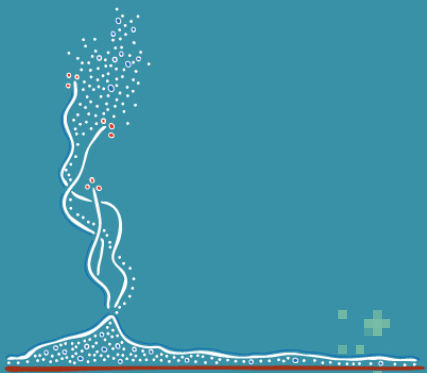


Our Healing Our Solutions

Findings from the January to June 2011

Program Data

October 2011



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

healing foundation

Strong Spirit Strong Culture Strong People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

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

Established on the anniversary of the Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the Healing Foundation addresses the profound legacy of pain and hurt in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives caused by colonisation and other past government policies such as removing children from their families.

The Healing Foundation is improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by:

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

Acknowledgements

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our 21 funded projects.

The Healing Foundation acknowledges the financial support of the Federal Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Introduction

In its initial program funding round in October 2010 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation funded 21 projects throughout Australia. The key themes of these projects are:

Stolen Generations

Children and Young People

Combining Western and Traditional Healing

Men

Women

Family and Community

Traditional Arts and Cultural Activities

The duration of these programs ranges from one off events to three years and funding for each project ranged from \$56,000 to \$400,000.

This report details the first six months of data collected from these 21 funded healing programs. Healing work has been progressing well with 2 programs having completed their activities within the January-June 2011 period and the remaining 19 programs well underway.

