are particularly high at around 91%, demonstrating the value of culturally-informed training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

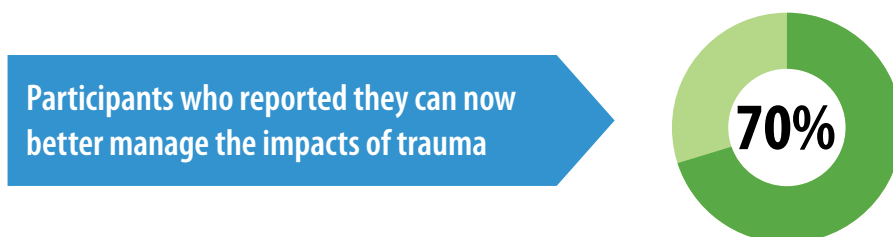
## National outcomes and indicators

The Healing Foundation works with the diversity of communities across our nation but also creates opportunities to highlight national outcomes relevant to the projects funded. Four National Outcomes were developed for this funding round, and these form the basis of the project reporting each 6 months. The figures and discussion below shows the project data from the period June- November 2012.

Figure 5: National Outcome 1, increased knowledge of the impacts of trauma



Figure 6: National Outcome 2, increased capacity to manage the impacts of trauma constructively





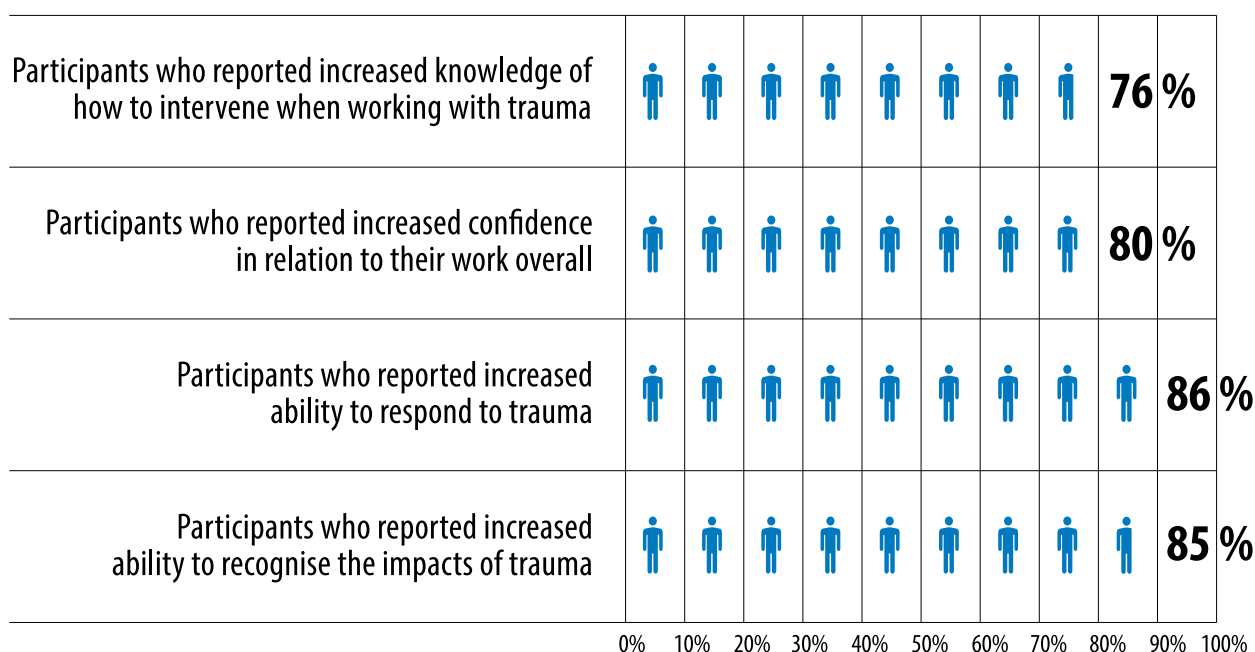
The results of National Outcomes 1 and 2 demonstrate that the projects are achieving a significant level of effectiveness in helping community members to develop trauma management and coping skills. Large numbers of families have benefited from the delivery of community education opportunities in these projects. These outcomes are confirmed in the qualitative data, which shows that the development of trauma management and coping skills is the strongest theme in the data.

**Figure 7: National Outcome 3, increased knowledge of support services available to assist participants**



National Outcome 3, which relates to knowledge of and access to support services, show that participation in the projects is enabling individuals and families to better engage with existing support services such as drug and alcohol services, domestic and family violence service, counselling and so forth. This shows that for many participants, community education about trauma encourages them to take further steps in their own healing journey and make use of existing support services to do so. This data is also supported by the qualitative data, in which access to and engagement with services is an important theme.

**Figure 8: National Outcome 4, a workforce with increased capacity to recognise and respond to trauma, loss and grief**



National Outcome 4 is about the creation of a trauma- informed workforce, which is culturally safe and aware of the historical and intergenerational nature of trauma for our people. The data shows that the projects are achieving a high degree of effectiveness in working towards this outcome. Through the workforce development activities, the projects are helping to build the capacity of the workforce to respond to trauma and more appropriately service our communities.

