



The National Empowerment Project  
Northam/Toodyay



# The National Empowerment Project Northam/Toodyay

July 2013

Tjalaminu Mia, Dezeræ Miller, Leonard Collard, Clint Bracknell, Anne Butorac, Adele Cox, Pat Dudgeon, Sabrina Swift



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## The National Empowerment Project

The National Empowerment Project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the National Mental Health Program.

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Publications ISBN: 978-1-74052-274-8

Online ISBN: 978-1-74052-295-3

copyright to

School of Indigenous Studies,

The University of Western Australia

M303, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 Australia

Design and Print: UniPrint

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## Abbreviations

SKHKAC	Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation
KEP	Kimberley Empowerment Program
NEP	National Empowerment Project
PAR	Participatory Action Research
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CSEWB	Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing
SWALSC	South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
S.Gs.	Stolen Generations

## Acknowledgements

- The authors would like to acknowledge and thank participants in Northam and Toodyay for sharing their time, thoughts and information as part of the community consultations that formed the basis of this Report. The valuable information gathered through these community consultations are being used to develop with the intent of delivering an Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program to be run in the local communities.
- Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation – (Auspice Agency Communicare Inc.), for their support and assistance as our local partner organisation for the Northam/Toodyay site and particularly for their wisdom and guidance on the ground.
- Photo's in this Report and other Project related documents (including website) were provided by Tjalaminu Mia and Dezeræe Miller.
- Maps were developed and provided throughout this Report and on other resources by Stephen Ball, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.
- Thanks to Joshua Reynolds from the School of Indigenous Studies for his time and work on the Project website.
- Special mention and thanks to Professor Helen Milroy for use of her original artwork as part of the Project. 'The River of Life' is on our website [www.sis.uwa.edu.au](http://www.sis.uwa.edu.au)
- Finally, thanks are extended to the Kimberley Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program team; Cheryl Dunkley, Divina D'Anna, Kathleen Cox, Kate Hams, and Vanessa Poelina. Your contribution and guidance to the National Empowerment Project has been outstanding.



### Artwork

Tovani Cox is a young Bunuba and Gija woman originally from Broome.

*Communities coming together to share experiences and stories as a way of helping to build strong and healthy people, families and communities.*

*The circles represent the communities across Australia and the white dots represent the people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). The connecting lines represent the sharing of experiences and stories and once all the communities come together, Aboriginal Australia is 'United'.*



A landscape photograph showing a valley with rolling hills. The hills are covered in sparse, dry vegetation, appearing in shades of brown and orange. The foreground is a sandy, light-colored area with some small, green shrubs and trees. The sky is a clear, pale blue. A semi-transparent white horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "1. Introduction".

# 1. Introduction

## Executive Summary

The National Empowerment Project (NEP) at The University of Western Australia is an innovative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Project working directly with communities across Australia to address their social and emotional wellbeing.

Nine sites were part of the Project. Northam/Toodyay was one of the three sites in Western Australia.

The NEP was conducted at nine sites and at each site the Project was linked to a partner organisation:

- **Northam/Toodyay, Western Australia**  
(Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation – Auspice Agency Communicare Inc.)
- **Narrogin, Western Australia**  
(Marr Mooditj Foundation)
- **Perth, Western Australia**  
(Langford Aboriginal Corporation)
- **Kuranda, Queensland**  
(Mona Mona Bulmba Aboriginal Corporation)
- **Cherbourg, Queensland**  
(Graham House Community Centre)
- **Darwin, Northern Territory**  
(Danila Dilba Aboriginal Health Services)
- **Sydney, New South Wales**  
(National Centre of Indigenous Excellence)
- **Toomelah, New South Wales**  
(Goomeroi Aboriginal Corporation)
- **Mildura, Victoria**  
(Mallee District Aboriginal Services)

Community participation is at the heart of the NEP and as such relationships with partner organisations were established and two local Aboriginal consultants were employed in each site. Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation – Auspice Agency Communicare Inc., was the partner organisation for Northam.

The NEP involved two stages; firstly a community consultation and secondly, the delivery of a cultural, social and emotional wellbeing workshop. In addition, an empowerment healing and leadership program is being developed.

The process and outcomes of stage one are reported here. Using a participatory action research process, interviews and workshops were undertaken with a total of 40 people. People were asked about the issues that were important for them as individuals, families and communities and what was needed to make them strong.

Participants from the Northam/Toodyay consultations identified a range of concerns relating to family breakdown and feuding, community violence and substance abuse. These were linked to the impact of the Stolen Generations and to a history of cultural prejudice and discrimination. The impact of these on youth was highlighted as an issue.

Participants were very forthcoming about what needed to happen to make individuals, families and communities stronger. High on the agenda was a focus on Aboriginal identity and culture and the need to bring people together. Healing and empowerment were also strong themes to strengthen both individuals and the community as a whole.

The disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is evident across all indicators and measures such as low employment, low income, lack of housing, lack of access to services, disrupted social networks, disrupted connection to land, high prevalence and experiences of racism and high levels of incarceration. These indicators are inter-related and the consultation outcomes reflected this. This Report focuses upon recommendations pertaining to what types of programs might benefit the community.

The following is a summary of the key issues and recommendations compiled through the community consultations and social emotional wellbeing workshop:

**Recommendation 1:** A program needs to be community owned and culturally appropriate. A local Northam/Toodyay empowerment program needs to have community members identifying their problems and designing the solutions. Any program needs to have legitimate community support; be culturally appropriate and locally based; take a community centred and strengths based approach; aim to capacity build, that is, employ and train local people and ensure a valued role of Elders in all aspects.

**Recommendation 2:** Delivery. Any program should be flexible and delivered on country, where possible; and be able to meet peoples' different needs and stages in their healing journey. The program should consider gender issues so that separate male and female modules can be delivered if and when necessary. A program should also be delivered in a manner whereby opportunities for education, training and employment are provided as potential prospects.

**Recommendation 3:** Content. The content of programs should include modules that address cultural, social and emotional wellbeing, healing, and self-empowerment. Other skills could include life skills such as problem solving and conflict resolution skills, goal setting, and communication skills (especially with family).

## Background

Indigenous Australia is made up of two distinct cultural groups – mainland Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that in 2011 there were 548,370 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Australia. Overall, Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 2.5% of the total Australian population. Among the Indigenous population in 2011, it is estimated that 90% (493,533 people) were of Aboriginal origin, 6% (32,902 people) were of Torres Strait Islander origin and only 4% (21,934 people) identified as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

In 2006, 32% of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples lived in major cities, with 21% in inner regional areas and 22% in outer regional areas, while 9% lived in remote areas and 15% lived in very remote areas (ABS, 2008). While the majority live in urban settings, the population is much more widely dispersed across the country than is the non-Indigenous population, constituting a much higher proportion of the population in northern Australia and more remote areas (ABS, 2011).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most disadvantaged group in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia experience poorer health outcomes than others, for example; a shorter life expectancy than others (11.5 years less for males and 10 years less for females) and higher hospital admission rates. In mental health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples report experiencing psychological distress at two and a half times the rate of non-Indigenous people and are hospitalized for mental and behavioural disorders at around 1.7 times the rate of non-Indigenous people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are hospitalized for non-fatal self-harm at two and a half times the rate of others and suicide death rates are twice that of non-Indigenous people (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012; Thomson et al., 2012).



In education and employment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in education is much less than other Australians. The employment rate has increased over the past 20 years but remains 20% lower than for non-Indigenous Australians and the average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander income is lower than others with a much lower proportion of those owning their homes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Thomson et al., 2012).

In the justice system, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were imprisoned at 14 times the rate for non-Indigenous people, with imprisonment rate increasing by 59% for women and 35% for men and juveniles were detained at 23 times the rate for non-Indigenous juveniles. Homicide rates were six times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Thomson et al., 2012).