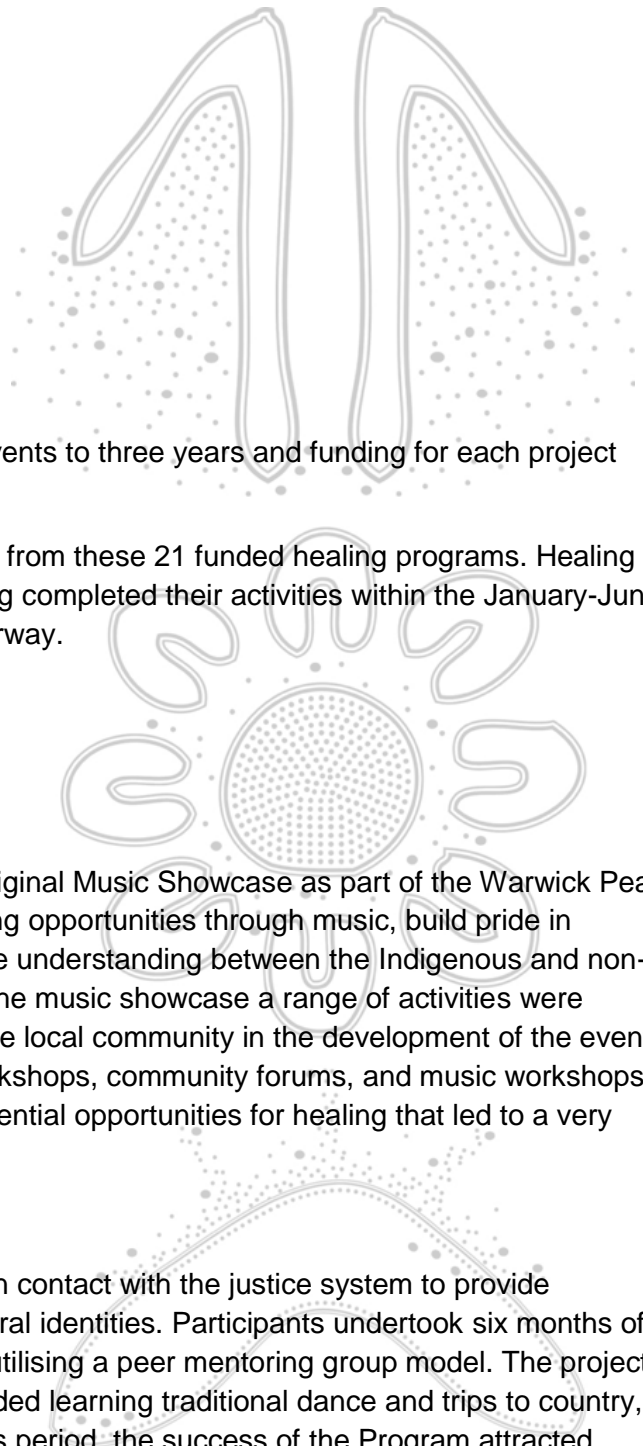
Completed programs

The Peace Festival Aboriginal Music Showcase

In April Total Health Education hosted a two day Aboriginal Music Showcase as part of the Warwick Peace Festival. The purpose of the event was to create healing opportunities through music, build pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and create understanding between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In the months leading up to the music showcase a range of activities were conducted to garner community support and include the local community in the development of the event. These included an Aboriginal choir, traditional arts workshops, community forums, and music workshops with the schools. Many of these activities provided essential opportunities for healing that led to a very successful event with over 3500 participants.

Halo Healing

Halo works with young Noongar men who have been in contact with the justice system to provide opportunities for healing through building positive cultural identities. Participants undertook six months of community, cultural and personal leadership training utilising a peer mentoring group model. The project works closely with Noongar Elders, and activities included learning traditional dance and trips to country, as well as career and life planning workshops. During this period, the success of the Program attracted additional Federal Government support through DEEWR that saw the program grow in size and capacity. Healing Foundation support enabled the program to be developed further to attract these resources, ensuring the sustainability of this work.



Activities

Our projects have implemented a great range of activities over the January to June 2011 period. These include:

- Healing Camps for Elders including Stolen Generations, girls, young men, kids in out-of-home care and whole of community, strengthening culture and taking care of pain in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander way
- Traditional arts workshops including basket weaving, fabric dying, and possum skin cloak making
- Traditional healing work including smoking ceremonies, bush medicine production and Ngangkari treatments
- Music and dance workshops, performances and concerts which provide healing through ceremony
- Trips to country to collect bush tucker, bush medicine, weaving and dying material, and to learn culture and stories
- Community healing forums and consultations
- A suicide prevention workshop
- Establishment of steering committees and reference groups and development of community decision making processes and leadership

Overview of the Data

There are three main types of data we are collecting from the programs to map the healing work that is going on across the country. Each data type serves a different need. The three data types are:

Performance Reporting Data

This data is collected to provide overall information about the performance of funded projects in line with many of the Closing the Gap strategies. These include:

- **Indigenous employment outcomes:** this includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders who are paid for their participation in the project including staff, steering committees, cultural advisors, facilitators and performers
- **Clients/participants:** total number seen by the project over the six month reporting period
- **Services delivered:** total number of services delivered by the project over the six month reporting period such as healing camps, workshops and counselling services
- **Client satisfaction:** the percentage of clients who are satisfied with the services delivered by the project

National Outcomes

The 21 funded programs cover a diverse range of activities and are working towards multiple outcomes. In February 2011 the Healing Foundation brought the funded programs together for an evaluation forum. At this forum three common outcomes across the programs were identified and agreed upon. Indicators were then established in consultation with the funded programs to measure the outcomes. Given the diverse range of programs, indicators needed to be applicable across multiple domains.

For all three year funded programs the Research division is investigating a more in depth periodic evaluation methodology. The national outcomes and their indicators are:

National outcome 1

Strengthened social, spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of our people

Indicators:

1. The number of wellbeing activities or services provided
2. The percentage of project participants who report an increase in their social, spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing

National outcome 2

Strengthened connection to our culture

Indicators:

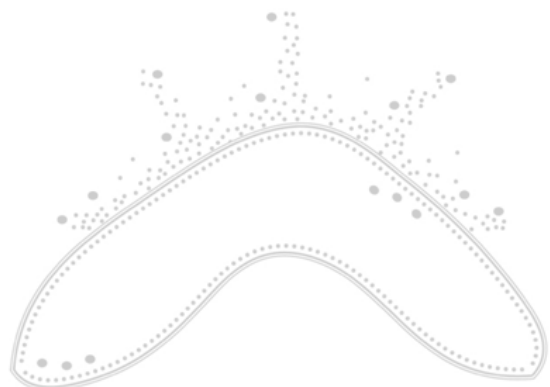
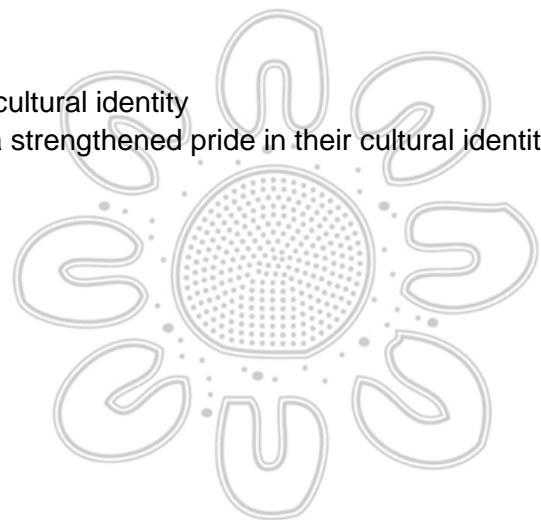
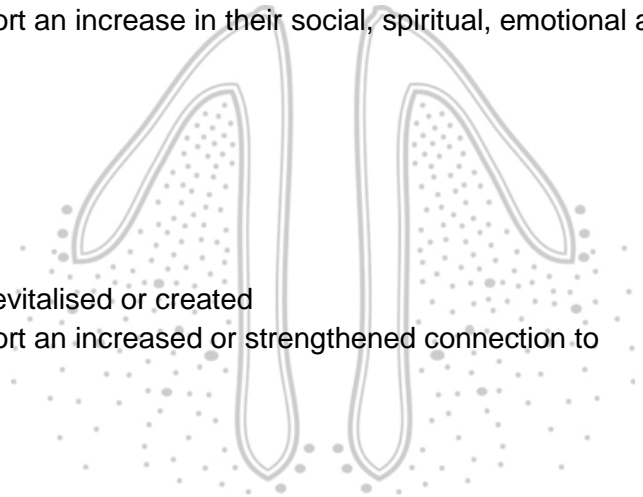
3. The number of cultural activities undertaken, revitalised or created
4. The percentage of project participants who report an increased or strengthened connection to culture

National Outcome 3

Strengthened pride in our cultural identity

Indicators:

5. The number of activities which strengthen pride in cultural identity
6. The percentage of project participants who report a strengthened pride in their cultural identity



Qualitative data

Alongside the quantitative data we are also collecting qualitative data. We asked each of the programs to provide one case study per reporting period showcasing the healing experience of the project participants. The collection of these healing stories from across the country will assist the Healing Foundation to illustrate the national healing story, representing the diversity of perspectives and experience from across the nation.

Case studies can be presented in written form or as photos, artwork or a combination of these. This variety of formats encourages programs to present the information in a manner that more accurately reflects an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview. We encourage programs to provide quotes and other useful information which demonstrates the participants' perspectives on healing and wellbeing.

Our programs usually go over and above the minimum reporting requirements. They are providing the Healing Foundation with a diverse range of data on their healing work. The Programs Team is building a qualitative database using NVIVO software, which enables us to identify key themes, and store this information for use in reports, presentations and communications material.

January to June 2011 Data

This is a summary of the reporting data received from the 20 programs required to report for this period.¹

FaHCSIA reporting data

Indigenous employment outcomes

117 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders employed over the period

Total clients/participants	4437*
Services delivered	125 activities such as healing camps, community forums and workshops and counselling services
Client satisfaction	95%

*Note: this figure includes the 2466 participants of the Aboriginal Music Showcase. The remaining 19 projects provided service to 1971 participants, an average of over 103 per project.

National indicators

National Outcome 1: Self-Reported improved social, emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing	
Wellbeing activities/services	4624*
Increase in client wellbeing	85%

¹ Due to the late start in June 2011 Balunu is not required to submit a report this period. They will submit their first report in January 2012

*Note: This figure includes 2466 participants from the Aboriginal Music Showcase. The remaining 19 projects provided 2158 treatments/services which is an average of over 113 per project.

National Outcome 2: Self reported Increased connection to our culture

Cultural activities	265
Increase in connection to culture	95%

National Outcome 3: Self reported increased pride in cultural identity

Cultural activities which increase pride	370
Increase in pride in cultural identity	91%

Case Studies

‘A Child Spirit’

I was so happy to see the self confidence and esteem of the children (participants) attending the program. I have known the children whilst employed for the past two years and have not witnessed confidence in children in such a short time. At the camp, I saw children talk, engage and participate in activities (fun and cultural learning activities) during the program and this was nice to see, I was so proud of the children. I believe that the children who participated in the program will want to learn more about their Aboriginal Cultural and “child spirits”, be more comfortable and able to ask questions of their caseworkers about their circumstances and birth families and I also believe that the children will also be so excited and love an opportunity to participate in another follow up program.