## Elements of a quality healing program

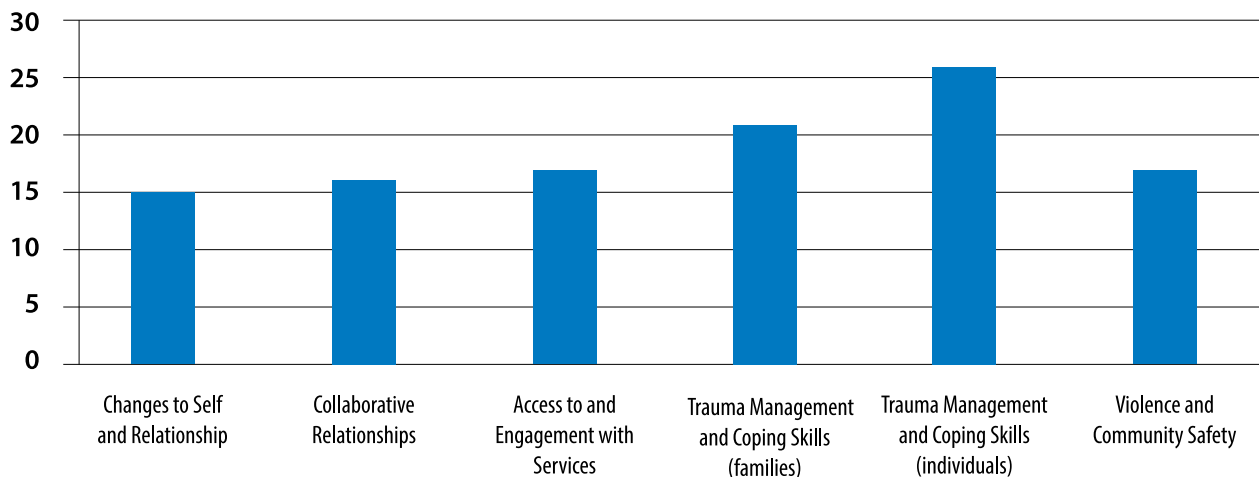
Evidence from the Healing Foundation literature review of Indigenous healing programs in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America finds that there are 8 critical elements that are common all to quality Indigenous healing programs, regardless of where they are located. These elements are outlined in the figure below. The elements are also emerging in the evidence from the projects, which is highlighted in the following discussion. Where the elements are present they have been highlighted in the relevant colour.



## Key emerging themes

Project reports highlight themes that provide significant insight into emerging outcomes from the projects. To capture and analyse these across the funding round, the Healing Foundation utilises NVIVO qualitative data analysis software to tell the story of healing at the national level. Through an analysis of the data and case studies, we are able to identify the key themes identified in the training and education projects. Figure 5 below shows the top 6 themes by the number of projects.

**KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED**



**Building Individual and Family Capacity to Manage Trauma**

The strongest focus of the training and education projects is on enabling individuals, family and communities to develop trauma management and coping skills. Through the delivery of training, the projects are working to **build individual and family capacity through the acquisition of knowledge and skills**. The qualitative data strongly shows that understanding trauma and the development of coping skills can lead to profound changes within families and communities. It is often the catalyst for individuals taking ownership over their emotional and social wellbeing, engaging with existing support services and reaching out to families and communities for emotional support. Through the training opportunities individuals and communities are gaining a sense of hope and personal agency.

**Understanding the impacts of trauma**

The first step in developing these skills is becoming **informed about and understanding the impacts of colonisation, transgenerational trauma and grief** on individuals, families, and communities. . Many of our communities and people are unaware of the role of trauma in their lives and its influence on relationships. Through community education, projects are helping communities to:

- ◆ Understand the historical basis of trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how this trauma is passed from one generation to the next.
- ◆ Recognise the manifestation of trauma in our communities through pain based behaviour including domestic and family and violence, substance abuse, and disengagement with education and employment
- ◆ Understand the profound impact of trauma on our children and families.
- ◆ Understand the impacts of loss and grief within communities
- ◆ Recognise the presence of lateral violence and understand it as an expression of historical trauma and history of racism and disadvantage.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are derived from an analysis of the qualitative data provided in the project reports. It is important note that these numbers are not definitive. Projects are asked to highlight case studies and stories of impact that are significant to them. Some projects may not highlight some of the themes in their report, but the work of their project may still address these themes. Therefore, the specific figures that relate to the qualitative data should not be seen as scientific, but they do give an indication of the relative importance of many themes.

Initial findings from the comprehensive evaluation are that “many of our communities are unaware of the role of trauma in their lives and its influence on relationships” and that even within well-established community-controlled organisations, “the concept and understanding of trauma- and more importantly its current impacts- is still emerging.” (Social Compass 2013),

Understanding trauma, and realising that trauma has had an impact on individual lives and relationships gives participants a different frame from which to understand their own lives and interactions with loved ones. Through the projects, participants gain knowledge and understanding of pain-based behaviours- such as substance abuse and domestic violence- as stemming from their own experiences of trauma. In many cases, this enables participants to imagine a more hopeful future. One of the projects noted that “this knowledge will help our participants acknowledge the fact they have been traumatized in the past, and give them a space to talk opening about what has happened them, and see that they are not alone, and that they can get help and move on in their lives.”