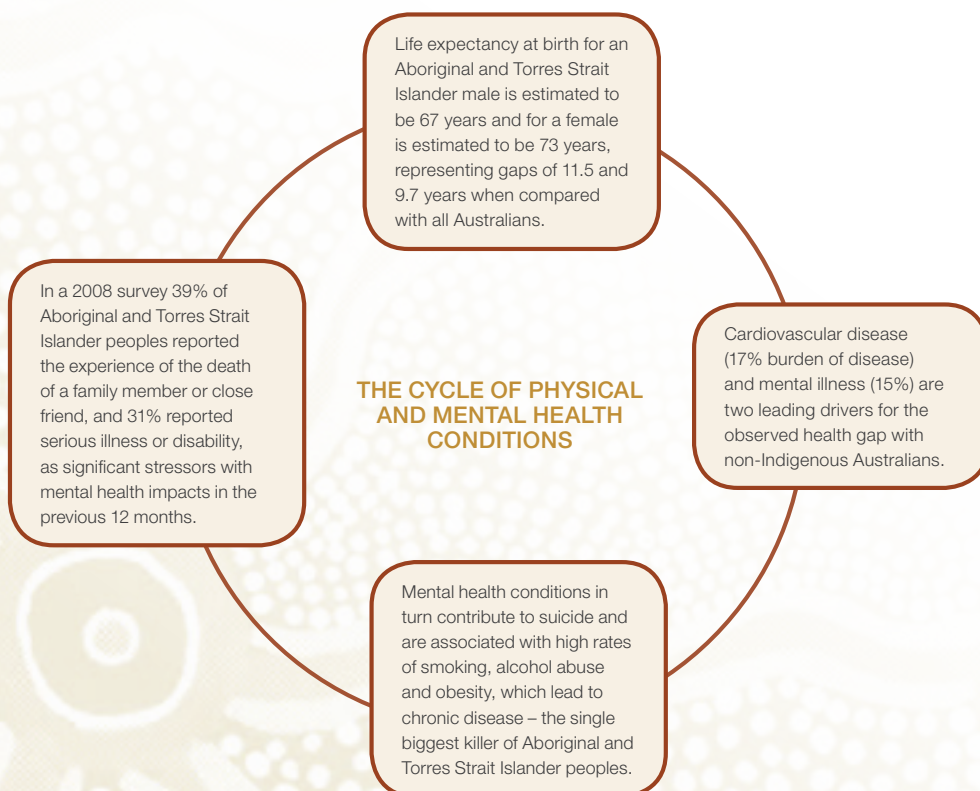
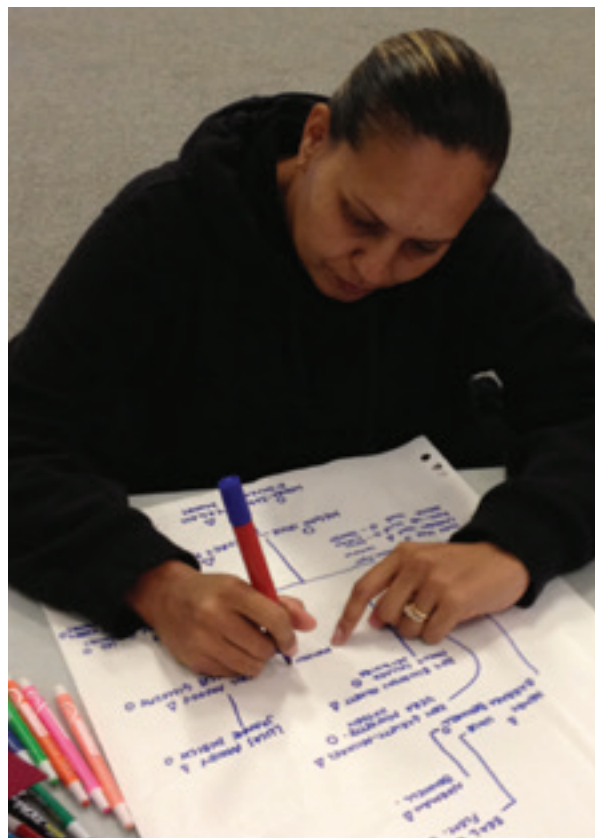
Overall, all indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage are poor and have been that way for some time. Indeed, the 2011 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* recognised:

*Across virtually all the indicators in this Report, there are wide gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. The Report shows that the challenge is not impossible – in a few areas, the gaps are narrowing. However, many indicators show that outcomes are not improving, or are even deteriorating. There is still a considerable way to go to achieve COAG's commitment to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p.3).*

Despite these grim statistics, there are great strengths and resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities. Any discussion about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and mental health needs to have at the core not only a recognition of the impacts of colonisation, but the proper engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and considerations of the cultural values, expressions, practices and knowledge systems of Aboriginal people across their rich diversity. In government policies and in the growing body of research, the importance of this is been acknowledged. For instance, in discussions about culture as a strategy to support strength, combat disadvantage and promote positive futures, the Office of the Arts states:

*Culture is an important factor to consider in policies and programs to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Moreover, the strengthening of Indigenous culture is a strategy to reduce disadvantage in itself, holding enormous potential for contributing to Closing the Gap outcomes. Keeping Indigenous culture strong is a necessary part of the solution to Indigenous disadvantage in Australia and to providing a positive future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (2013, p.1).*

The National Mental Health Commission provided a comprehensive overview of the interrelated nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, cultural, social and emotional wellbeing, and how this is shaped by the need for cultural recognition, the impacts of colonisation and ongoing social determinants in *A Contributing Life: the 2012 National Report Card On Mental Health and Suicide* (2012). The following figure demonstrates this.



National Mental Health Commission (2012, p.41)



### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health

High rates of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are commonly attributed to a complex set of factors. These include risk factors shared by the non-Indigenous population, social exclusion and disadvantage, and a broader set of social, economic and historic determinants that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health. A comprehensive national or regional strategy to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to restore their cultural, social and emotional wellbeing has yet to be implemented. Instead, communities have been left to manage the cumulative effects of colonisation and the contemporary determinants of health and wellbeing as best they can, for several generations.

Nationally, twice as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience serious psychological distress (32%) compared to non-Indigenous Australians (17%) (ABS & AIHW, 2010). Serious psychological distress among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tends to be correlated with higher exposure to stressful life events, which accompany the social determinants. Stressful life events include death of family members, serious illness, accidents, incarceration of family members, and crowded

housing. It is likely therefore, that the deeper inequities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country have produced dangerously high levels of psychological distress. When serious psychological distress exists among 30% of people in any community, it can easily spread and become 'community distress' (Kelly, Dudgeon, Gee & Glaskin, 2010). This risk is further heightened in remote and isolated communities, and amplified again by the interconnected nature of remote Aboriginal communities.

