



HealingFoundation



The Centre of Best Practice in
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Suicide Prevention

WORKSHOP REPORT

Supporting the Stolen Generations: social and emotional wellbeing for survivors and workforces

3 March 2026—Noongar Boodjar (Fremantle, WA)

Presented in conjunction with

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Gathering 6

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ABSTRACT

The CBPATSSIP/Boorn Centre partnered with The Healing Foundation to deliver a workshop to: discuss the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) support needs of Stolen Generations survivors as they age; explore strategies for sustainable, culturally safe SEWB support practices in Stolen Generations Organisations (SGOs), and; explore training needs and options for SEWB and other workers within SGOs.




Approximately 35 representatives of SGOs and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) participated, sharing diverse experiences from many Countries and regions.

Through their conversations the workshop group: endorsed the SEWB model as a foundation for supporting Stolen Generations; called for greater access to training in trauma-informed and other relevant approaches, to build capacity and prevent workforce burnout, and; advocated for networking opportunities that recognise the distinctive experiences of working in the SGO sector.



Executive Summary

A workshop was convened to explore the social and emotional wellbeing supports needs of Stolen Generations survivors and of the workforces in Stolen Generations Organisations. The workshop discussions resulted to the following conclusions and recommendations:

-  The social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) model provides a culturally appropriate and holistic foundation for supporting Stolen Generations survivors and the Stolen Generations Organisations (SGO) workforce. Its explicit recognition of historical, social and political determinants aligns strongly with survivors' lived experience and the realities of lifelong healing.
-  Trauma-informed training and development focused on SEWB would be highly valued by SGO workforces, helping them to promote holistic healing, growth and autonomy in their clients and supporting their own wellbeing.
-  The SGO workforce would benefit from clearer pathways to training, including structured advice about available options, supported decision-making about course quality and relevance, and improved promotion of existing funded training opportunities.

- Workforce sustainability remains a key challenge across the SGO sector. Enhanced training, professional and cultural supervision, and accessible peer support mechanisms are critical to reducing burnout, vicarious trauma and staff turnover.
- Opportunities for sector wide networking, including face to face forums and regular online communities of practice, would strengthen capability, reduce isolation (particularly for staff in smaller SGOs), and support consistent, culturally safe practice.
- Further consideration should be given to the application/adaptation of CBPATSISP/Boorn Centre's training program for SEWB workforces (currently in development) to the specific context, roles and resource constraints of SGOs.






Background

The Stolen Generations are the children who were forcibly removed from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities from the mid-1800s until the 1980s under assimilation policies aimed at eliminating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Stolen Generations were separated from their families, communities, Country, culture and language, placed in institutions, missions, training farms and schools, and adopted by non-Indigenous families or fostered. Many were abused, neglected, or both.

The CBPATSSIP/Boorn Centre partnered with The Healing Foundation to deliver this workshop as part of SEWB Gathering 6, to:

-  discuss the SEWB support needs of the Stolen Generations survivors as they get older
-  explore strategies for sustainable, culturally safe SEWB support practices in Stolen Generations Organisations (SGOs)
-  explore the training needs and options for SEWB and other workers within SGOs.

The workshop was attended by ~35 people, around half of them from SGOs from across Australia while the remainder were from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and others with an interest in supporting Stolen Generations.

There are approximately 20 Stolen Generations Organisations operating nationally, ranging from small volunteer run organisations to large state-based services including Link-Ups. Stolen Generations organisations are survivor-led (including founded and governed) Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, who deliver a range of services and programs including re-unification, redress support and collective healing. The first SGO/ Link-Up was founded over forty years ago to provide support services to the generations of survivors who had experienced forced removal under policies commonly understood as the Stolen Generations.

Tegan opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and reminded attendees to show care and respect for others' perspectives, especially considering the conversation would address the trauma of removal.

This summary has been prepared from the verbal responses shared in the workshop and from the written comments (butcher paper) from each table.

Question 1

SGO workforce training and support needs

- What skills are strong in the SGO workforce?
- Where are the capability gaps?
- What training is urgently needed?

Attendees said workforces needed more trauma-informed training and support to assist Stolen Generations survivors. They appreciated the opportunity to attend this workshop and said it would be valuable to extend such opportunities to more people working at SGOs, forming networks of peer support.

Cultural governance and oversight, and professional and cultural supervision for SEWB workers, were seen as essential to ensure a high and consistent quality of support for Stolen Generations survivors and to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma among workforces.

Attendees emphasised that – because of the particular sensitivities surrounding the experiences of the Stolen Generations – it was essential for staff to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. They also said all staff, including reception and administration staff, should be trained in trauma-informed responses, both to meet the needs of clients and for their own SEWB.

Key strengths were the powerful values and commitment within the SGO sector, and strong connections to local communities including with Stolen Generations descendants (many also being descendants).

Smaller SGOs struggled to provide a SEWB team or counselling, meaning researchers and other staff needed to have SEWB support skills.

Across all SGOs, comprehensive orientation should be available for all new staff to discuss the complexities of supporting Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants, raise any issues specific to the local community, and ensure staff know how to seek support for their own SEWB. Some SGOs offer wellbeing days and other activities for staff.

Opportunities for career progression were viewed as important for staff retention and maintaining a culturally secure SGO workplace, with the same core SEWB support skills required across case-worker, counsellor and management roles. This approach could also provide greater continuity and stability for Stolen Generations clients, as staff developed their active listening skills and understanding.