*“As a result of working through such trauma in the local community, I have felt empowered to have some very honest conversations with a range of agencies in the area. It is difficult to discuss such concerns but when it is looked at in terms of creating a better community for our younger generations, there seems to be more empathy and understanding which is positive.”*

*– Project participant*

Awareness of and knowledge about trauma also provides a different frame for understanding the behaviour of family members, and this has the potential to improve relationships within families. As highlighted by one of the projects, “one [participant] was able to see the dysfunctionality within part of her family in a different and new light. She said she had struggled to forgive an aunt for circumstances within her family but was now seeing and better understanding where some of this had come from.” Another project describes how knowledge gained decreased conflict between families “community members are gaining an increased understanding of the cycle of grief and the different ways people respond to a traumatic incident. This knowledge has de-escalated the potential for family fights to develop into ongoing community fights. As a result of interventions so far we are also seeing increased self and other referrals to the project and other local services as people seek earlier interventions relating to traumatic incidents.”

### ***Understanding and creating opportunities for change***

Beyond awareness of trauma and its impacts, many projects provide the opportunity for more intensive development of skills to change the impacts of trauma on participants’ lives. For example, one project worked with domestic violence offenders to examine the role of trauma in their own violent behaviours, and worked on behavioural change strategies to break the cycle of violence. In another project, a Stolen Generations yarning group developed peer relationships as a source of strength and support for coping with childhood trauma.

Cultural knowledge systems also provided processes that not only increase knowledge of trauma but are also a framework for change. A participant in one project was empowered by what he learnt about the knowledge that his community had on responding to grief within a traditional way. The significance of sharing this knowledge within the community was empowering for him and he could see how it would also be used by his community

### ***Access to and Engagement with Services***

For many participants the opportunity provided through participating in the training and education projects, is the first time they have been willing to engage with a support service. Others have had poor results with support services previously. This funding provided an opportunity for services to focus on the outcomes of trauma, such as alcohol use and family violence, within a trauma informed framework, thus changing their understanding of their clients’ behaviour. The data across the funding round demonstrates that when given the opportunity to understand trauma, and understand the impacts, participants are more willing to access and engage with support services to overcome the impacts of trauma. Such services include drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family support services, domestic and family violence services, and individual and family counselling.

*“It’s been great to look at the historical factors and the devastating impacts, even still today. Also to now have strategies and know of the support services, that assists us to deal with it.”*

**– Project participant**

Many of the training and education projects have been delivered by health service and other agencies which have a range of support services within their organisation. The funding offered an opportunity to engage with potential clients in the community differently and within a new framework.

For example, one of the projects focussed their training on removing the “shame” around seeking support through their services. This has led to an increase in community access to the service, including more self-referred clients, increased referrals to other relevant agencies and better engagement of youth. Another project saw an increase in confidence in community participants, which not only led to better engagement with the service, but also to families having the confidence to identify and request specific services to meet their needs, such as child care services and financial management support.

Many other projects were delivered by small community organisations that lack the capacity to offer wrap-around services. However, these projects still led to an increase in engagement with the support services available in their communities. Our projects are aware that a one-off workshop or a short-term project of 1-2 years could only be the first step in a healing journey. Thus, an important strategy to sustain the impacts of their project was to include comprehensive knowledge of support services in the training materials. This is also a risk management strategy to ensure that clients are not left unsupported on their healing journey. Many of the projects reported that understanding the impacts of trauma, as well as understanding where to access support, has an empowering impact on their participants, many of whom were empowered to make permanent changes to their lives.

**Workforce support**

Along with community education opportunities, the funding round has offered workforce training opportunities to build a trauma-informed workforce that understands the unique trauma experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. This will enable the workforce to better service our people, and more appropriate services may also increase the engagement of the community with support services. In this short-time frame it is difficult to observe the fully the impacts of workforce development on client engagement with services. However, our projects have reported that staff feel better placed to provide trauma-informed care. Evidence from the perspective of workforce members also shows that staff are more responsive to client needs as a result of a better understanding of the role of trauma in their lives. For example, a project that trained therapists who worked with children reported that training participants were able to engage with their clients, display more empathy for difficult behaviours, and thus work more effectively with highly traumatised children.

Training opportunity for workforce members, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce members has also led to an increased understanding of the impacts of trauma on their own wellbeing. This trauma can stem from workforce members own family experience, as well as the experience of vicarious trauma from clients. A number of projects have reported that their workforce development activities have led to staff members making better use of the Employee Assistance Program counselling in order to cope with their personal experiences of trauma. This increased access to services is significant as when workforce members take care of themselves, they reduce the chance of burn-out and improve their ability to work in often stressful circumstances.

## Building the evidence base for healing

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Through the analysis of the project data, the Healing Foundation is documenting and building a picture of the evidence and theory base of the healing projects that we fund. Through our analysis we can gain greater insight into the specific theory and evidence base for healing projects in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### *Culture as the process for healing*

Across the funding round, culture is central to the approach of the projects and is absolutely critical to their success. The centrality of culture as a tool for healing is consistent with findings in our other funded projects. Rather than being incidental or an added extra, connection to culture and spirituality is the key component in healing. This is as true for communities that have been most disconnected from their traditional culture and country as it is for communities who are strong in their traditions.