Being perennially identified as an 'at-risk' group within the broader mainstream population has resulted in the repeated delivery of selective or indicated strategies, where only small pockets of the most vulnerable receive short-term support. Evidence suggests that multiple short-term programs, which reach small numbers, will not achieve the critical balance required to restore cultural, social and emotional wellbeing across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Universal prevention strategies that promote strong, resilient communities and focus on restoring cultural, social and emotional wellbeing are needed. This needs to be done in such a way that each language group/nation and/or community is supported to achieve the goal of restoring cultural, social and emotional wellbeing at individual, family and community levels (Dudgeon et al., 2012).



Many key reports propose that cultural, social and emotional wellbeing needs to be recognised as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural concept and any program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should work from this paradigm. In the provision of mental health services and programs, rather than simply adapting and delivering models designed for mainstream Australians, cultural, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services or programs need to engage with the diversity of cultures and language groups and each group's understanding of cultural, social and emotional wellbeing and how best to achieve it (Kelly et al., 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2012).

Identifying the risk and protective factors that contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and its opposite, community distress and suicide, requires an in-depth knowledge of the historic, cultural and economic risk factors at play in each community. These are best known and understood by community residents themselves. Furthermore, while external change agents might be able to catalyze action or help to create spaces for people to undertake a change process, empowerment can only occur as communities create their own momentum, gain their own skills, nurture family and community strengths and advocate for their own changes.

The National Empowerment Project is an innovative Indigenous-led Project working directly with communities across Australia to address their cultural, social and emotional wellbeing. This is being achieved through the development of respectful partnerships with local communities to undertake participatory and community driven research identifying the distinctive and particular needs of each community; in order to develop Empowerment, Healing and Leadership programs to address those issues.

The design and methodology of this national Project is based on extensive research, previous community consultations and a pilot program undertaken across three communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Dudgeon et al., 2012). This research has identified that Empowerment, Healing and Leadership programs can be an effective way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves to address the social inequality and relative powerlessness that are considered major factors in their disadvantage and key social determinants of health. The focus of such programs on mentoring, restoring family relationships, enhancing parenting roles and communication skills, means they are proving particularly effective in restoring a community and facilitating the support and nurturing of their young people, which is a major factor in youth cultural, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide.

Both the Kimberly Project and National Empowerment have adopted a universal and selective intervention approach towards preventing suicide. This is in keeping with the principles and approaches held in the Living is for Everyone: (LIFE Framework) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) and the principles in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (Department of Health and Ageing, 2013).



## 2. Background: National Empowerment Project

## The Kimberley Empowerment Project

In June 2011 a *Community Consultation to Develop an Innovative, Culturally Responsive Leadership, Empowerment and Healing Program for Aboriginal People Living in the Kimberley Region Western Australia* (The Kimberley Empowerment Project) (Dudgeon et al., 2012) was implemented. The Kimberley Empowerment Project was initiated in response to the high rates of suicides in the region over a period of time. Between 1999 and 2006, there were 96 Aboriginal suicide deaths in the Kimberley, an average of one suicide per month over that period. These rates have not declined and in the past several years the number of completed suicides have continued at alarming rates, although the numbers are not yet confirmed because of the coronial reporting processes. In the Kimberley, suicide and self-inflicted injuries combined have been identified as the third most common cause of avoidable mortality for Aboriginal people in 1997-2007. Suicide accounts for twice the mortality burden compared to alcohol-related mortality.

Funds were received to undertake an extensive community consultation process in Broome, Halls Creek and Beagle Bay. The consultations explored what the community thought was needed to address suicide and other mental health issues in a long-term community based approach. The partners in this research included the School of Indigenous Studies and Telethon Institute of Child Health Research at The University of Western Australia and the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council (KAMSC). The research findings from the Kimberley Empowerment Project were published in the *Hear Our Voices Report*, (Dudgeon et al., 2012) and launched in August 2012 in Broome by visiting Emeritus Professor Michael Chandler, a leading academic in the area of Indigenous suicide prevention from Vancouver, Canada, whose work has great relevance (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). The Report highlighted a number of the key issues and findings affecting Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley region in relation to community distress and suicide.

Across the three communities where consultations took place, there was an overwhelming consensus that there is a real need to support individuals to change their lives. People spoke of needing to “build self-first” and to “make ourselves strong” and to focus on “rebuilding family”. Respondents said they wanted to learn how to talk to one another again, and to share and care for one another and to praise those who do good things for themselves and their communities. Of particular note was the high level of concern and urgency for the need to focus on young people who, it was felt, have lost their sense of connection to and respect for their culture, their family and themselves.