I think a program like this gives the children who attend and participate opportunity to not only build self confidence but learn their culture and identity - who they are and where they fit in and have a sense of belonging- personally, within their family, community and culture - and in my personal understanding of children who are in care, this is so important for so many reasons. I am both happy and proud to be involved in a program that can support children in any way get through this time in their lives so they can grow and reach their full potential.

‘Anangu Way’

A young Indigenous person from a city interstate consulted the Ngangkari about significant mental health problems related to trauma. She was supported by a worker who brought her to see the Ngangkari at the request of her grandmother, who had relations in Central Australia. The Ngangkari spent a long time establishing who her relatives were, and how they were all related to her. The Ngangkari listened to her and treated her, and then explained the way they saw her problem and that it was a common problem for young Anangu women in their families, and explained how it affected them. This appeared to have a powerful affect on her, and the worker reported that she was considerably happier, and appreciating the way her issues were reframed within an Anangu context.

'Fabric of Our Culture'

The work of our group attracted the attention of a leading regional arts organisation who invited us to participate in the "Fabric of Our Culture" project. The project aimed to hold an exhibition of non-professional Bundjalung art in a major metropolitan Aboriginal art gallery. Our group and two other local women's groups were offered the opportunity to exhibit traditional and contemporary textiles and weaving at the Boomali Gallery in Sydney.

The women enthusiastically took up the offer and immediately started preparing both individual and group pieces. Besides producing impressive works, the process was equally, if not more, important: the group work furthered a sense of cohesion. It also improved communication, collective decision making and conflict resolution skills. The facilitators took a step back to encourage the women themselves to become more drawn into the negotiations with the arts organisation and to take part in the various administrative processes involved in organising a joint exhibition. The women undertook excursions out into the bush to collect the plant materials used in the woven and dyed art pieces. This increased their connection to the environment and their relationship with the Land. The weaving teacher and the support workers supported the women throughout the entire process from identifying, collection and creating, to presenting their individual and group works. The woven sculptural group pieces especially reflect the growing confidence and connection to their Bundjalung culture.

The whole project involved five months of preparation. In the build up to the exhibition the group attendance was very strong and the excitement and energy in the group palpable. The women were flown to Sydney to attend the opening of the exhibition. For several of them it was their first experience flying but despite their fears they all got on the plane and survived. The well attended exhibition was opened by the Governor of NSW, Marie Bashir. The women sold most of their individual works. They showed enormous pride in their achievement and money from the sales will enable the group to purchase more materials.

Key Themes

Through an analysis of the case studies across each of our programs we are able to see the emergence of some key themes. The analysis will continue to grow as we collect case studies each six months, and this will eventually provide a rich data source sharing perspectives on healing from across the nation. From this first round of case studies significant themes emerging are:

Building **connection to culture** is a common theme across all of the projects. One participant of a healing forum described healing as *"knowing who we are and where we come from - our culture, our identity, practicing, valuing and passing it on"*.

For the children and young people in out-of-home-care who participated in a healing camp, building **connection to culture** also built a new sense of **pride in their cultural identity**, which is described by one of the carers who participated in the camp *"for all of these young people, enabling them to see themselves as worthwhile members of the larger Aboriginal community, to have a sense of belonging, to have a sense of safety, to be invited to be proud of who they are and where they come from and where they fit. It also develops their sense of connection and identity."*

The women who participated in the a weaving group were able to showcase their newly learned skills at an exhibition which gave an immense sense of **pride in their cultural identity** and in their achievements. *"It has been amazing to watch the increased confidence [of the women], to see how they deal with the media and socially mix with people. Sitting there and weaving gives them a sense of having something to offer...people are coming to them and engaging with them...they can show their knowledge and skills in public...and show pride in their culture."*

Using **traditional healing** methodologies is important to a number of the projects as it provides a way to work within **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews** and **connect to culture**. *"Traditional*

healing is about knowing your identity - who you are, where you come from which helps with your wellbeing and re-enforces that confidence”