Yet the importance of culture goes beyond a simple use as a tool to translate mainstream concepts into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews. **For the majority of projects, it is the use of cultural approaches to dealing with trauma that are critical. Culture is the process through which healing takes place.** Many participants are seen to be more receptive to dealing with trauma in a non-clinical setting that is culturally-based. This is consistent with focus of activities across the funding round in which the overwhelming majority of projects have opted for group-based, often whole-of-community activities rather than individual one-on-one treatments. Projects are making use of and revitalising cultural ways of coping with trauma, loss and grief. This includes the use of traditional healing, ceremony and ritual to cope with loss and grief, using relationship to country and spiritual sites as a source of strength. One project notes that through their project “participants have been skilled to develop and initiate Aboriginal cultural ways of healing for families.”

Many of our projects discussed the importance of delivering training that is culturally strong. One project in particular noted that concepts were easy to understand because they were communicated in way that made cultural sense. Training is most effective when the content is communicated in a way that fits within participants’ worldviews

A number of projects highlighted that the passing on of cultural knowledge reiterates the positive and important roles of individuals in culture and family history. Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural methodologies strengthens the positive cultural identity of participants. Positive cultural identity promotes resilience and works to undo negative identities and self-perceptions that are a result of racism and the legacy of colonisation. “Cultural knowledge and cultural ways of healing validates and values the individual’s Aboriginal heritage and identity”. Strengthening positive cultural identity is critical to trauma recovery and healing.

Training that is steeped in culture can also enable participants to feel more connected to their community and their heritage. As the result of a camp that explored culturally significant sites on country, “participants reported feeling more connected to country and to the ancestors, which in turn reduced their feeling of isolation and lessened their experience of trauma”. By addressing trauma within a cultural framework, the projects are creating a safe space in which to address complex trauma in communities and families.

### *Changing lives and relationships*

Across the funding round, we have observed that the opportunity to discuss trauma within a cultural framework has led to profound changes to the lives of participants, many of whom have complex trauma histories. Some of the changes to participants’ lives and relationships include:

- ◆ Development of supportive relationships with peers and communities to deal with the impacts of trauma
- ◆ Increased willingness to engage with support services such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation, counselling, domestic and family violence services
- ◆ Improvements in family relationships
- ◆ Increased confidence to engage with volunteer and paid employment opportunities

There were many case studies of observable changes in participants' lives as a result of the healing journey that was initiated by the training. One project discussed the powerful case of a woman who had an unstable housing situation and lifestyle, and as a result of domestic violence had lost the care of her children. Through attending the training she began to understand that losing custody of her children was not her fault, but due to her victimisation. The result of this understanding was a new motivation to create a stable environment so that she could regain custody of her children. She sought out housing services, undertook vocational study and for the first time engaged in volunteer employment to develop her work skills. Her new motivation has led to meaningful changes in her life and set her on the track to reuniting with her children.

Several of the case studies highlighted throughout this report also describe similar profound changes in the lives of project participants and through this have created the possibility of overcoming multiple layers of disadvantage. The box below provides a powerful illustration of how project participation has enabled profound changes in the life of a young Aboriginal boy.

### *Project case study: Strong identity- Healing through connection*

A little boy was involved in our film project and gained a great deal from his participation. On his first day it was apparent that he had significant behavioural issues and was finding it extremely challenging to concentrate and involve himself in discussions. His school had also reported to them that his behaviour was escalating and they were finding him increasingly challenging. Each week he attended the program and each week he was exposed to cultural knowledge about his community, his totem, and family stories. We witnessed an emerging sense of pride in him as the project developed. During the course of the project his challenging behaviour reduced. He became extremely focused and involved in every task. He played a lead character in the film and was extremely determined to do a good job.

This young boy transformed his behaviour, showed enormous enthusiasm for the project, and his family showed great pride in his achievements. The difference for this little boy is that he has accomplished something that is great and that he is so proud of. He has had success and he has been valued. He has developed a strong sense of cultural pride. His increased self-esteem and his success in this project positively impacted on his behaviour and as a result he formed positive relationships with not only the staff on the project but also with his peers.

### *Ending the Cycle of Violence*

The high level of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the Healing Foundation believes is one expression of the underlying unresolved trauma in our communities. The evidence from the funding round demonstrates that when trauma is addressed within a cultural framework it makes a significant contribution towards ending the cycle of violence in families and communities.

Across the funding round, projects have highlighted specific examples of how their training has impacted upon both victims and perpetrators of violence and inspired significant behaviour change. This has been the case for projects that have focussed specifically on violence, but perhaps more significantly, the evidence from the projects show that the positive impact on curbing violence in families has been an outcome of several projects, regardless of whether violence was a specific focus. Across the funding round, 17% of the projects have reported specific examples of participants being empowered to end violence in their lives, and a further 19% have discussed attitude changes about violence that are likely to contribute to curbing violence. Therefore conservatively **36% of all funded projects focused in some way on violence.**

Through the delivery of training, case studies demonstrate that perpetrators of violence have gained an understanding of violence as an expression of their own trauma histories. They have also become aware of how their own violent behaviours are continuing the cycle of violence and passing trauma on to their children. This knowledge has motivated participants to develop their own coping strategies and work to discontinue the cycle of violence in their own families. A number of projects highlight cases in which participants sought access to services to support them in the development of coping strategies. The case study highlighted below provides a powerful example of how addressing trauma can enable perpetrators of violence to move beyond the cycle of violence.