The consultation process also confirmed the need to ensure individual and community readiness to commence any types of healing and empowerment program. There was a concern that those in most need of such a course, especially young people, would be unable and/or unwilling to participate. The community consultations, literature review and program review demonstrated that to be effective, programs needed to be culturally based and incorporate traditional elements. This includes employing local people to work on interventions and training them in community development skills.

The Project also included a comprehensive review and analysis of some of the key literature and theory about healing, empowerment and leadership and relevant programs.

The literature review identified:

- Conceptions of empowerment, healing, and leadership.
- Why these concepts are considered effective in addressing the trauma and dysfunction experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- In what ways they build esteem, capacity and improve people’s cultural, social and emotional health and wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2012).

Key findings included:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander conceptions and understandings of healing, empowerment and leadership differ considerably to Western concepts. They are conceived holistically – involving physical, social, emotional, mental, environmental, cultural and spiritual wellbeing.
- Healing, empowerment and leadership are interconnected, and involve a process of decolonisation, recovery and renewal. Only through a healing journey can people become empowered and then be able to assist and lead others in their own journey. This empowerment occurs at the level of the individual, the family and the community.
- Healing and empowerment enable the development of a strong sense of self and a strong cultural identity, which are critical protective factors against community distress and suicide risk (Dudgeon et al., 2012).

A comprehensive review of relevant healing, empowerment and leadership programs in Australia was undertaken. The specific focus of the program review was to:

- Understand what programs or aspects of programs are working to facilitate greater individual and community wellbeing.
- Identify a set of core elements critical to the effectiveness of healing, empowerment and leadership programs for Aboriginal people (Dudgeon et al., 2012).



While no single approach or program can be made applicable across all communities, some common factors seemingly central to the effectiveness and longevity of many of these programs can and have been identified. Findings showed effective programs need to:

- Ensure a community's readiness for change.
- Facilitate community members owning and defining their problems and designing the solutions.
- Have legitimate community support.
- Be culturally appropriate and locally based.
- Take a community centred and strengths based approach.
- Employ and train local people.
- Be adequately resourced and sustainable.
- Ensure the role of Elders.
- Be flexible and delivered on country, where possible; and,
- Be able to meet peoples' different needs and stages in their healing journey.

Programs should focus on:

- Cultural, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Nurturing individual, family and community strengths.
- Self-worth.
- Problem solving and conflict resolution skills.
- Goal setting.
- Communication skills (especially with family); and,
- Mentoring (Dudgeon et al., 2012).

*Hear Our Voices* (Dudgeon et al., 2012) also identified a number of recommendations with some very practical steps to develop an Aboriginal led Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program in the Kimberley. Since then, the Kimberley Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program has been funded through KAMSC and has been delivered to around 100 people across the Kimberley. KAMSC has also commenced a train-the-trainer program to enable local community people to deliver the program now and into the future.

The Kimberley Empowerment Project responded to the suicide crisis in the Kimberley communities in a way that was holistic, strengths-based, and culturally and geographically appropriate. It aimed to enhance the capability and capacity of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take charge of their lives and strengthen their communities. Another aim was to address the range of social determinants that impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural, social and emotional wellbeing.

The Kimberley Empowerment Project in its pilot phase had signs of potential applicability across many regions and areas, and as such, the National Empowerment Research Project was initiated.

## The National Empowerment Project

The National Empowerment Project was initiated by the Department of Health and Ageing who identified a need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country to help lessen the level of community distress and work towards the prevention of suicide and self-harm. The National Empowerment Project is an innovative Project where research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and cultural, social and emotional wellbeing are recognised as having cultural underpinnings and needing to be undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It flows on from many formal and informal community consultations across the country about the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based understandings of mental health and the work required to be undertaken to unpack Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander meanings of strengthening cultural, social and emotional well-being by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves.

The Project aims to contribute towards strengthening the social and cultural bonds among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. The outcomes will investigate culturally appropriate concepts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, examined how the community perceives these and how they can be addressed and strengthened and transferred into meaningful programs.

The National Empowerment Project is comprised of Two Stages: Community Consultations and Program Development.

### Stage One: Community Consultations

Stage One involved an extensive community consultation process over nine sites across Australia. These sites were selected by the National Empowerment Project and the Department of Health and Ageing, and were identified based on initial community consultation as a way of exploring the communities readiness to engage as part of the Project and be able to develop and deliver a local Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program.

Stage One is a significant part of the empowerment program, as it involves gathering information from each individual community to establish what needs they require to facilitate themselves, their families and their communities to be empowered and healthy. This process is imperative to ensuring communities have ownership and control their own futures. This process in itself empowers the individual and promotes self worth and esteem and gives a sense of hope. This has already been completed in the Kimberley with proven outcomes.