Question 2

Applying the SEWB Framework to support the Stolen Generations

Tegan discussed the SEWB Framework, displaying the diagram that shows how for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the individual is inseparable from family, community, culture and Country and spiritual, mental and physical health – experienced in the context of social, political and historical determinants.






Tegan described the work of the CBPATSIISP/Boorn Centre to develop a two-day SEWB training program for people starting in SEWB support worker roles, asking attendees whether the concepts and training topics resonated with their experience in SGOs.

Tegan asked attendees to describe how their organisations are applying the SEWB Framework in practice, or how they could do so. She suggested people could focus on three SEWB domains in which they could foster greater connection for Stolen Generations clients.

Attendees said the SEWB Framework was a valuable model for supporting Stolen Generations survivors, particularly because it frames social, political and historical determinants as current and important in people's experiences of their lives today.

The grief and loss experienced by members of the Stolen Generations continues, and healing may be a lifelong process. The SEWB model makes space for these experiences.

Attendees described how the existing work of SGOs could be understood within the SEWB model, for example:

-  oral history projects connect people to culture
-  photography and kinship projects connect people to family and community
-  crisis counseling can connect people to their experience of their body, behaviour, mind and emotions.


Some SGO representatives said they did not typically have dedicated SEWB teams, with some relying on referring people to external SEWB services eg at ACCHOs. SGOs would welcome the opportunity to systematically apply the SEWB Framework holistically across their services.

However Stolen Generations survivors sometimes had pressing practical needs, such as for food, housing, utilities and identification to allow them to apply for government payments, that needed to be prioritised ahead of a SEWB focus. In addition the costs of providing some SEWB-related supports – for example taking people out on Country – could not be provided within current SGO funding models.

Descendants of the Stolen Generations similarly experienced continuing practical issues linked to intergenerational trauma, putting the immediate focus on surviving rather than thriving. In these situations the SEWB model was still valuable but did not address the full range and complexity of people's needs.

While the SEWB Framework was not consistently applied within SGOs, representatives felt its core concepts were embedded in their service models eg The Healing Foundation's Collective Healing Grant program which facilitates healing by restoring connection to family and community. By empowering people to choose their own approach to family or community reunion, SGOs could help people reclaim the self-determination that colonisation took away.

However when communities of origin did not accept someone seeking reunification, this could exacerbate grief and loss, undermine SEWB and cause vicarious trauma among workforces.

-  The Good Spirit Good Life (GSGL) assessment framework, intended to be used with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on intake into aged care, was nominated as an important measure that included both SEWB and additional practical domains, and was considered highly relevant to members of the Stolen Generations.



Question 3

What training have people already done and how valuable have they found it?

Many SGO representatives had undertaken training courses specific to Stolen Generations, including in case management, family history research and restorative justice.

Link-Ups funded through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) also had access to training in alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and domestic and family violence through workforce development units, but this was not always well promoted to services.

Attendees agreed there was a need for further training and development directed towards social and emotional wellbeing of both Stolen Generations survivors and SGO staff. However they also emphasised the value of lived experience and community connection, as distinct from formal training. Some relevant online training courses are available, but attendees said it was difficult to gauge their usefulness from their online profiles, and there was an absence of guidance for how to choose them.

SGO staff welcomed the opportunity to meet their peers at sector events, and thought there could be a role for regular online communities of practice to share experiences, challenges and approaches. This could be particularly valuable for more junior staff who typically have fewer opportunities to network outside their own organisations. The following is a summary of the formal and informal training opportunities accessed by attendees.



11295NAT **Certificate IV in Stolen Generations Family Research and Case**

Management is an important program that attendees said was essential in building capacity to work effectively with this group. However there is a shortage of qualified trainers, which prevents SGOs and ACCHOs from offering the qualification to their workforces.



11227NAT **Diploma of Narrative Approaches for Aboriginal People (Counselling, Group and Community Work)**

adopts concepts that are consistent with the SEWB model and valuable in supporting Stolen Generations survivors.



CHC51015 **Diploma of Counselling** is a mainstream course with core and optional units dedicated to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is available Australia-wide through various Registered Training Organisations. In Queensland it is offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by community-controlled Gallang Place, funded by Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC).



The **Marumali Program** provides trauma-informed workshops for Stolen Generations survivors and descendants and for support workforces.

- Marumali Program at Work for First Nations Service Providers
- Marumali Program at Work -Risk Management
- Marumali Program at Work for Non-First Nations Service Providers
- Marumali Program for Survivors
 - Healing journey in community
 - Healing journey in the justice system
- Marumali Program for young people

The program is based on the Marumali Journey of Healing Model, developed by Aunty Lorraine Peeters, a Stolen Generations survivor. It includes modules on assessing and supporting SEWB.



Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid



Mental Health First Aid



Indigenous Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (I-ASIST)

These programs were considered useful in helping SGO staff to respond effectively to people in crisis, including teaching techniques and approaches to restore calm and safety.



SGO Gathering



SEWB Gatherings



Culture Care Connect Summit



Red Dust Healing is a program developed in NSW that is now available in other regions



Sisters Day Out wellbeing workshops









Yarning Circles

These events were nominated as additional opportunities for SGO staff to engage and focus on their own SEWB.



Conclusions and Recommendations

-  The social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) model provides a culturally appropriate and holistic foundation for supporting Stolen Generations survivors and the Stolen Generations Organisations (SGO) workforce. Its explicit recognition of historical, social and political determinants aligns strongly with survivors' lived experience and the realities of lifelong healing.
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