<sup>1</sup> Project reports did not ask a specific question about violence, therefore it is possible that other projects have also made a contribution to curbing violence but have not included this information in their report. The case studies are drawn from the 17 projects which chose to specifically discuss violence in their progress reports.

## ***Project Case Study: Healing a man, reuniting a family***

One participant was estranged from his family. He had a history of substance abuse and this had led him to behaving violently towards his family. He was a descendent of the Stolen Generations and a victim of sexual abuse. Through attending the training, he realised that the trauma of his childhood, and the impacts of past government policies was the 'cause' of his actions. He could understand that past trauma had unconsciously shaped his identity and how he had behaved to his family. He recognised that the trauma he had been carrying has had a long term impact, and that he until now he hadn't had the awareness, skills or support to cope with the trauma.

Attending our training gave this man the confidence to take ownership, seek services to deal with his substance abuse and emotional trauma, and enhance positive outcomes for himself. He has created a new beginning- he has reengaged with employment and reunited with his family. Our community now has a positive participating male community member who is viewed by his family, the community, and the workforce as an outstanding role model.

One project in particular focussed on providing trauma-informed support to men who had had contact with the criminal justice system as a result of domestic violence. This project enabled participants develop anger management strategies to constructively and respectfully deal with conflict with their partners and develop positive relationships with their children. This has an impact for families, and participants spoke positively about their changed relationships with their families, as well as about the value of remaining in the community and avoiding repeated contact with the criminal justice system.

For many victims of domestic and family violence, participation in the projects has also empowered them to break the cycle of violence, leaving violent relationships and avoiding involvement in new potentially violent relationships. For many women the focus has been on, enabling their children to grow up in a home that is free from violence. One project gave an example of a young mother who had been empowered by the strength-based approach of the training and made the decision to end her violent relationship in order to raise her child in a trauma free environment.

Another project reported of one of their participants "I asked her whether she was married up again, and her reply was "No I'm just looking after the kids now". She did put her man into the police for assaulting her and breaking AVO's which resulted in his being locked up, and taking him to court and getting sole custody of their children. All of this was a big move on her behalf."

Whilst these are only small steps in the work needed to impact on violence the projects are demonstrating that a focus on understanding of trauma and its impacts on behaviour enable both survivors and importantly perpetrators not to continue to be beholden to violence and is creating important pathways to change.

Along with significant impacts upon domestic and family violence, many of the projects have had a focus on ending lateral violence within communities. As these projects progress and the next 6 monthly data become available, the Healing Foundation will undertake specific analysis on this important topic.

***"I feel stronger in having shared feelings with the other participants and feel that this has been constructive, although I was worried that it would bring up too much sadness from my life. Being with others and feeling supported was a great help and was very constructive. I know if I have a bad day, I can have someone local to talk to that I can trust and not feel shamed that there is anything I have conveyed that will judge me in a negative way, it was a great feeling."***

***– Project participant***



### *Creating a Supportive Environment for Healing*

Through the delivery of training, each of the projects have contributed to creating a supportive environment for healing. The projects work at individual, family, community and systems levels to create the psychological space in which healing can take place. Whilst the healing journey is unique to each individual, a supportive environment for healing is required if change is to be enabled. This is especially important due to the collective identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At the individual and family level, the projects have provided participants with knowledge of how trauma has impacted on their lives, and an understanding of their needs for healing. However, it is difficult for individuals and families to undertake their healing journey if the environment around them does not support their healing needs. This is why the creation of a supportive environment for healing is essential.

### *Developing collaborative relationships to address local community needs*

The project reports show quite clearly that the development of collaborative relationships with peer groups and community play a significant role in the healing journeys of individuals and families, and help to create a supportive environment for healing. Through the development of these relationships, projects are enabling individuals and communities to **address issues in the local community**. Many projects note that the development of trusting relationships with peers, and an understanding that are not alone in your healing journey, has played an important role in the development of coping strategies of individuals. This has created a safe space in which individuals feel supported to open up and share their thoughts and feelings to address their trauma. Many participants noted that the supportive network of peers was an important outcome of the projects and would assist them in their ongoing healing.

As well as enabling the development of supportive relationships with peers, many projects fostered collaboration within the community, support local leadership, and assist the community to identify the inherent strengths that could be drawn upon to support healing. The project funding is provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and are **driven by the local community**. In this way the projects funded are driven by local leadership and enable local communities the space to **address issues in the local community**.

In one project, whilst reflecting upon the importance of working collectively to resolve difficult issues, a participant noted "How powerful if we could get together on other issues...the result of this could be too deadly". This project had enabled participants have confidence in their community's strength to work through difficult issues and support healing within the community. Another project reported "Through strengthening kinships systems we have witnessed a family being supported through the loss of their father by community people acting as Aunts and Uncles to the Jarjums [young ones] and a support for the now single mother. By reinforcing the importance of family and community, the family have felt a sense of belonging to the community and have been adopted as extended family. They feel support where there was once none". The development of collaborative relationships within the community has built community strength to support each other through times of grief and meet the healing needs of the community.

One project worked with community members to develop local capacity in mediation, utilising a combination of local Aboriginal and Western approaches to conflict mediation. This training motivated the development of a community mediation group who could support constructive community solutions to dealing with conflict and promote positive relationships where there was fracture.