Stage One aimed to:

- Build relationships with at least nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Capacity build local community people to undertake a participatory action research process.
- Train and support up to 18 Community Consultant Co-researchers in skills such as Project planning, scoping the community, interviewing, workshop data collection methods, data analysis, report writing, and Project dissemination strategies.
- Develop a national network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Community Consultant Co-researchers involved in empowerment, healing and leadership.

### Stage Two: Program Development

Stage Two involves the development of an empowerment program specifically for each local community and based on the outcomes of Stage One. The data gathered from Stage One has been analysed and put into meaningful information that is being used to specifically design an Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program for each of the sites, (outcomes from the consultations undertaken in each of the nine sites have showed that all sites require healing, empowerment and leadership programs).

Stage Two will:

- Assist local communities to develop an Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program for their own areas.
- Train local community consultants as co-researchers and facilitators to deliver the program.
- Produce training materials, facilitator workbooks and participant workbooks.
- Work with other experts in the field to develop an appropriate program that includes information for each local community about what they need to empower themselves, their families and the wider community.
- Work with local communities to plan and deliver a two day cultural, social and emotional wellbeing workshop as a preparatory module to the Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program.
- Assist local communities to write submissions and seek funds to ensure delivery of their programs.

### Methodology: The National Empowerment Project

Development of Aboriginal knowledges by Aboriginal people is fundamental to the National Empowerment Project. The usefulness of knowledge is a key characteristic of the Project, including findings from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspective so that practice and program development may be better informed. It utilised a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process which has been widely promoted and used as an effective process in working with Indigenous peoples in achieving better outcomes in a range of factors such as health, education and community building, (Bacon, Mendez & Brown, 2005; Radermacher & Sonn, 2007). Conventional research practices in many contexts have been perceived as ineffective and disempowering. Hence the National Empowerment Research Project used Participatory Action Research that 'gives voice' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

At every stage, research activities have been founded on a process of Aboriginal-led partnership between the researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The connections between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, particularly the local Community Consultant Co-researchers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are inseparable and as such, the National Empowerment Project is driven by community identified needs. The PAR process also enabled the research outcomes to be seen immediately at the community level, which is also central to the integrity of the National Empowerment Project.

The design of the National Empowerment Project has allowed time for respectful engaging relationships to be built with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to be developed. A National Advisory Committee to the Project was instrumental in ensuring that a strong relationship was in place that gives the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community an empowered and equal position in the research and oversaw and advised all stages of the process of the research Project. Further, the Project used Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander developed frameworks derived from the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2004-2009* (2004), that respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander based understandings of mental health and cultural, social and emotional wellbeing and also facilitated the inclusion of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges.

This framework described includes: self-determination; a community based approach; holistic perspectives; recognition of diversity and acknowledging the history of colonisation.

### **Self-determination**

Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health, particularly mental health issues (SHRG, 2004).

### **A Community Based Approach**

The underlying principle of all community development and empowerment approaches is that only solutions driven from within a 'risk community' will ultimately be successful in reducing community-based risk conditions. Ensuring the community drives the process is the most important factor if community outcomes are to be achieved. Discussions of successful strategies implemented to address community distress and suicide have highlighted the absolute necessity for the community to go through its own process of locating and taking ownership of any problems and vulnerabilities, and seeking solutions from within. This is critical where the social determinants of community distress and suicide have historical roots, which have contributed to a sense of powerlessness at an individual, family and community level. Solutions brought in by outsiders cannot address the risk factors or harness the protective factors, which lie within each community and within the domains of cultural, social and emotional wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2012).

### **Holistic Perspectives**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health should be viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health, as well as physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land, family and spirituality are central to well being. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, family and kinship must also be recognized (SHRG, 2004).

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diversity**

There is no single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and communities, as well as ways of living. There is great diversity within the group and also between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These differences need to be acknowledged and valued (SHRG, 2004).

### **Acknowledging a History of Colonisation**

The National Empowerment Project recognised that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, there are concerns about research and research methodologies as continuing the process of colonisation in determining and owning knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These concerns have highlighted how research is inextricably linked with European colonisation. Western knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, played a role in oppressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars propose that a central issue in contemporary times for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is to challenge the dominant discourses about us and to reclaim Indigenous cultural knowledge and identity. It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers/scholars engage in producing cultural knowledge with local groups in appropriate ways, as this furthers cultural reclamation and Indigenous self-determination (SHRG, 2004).

### **Principles: The National Empowerment Project**

A set of principles was developed with the Community Consultant Co-researchers for the Project. These principles were informed by the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation's program principles (2009) and the Department of Health and Ageing's *Supporting Communities to Reduce the Risk of Suicide* (2013). These were the philosophical underpinnings of the Project team and guided the work we undertook. The following six principles informed the National Empowerment Project:

1. Social Justice and Human Rights.
2. Community Ownership.
3. Community Capacity Building.
4. Resilience Focused.
5. Building Empowerment and Partnerships.
6. Respect and Central Inclusion of Local Knowledges.