Many of the projects are building skills within their communities and **skills development** is emerging as an important theme. *“Both observations by the facilitators and information comments made by participants show the significant benefits achieved during the short time of the project. For example, for the first time ever the women took the initiative and started exploring possibilities of becoming self sustained as an Aboriginal artist collective or a business. If successful it may eventually create an income stream for the women who have been long term welfare recipients.”*

This theme appears to be closely linked to **pride in cultural identity**, as project participants build skills in traditional crafts and roles, such as weaving, making bush medicine, and Ngangkari work. *“Working as a public paid Ngangkari in the community rather than only practicing within our families makes being a Ngangkari more desirable for the young ones, and more and more want to learn the healing tools”.*

There are a number of other themes which are touched upon in the case studies and with more data they may prove to be significant. We will be able to explore these themes in more depth as each successive reporting period grows the depth and richness of the data available to us.

Analysis

Figure 1 on the next page represents the most frequently used words across the case studies and consultations. The size of the word represents the relative frequency - the bigger the word, the more often it is mentioned. The graphic demonstrates some of the emerging key concepts that are critical to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing work.

Healing work supports our own people, in our own way, with a focus on children and families, to grow connection to culture and identity.

Project Achievements

The projects have shown that much can be achieved, when given the opportunity to work in our way, within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural framework and worldview. These achievements include:

- 117 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed across 20 projects as project workers, administrators, cultural advisors, facilitators and in governance roles
- Despite some challenges with attracting appropriate staff and delays in establishing governance committees every one of the 21 projects have been able to overcome the challenges and become operational within the timeframe
- Successful take up of services across the country
- A high degree of community participation with communities driving the focus of projects
- A focus on using the strength of culture as a basis of all activities
- A focus on providing wellbeing services and healing interventions an average of over 103 participants per project as well as an additional 2466 participants at the Aboriginal Music Showcase
- Whilst the measurement of the wellbeing outcomes is not scientific there is a high degree of self-reported increase in wellbeing of participants, with 85% of surveyed participants reporting an increase in their emotional, spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing as a result of their participation in the project.

Project Challenges, Barriers and Solutions

Some of the projects have faced barriers to the timely implementation of their workplans. These include:

- Ill health of key Elders and community leaders
- Multiple deaths and sorry business commitments
- Lengthy time needed to negotiate and establish appropriate governance structures such as steering committees and delays due to health reasons and sorry business

Remote service delivery projects face additional challenges due to the nature of operating in a remote environment. These include:

- Difficulty in securing appropriately skilled staff
- Lack of available local staff with appropriate literacy and numeracy skills
- Difficulty in gaining police checks and meeting other legal commitments for remote community staff
- Competing with the high wages paid to government workers in remote locations

The Programs Team has put mechanisms in place to enable the projects to respond to these challenges. Our solutions include:

- Each six months programs are given the opportunity to submit a new workplan and budget for approval. This flexibility enables programs to adjust their schedule of activities to take difficulties into account or to respond to emerging needs within the community. Programs can also redesign budgets to meet new or unanticipated budget constraints. The programs cannot increase their overall budget, nor can they make changes to their stated project outcomes however the flexibility to re-work the workplan and budget ensures that the projects are best able to deliver on these outcomes.

- Projects are also given the opportunity to work more intensively with the Programs Team, to problem solve any major issues faced by the project, and ensure that the healing work can be delivered in the best way
- All changes are appropriately documented and reviewed ensuring consistency with the overall funding agreement

Program Support

The Healing Foundation sees our role as partners with our funded programs. We provide program support to mutually work towards the success of all funded projects. Program support provided over the six months from January to June 2011 includes:

- Visits by Healing Foundation staff to ten of the funded programs
- Evaluation workshop in Canberra attended by two representatives from each project
- Assistance in program design and discussions and advice on meeting identified challenges and barriers
- Assistance in completing new workplans and program refinement
- Flexible approach to enable funded programs to meet emerging healing issues

Conclusion

The first 21 funded programs have been hugely successful in their implementation stage, with an average of over 113 healing services provided by each project during this reporting period.

The need for healing is great. In the past six months wherever we have travelled people have told us about the importance of healing in their lives.

The establishment of these programs has provided an opportunity for the Healing Foundation to begin the development of a response to caring for our healing our way. We look forward to the ongoing evaluation of this work as it continues to provide opportunities for change and renewal.