A project participant from another project reported that "After returning from the training we had a new impetus to build a nucleus of like-minded men who have begun to impact the community for change. Many of the men in our community are the recipients of the negative impact of past atrocities and marginalisation. Living in a remote area sometimes men are not aware of other Aboriginal men living together, working together and strengthening each other. Far from being a blaming exercise the training presented provided awareness of issues (common to most men), values based knowledge, strategies to overcome disadvantage and a healthy pride in one's Aboriginality and unique perspective in life."

This is another powerful example of how building community strength can foster an environment that is supportive of healing through the development of collaborative relationships to address local needs.

### *Creating a system that understands the healing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*

Finally, in order to support healing, there needs to be systems level change to the services that support the community. Such services include, but are not limited to, health and mental health services, drug and alcohol services, and family and children's services. In order to support healing, these services need to **understand the impact of colonisation and transgenerational trauma and grief** on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This systems level change has been influenced by the projects that have undertaken workforce development training. Through this training, support workers gain a better insight into the needs of their clients and an understanding of healing. This enables the organisations to better respond to the needs of their clients. One project reported that "the participants of the program who work directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients/young people have a better understanding of their issues and the trauma the family have endured from decades of government interference in their lives".

In a few projects, participation in the workforce development training has motivated cross-agency collaboration to support healing within the community. This is powerfully illustrated by the case study, detailed in one of the project reports, which describes the creation of a trauma-informed community of practice amongst participants of the training workshop. These participants were staff of mainstream services that provide support to Stolen Generations members. The group maintains regular email contact and meetings outside of their normal work duties, supporting each other in ongoing reflection of the experience and integrating the learnings from this workshop into their practice with clients and patients. The workshop was a very significant learning experience for many of the participants.

The development of the community of practice group enables participants to continue to learn from each other and gain support in creating change in their practices and those of their colleagues over time. The establishment of the community of practice fosters cross-agency collaboration to develop trauma-informed services to support the healing needs of Stolen Generations members in the community. This change has the capacity to create a service network that is more effective in responding to the healing needs of trauma survivors, Stolen Generations survivors in particular. Through this, these changes have the capacity to create more opportunities for healing and increased wellbeing for trauma survivors.

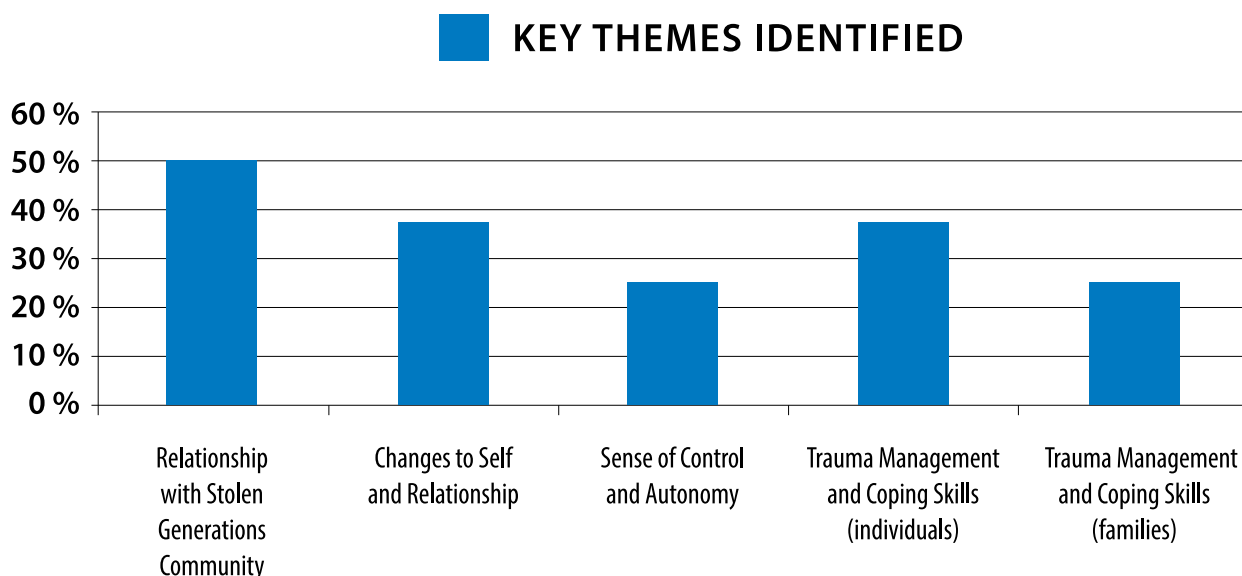
In another project, participants went on to establish a cross-agency support group of male community and health workers to build positive male identities and promote positive male role models within the community.

### *Combining western methodologies and traditional approaches*

Another way in which the projects are promoting systems level change to foster a support environment for healing is through **collaboration between Indigenous and mainstream approaches** to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This type of collaboration can be seen in the afore mentioned example of mediation training, which combines mainstream approaches to conflict resolution along with local Aboriginal approaches to develop conflict mediation capacity that meets the needs of the local context. Another powerful example of this type of collaboration is found in the project which develops collaboration between traditional healers and mental health workers. Through mutual skills sharing and discussion participants in this project develop a shared understanding of wellbeing for the community, helping them to work effectively together for the shared goal of healing within the community. Initiatives such as these take learnings from both mainstream and Indigenous approaches and promote the development of services that are better placed to meet the healing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Stolen Generations Survivors

Under the training and education funding round, 8 projects have been funded which focus specifically on the healing needs of Stolen Generations survivors. Stolen Generations members have experienced immense trauma, grief and loss as a result of government policies which took them away from their families, culture and country. Evidence from the Stolen Generations projects show that the healing needs of the Stolen Generations community are distinct from those of the broader community. Figure 6 below shows the themes that were most strongly highlighted by these projects.