### **Social Justice and Human Rights**

We, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have rights. We know and recognise our human rights and attaining social justice is part of our ongoing healing process. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to be treated as equals, to have cultural difference recognised and to be respected. We also have the right to have a voice and to be heard.

### **Community Ownership**

Our work must be grounded in community, that is, owned and guided by community. Our work needs to be sustainable, strength based and needs to build capacity around local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Our work should be a process that involves: Acknowledging what the people of local communities are saying; and acknowledging community values and beliefs. All mobs in a 'community' need to have leadership to control their lives and have pride over what belongs to them.

Our work will share learnings with all those involved and these should be promoted in other communities.

Our Projects should be sustainable both in terms of building community capacity and in terms of not being 'one off'; they must endure until the community is empowered. Part of our mandate is to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and community members with tools to develop their own programs.

### **Community Capacity Building**

There will be an ongoing cycle of developing, training, supporting, and engaging community members as partners. We will ensure that we feedback, mentor and support our communities when we collect information. We will remember and understand that this project has started from grass roots up and we need to keep the wheel turning with a continuous feedback.

### **Resilience Focused**

*It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment (SHRG, 2004, p.9).* There is great strength in each person and in the whole of our communities. From the life experiences and strengths of our ancestors, our Elders, past and present, and from our own life experiences, there is wisdom and strength. We will nurture and pass our knowledges and strengths for the next generations. Our work will enable us to develop understandings and skills that will strengthen the leadership of our communities.

### **Building Empowerment and Partnerships**

We will develop respectful partnerships with local community organisations in whatever area we work in. Genuine partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and other providers will ensure that we support and enhance existing local programs, not duplicating or competing with them. Our relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as key partners will be respectful, genuine, supportive and will include advocacy.

### **Respect for Local Knowledge**

We will respect local communities, local ways of being and doing. Local community knowledges include local culture, stories, customs, language and land. We will also have awareness of the differences within and between the communities themselves. We will respect local knowledge and local ways of being and doing. Our work will ensure that the local knowledges of communities are respected and heard. We will work in ways that respect and value our community and will work to ensure that their goals are foremost. We will work towards the self-determination of our communities.

### **Project Sites: The National Empowerment Research Project**

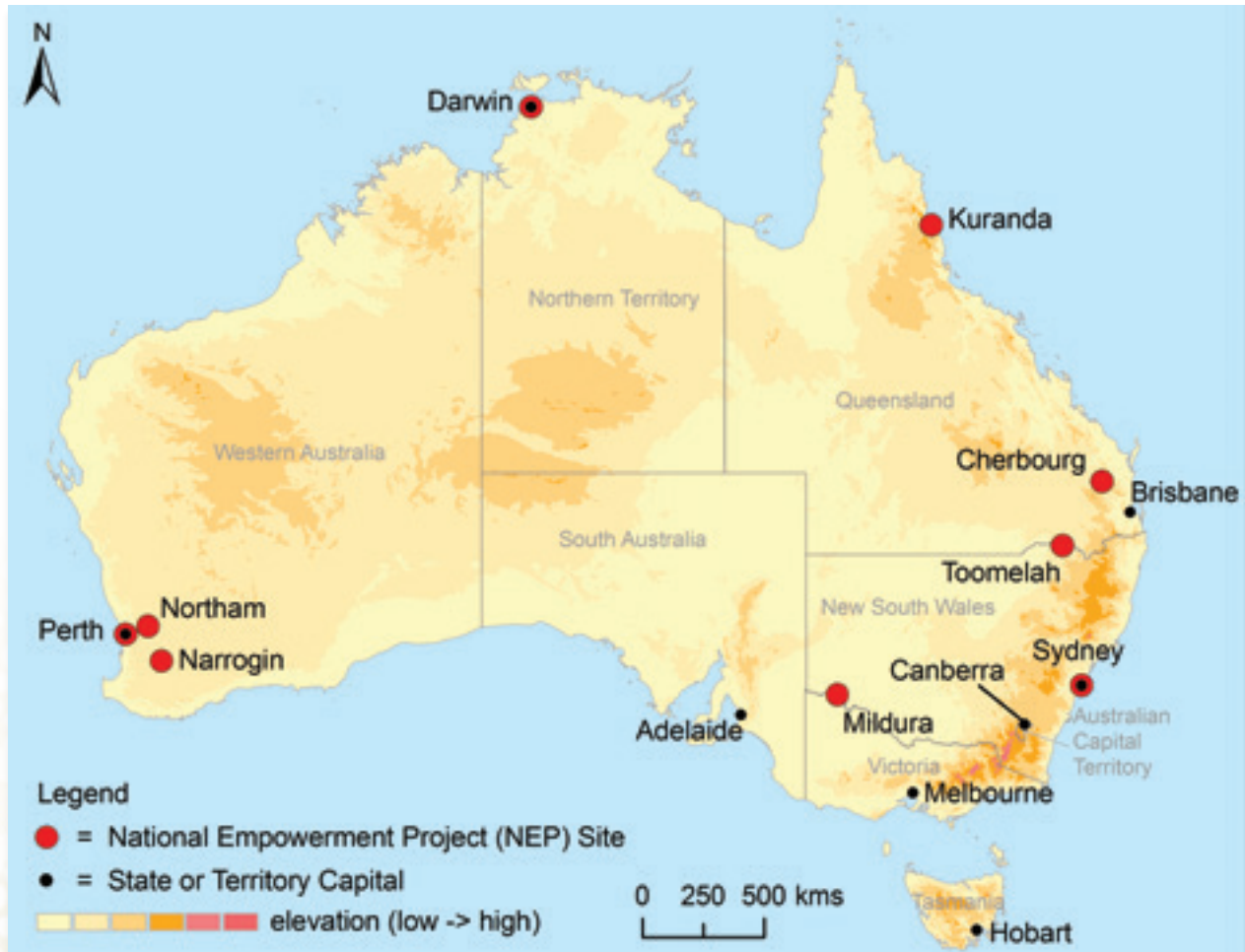
The National Empowerment Project has been working with local partner organisations in nine sites across Australia. These sites were selected by the National Empowerment Project team, the Advisory Committee and the Department of Health and Ageing and formerly identified based on initial community consultation as a way of exploring the communities readiness to engage as part of the Project and be able to develop and deliver a local Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program.