The evidence emerging from these projects highlights that Stolen Generations members have unique needs within our communities. Themes that emerge strongly as significant for our Stolen Generations projects **are the importance of building relationships with other Stolen Generations community members and changes to sense of control and autonomy as central to their success**. Both of these areas are enhancing the ability of Stolen Generations members to cope with their traumatic experiences.

### *Relationship with Stolen Generations Community*

Half of the projects that work specifically with Stolen Generations members discuss the development of supportive relationships of participants with their Stolen Generations community members. In some cases, the projects bring together members who were in the same institution, such as the Kinchela Boys Home or the Cootamundra Girls Home. In other cases, the projects work with Stolen Generations members who live in particular town or region. In both scenarios, the development of peer relationships is a source of strength and healing for Stolen Generations members and an important way to develop coping skills and understand the trauma of their past. For the participants of one project, it is the opportunity to connect with peers from their institution that provides the most powerful healing opportunities.

One participant stated that the “best healing for me is to see my sisters [peers from the same institution]” whilst another participant noted that “the best thing is the girls. They really heal me – we are the only ones that went through it and understand each other. They are my psych doctors”. In another Stolen Generations project, participants talked about the creation of a community that extended beyond survivors of a particular institution, to include their partners and descendents. This was seen as the creation of a family and community that could support each other, both survivors and family members to understand and cope with their trauma and grief.

The roles that Stolen Generations community members play in the healing journeys of other members is highly significant, and fostering opportunities for community members to come together is an important part of these healing projects. This is a significant difference between Stolen Generations focussed projects and those that work with other groups within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

## ***Project Case Study: Healing childhood trauma, reconnecting with peers***

One Stolen Generations Aunty from our gathering stated that participation in the gathering was beneficial for all our 'girls' because they allow: "the girls to be together and being able to talk openly and freely to each other is healing in itself". This gathering in particular helped her to progress her own 'healing journey'. It was the first time she had participated in our program and she found "it answered a lot of questions I'd been carrying around and taught me how to release the emotional baggage". The workshop sessions "took away the baggage that it was your fault or your mother's fault for what happened".

"Years of put-downs in the Home could bog us down for years and some 'girls' still find it hard to let it go". She reported that our gathering "picked you up and made you aware of what you're capable of, if you lose the emotional baggage". Her key message was that the gathering not only progressed her own healing journey, but the experience 'allowed the girls to get closer'.

### ***Sense of control and autonomy***

The development of a sense of control and autonomy is an important aspect of healing for Stolen Generations members. Through participation in the projects, Stolen Generations members are restoring the sense of control and autonomy over their own life that was damaged by the experience of being stolen from their families as children. One of the projects noted that participants have embraced their ownership to control some of their emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness, which had lead them in the positive direction of engaging with other support services.

The funded projects work to uphold the principles of self-determination, working with communities to support client control over the design of services. As the projects continue this important work, the Healing Foundation will continue to build the evidence base with Stolen Generations members.



## Challenges

### *Administration of funding agreements*

The 2010 Commonwealth Ombudsman report on the administration of funding agreements with remote and regional Indigenous organisations found that “complex grant requirements and a failure to adequately support Indigenous organisations to meet reporting requirements increase the risk that these organisations will fail, even where the programs are being delivered successfully “. (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2010) This is consistent with our observations, where projects that are being successfully delivered on the ground may still face difficulties in completing their reporting requirements on time. The Healing Foundation works to minimise this risk of projects being allowed to fail by supporting our grantees to meet their reporting requirements. This support includes sending reminder and follow up emails and phone calls, providing feedback on incomplete reports and assisting projects to complete the information required, and accepting late submission of reports.

Undertaking healing work is not without its challenges. This can be particularly the case in remote contexts where infrastructure is limited. However, regardless of location, projects across the nation can face a variety of difficulties in implementing project work plans within the allocated schedule or according to original plans. Common challenges in implementing work plans include:

- ◆ Difficulty in attracting and retaining project staff with the right balance of qualifications, cultural knowledge and experience working with the community
- ◆ Difficulty securing the services of consultants and training providers who are in high demand across the nation
- ◆ Difficulty in backfilling positions when staff members are taken offline to attend professional development training
- ◆ Disruption to planned activities, which are put on hold to honour bereavement processes within community
- ◆ Illness of key Elders and community members
- ◆ Competing demands on the time of key project staff
- ◆ Difficult and disrespectful clients disrupting group activities
- ◆ Difficulty in gaining participation and buy-in from relevant services and organisations in the community due to mistrust or poor understanding of trauma and healing
- ◆ Vast distances to travel for the delivery of training in remote contexts, and difficulty in establishing relationships with communities over distance
- ◆ Community expectations for ongoing healing support cannot be met by a one-off project

In response to the challenges faced, many of the projects showed innovation and ingenuity to adapt to the circumstances presented. The Healing Foundation reviews all of the challenges presented by projects to work on a tailored solution, where applicable, to assist organisations adapt or change to meet their objectives. This can be challenging for Healing Foundation Program staff who are a small team and meet commitments across vast distances. However, opportunities are utilised to visit and work with projects when we are in local places.

As a funding body, the Healing Foundation endeavours to ensure that we achieve inclusivity in our funding. One way in which we do this is by embedding flexibility within our grant management processes. This enables projects to work with the Programs to make appropriate adjustments to their work plans according to changing circumstances within communities and organisations. In doing so we do our best to ensure that project aren't left to fail when unexpected difficulties arise. By enabling projects the opportunity to refine their work plan, it helps to ensure that the activities on the ground are appropriate to the needs of the community under changing circumstances. This approach also ensures the effective use of funds, as projects are able to be responsive to the needs the community. In cases where there was a significant delay to the work plan, or where planned activities faced particular difficulty getting off the ground, the Programs team worked with the projects to find solutions.

Ways in which the Healing Foundation supported projects to adapt to challenges faced include:

- ◆ Troubleshooting particular challenges to develop workable solutions
- ◆ In cases where no solution could be found which would enable a planned activity to take place, identifying relevant changes to work plan activities to overcome obstacles whilst still meeting specified project goals and outcomes
- ◆ Developing/adjusting work plans to enable projects to carry out their activities within a realistic timeframe
- ◆ Amending project funding agreements to accommodate delayed timeframes, and adjusting payment schedules to reflect changes to the project work plan

It is important to note that the overall budget for projects cannot be increased and projected outcomes cannot be changed. However, by providing the flexibility to revise work plans and budgets, we are able to ensure that projects are best placed to deliver outcomes. Funds are therefore expended effectively and efficiently on services that meet community needs. Our funded projects are the Healing Foundation's partners in our national healing journey and we would like to commend projects and communities across the nation on their hard work and perseverance in doing all that they can to ensure the success of their healing work. Whilst this is valuable work it does create additional workloads for the Program team and we have struggled at times to meet our own and communities expectation for support given the competing demands on our time.

### ***Evidence collection and evaluation***

Healing is an emerging field in Australia. The complexity of working in an emerging space is a challenge in terms of developing new work and building the evidence base to support the work on the ground, as well as to ensure that quality work is funded. Building effective monitoring and evaluation strategies is essential to ensure that we collect the right data. It is through the project progress reports, as well as through external evaluations that we will build our evidence base of what works in healing our communities. The Healing Foundation is currently in the process of developing an evaluation framework which will guide how we collect this data and compile our evidence. The Healing Foundation is a learning organisation and we work to improve our processes and tools to ensure that they serve our needs and the needs of our funded projects in the best possible way.

This is reflected in the reporting template used by the projects, which have been amended to improve the data collection, as well as reduce unnecessary effort on the part of the projects by removing or changing sections that are not useful. It is a challenge to ensure the integrity of quantitative data, and we work with projects and our external evaluator to improve upon this. The Healing Foundation is also in the process of developing and refining our quantitative and qualitative databases, to ensure that we can make effective use of the data that is contained in the progress reports. By working to improve our processes and tools, we can ensure that we honour the work of the projects on the ground and build the evidence base of what makes quality healing projects in our communities.

The critical elements of quality healing programs that have been highlighted by the Healing Foundation literature review of indigenous healing programs in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States (McKendrick et. al. in press) needs to be addressed in our evidence collection. However, our data collection is in the early stage development and has not yet fully addressed the overall evidence emerging from the field. The importance of growing our evidence base to ensure that we are able to understand how to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities build quality healing services is imperative. This challenge is shared by our programs to ensure that data is captured and recorded, assisting them to understand and document the essential elements of their work that create change and deliver quality healing programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Conclusion

The 47 projects that were funded across our nation are doing important work in creating the space of healing, which includes increasing the awareness and understanding of the impact of trauma as a fundamental starting point.

Through this work, the evidence points to the effectiveness of projects supporting individuals and communities on their journey of healing.

This funding has enabled many of our community members to seek support for the impacts of trauma in their lives and it has created important opportunities for the development and strengthening of the quality of healing services that are provided.

Community organisations have worked diligently and effectively in creating pathways for change for their community and the Healing Foundation has been proud to be enabled to support this work nationally. We look forward to building on the findings within this report as we work towards our continued endeavour to build strong spirits, strong culture, strong people.

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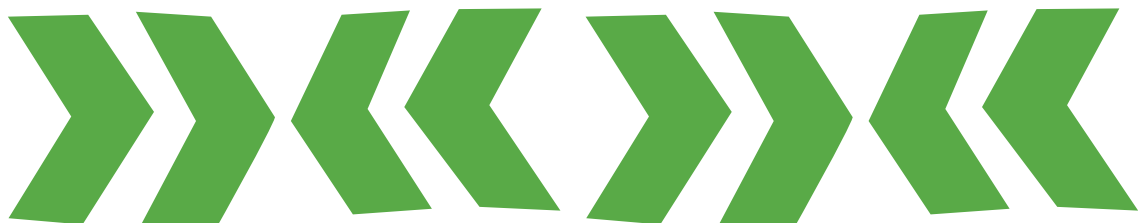
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