**The Site, Partner Organisations and Community Consultant Co-researchers that participated in the National Empowerment Project**

NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT SITE	PARTNER ORGANISATION	COMMUNITY CONSULTANT CO-RESEARCHERS
Perth, Western Australia	Langford Aboriginal Association Inc.	Angela Ryder and Chevienna Hansen
Northam/Toodyay, Western Australia	Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation – Auspice Agency Communicare Inc.	Tjalaminu Mia and Dezeræe Miller
Narrogin, Western Australia	Marr Mooditj Foundation	Venessa McGuire
Darwin, Northern Territory	Danila Dilba Aboriginal Health Service	Karen Geer and Shane Russell
Kuranda, Queensland	Mona Mona Bulmba Aboriginal Corporation	William (Biri) Duffin and Barbara Riley
Cherbourg, Queensland	Graham House Community Centre	Kate Hams and Bronwyn Murray
Sydney, New South Wales	National Centre of Indigenous Excellence	Donna Ingram and Nathan Taylor
Toomelah, New South Wales	Goomeroi Aboriginal Corporation	Glynis McGrady and Malcolm Peckham
Mildura, Victoria	Mallee District Aboriginal Services	Terry Brennan and Andy Charles



The following map highlights the sites that are selected and participating in the National Empowerment Research Project:



#### Local Partner Organisations and Community Consultant Co-researchers Secondary

To ensure that there was strong local ownership and leadership for the National Empowerment Project on the ground it was important to identify and engage with local partner organisations within each of the participating sites. This also ensured that the Project would have carriage and support for its ultimate development and ongoing implementation.

A set of criteria was developed to assist with the selection of a suitable local partner organisation, and these were as follows:

1. Strong presence of a functional Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) and or Registered Training Organisation (RTO).
2. Population significant enough to obtain the minimum number of interviews required as part of the Project.
3. Communities where suicide is evident at escalating rates.
4. Possible connections already established in the community.
5. Geographical diversity across urban, rural and remote areas.

In addition to the above criteria, it was felt strongly by the Project Team that the local partner organisation should also be selected based on the following additional criteria:

1. Stable governance, management and operations.
2. Existing capacity to develop and implement the National Empowerment Project.
3. Proximity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population locally.
4. Ability to work in a transparent partnership with UWA and the National Empowerment Project team.

### Community Consultant Co-researchers

A unique feature of having a local partner organisation involved as part of the project was the assistance provided in identifying and or recruiting locally suitable Community Consultant Co-researchers. These individuals assist the Project team with the development and implementation of stages one and two of the National Empowerment Research Project.

Two Community Consultant Co-researchers were identified in each of the Project sites with a preference where possible to have one male and one female consultant to cater for the diversity within community(s) and the need to have gender balance as appropriate. It should be noted that not all sites were able to identify suitable consultants of both genders and so, in some of the sites, two female consultants were selected.

Similar to the identification and selection of the local partner organisation, the Project had identified a number of criteria for the role of Community Consultant Co-researcher. These criteria were as follows:

1. Demonstrated ability and willingness to enact the values and principles of the National Empowerment Project.
2. Local accepted community member.
3. Demonstrated knowledge about the local community and experienced networking ability.
4. Broad understanding of conducting research and ability to conduct research interviews, workshops and focus groups.
5. Excellent communication skills and ability to lead and facilitate local consultation and workshops.
6. Ability to work within a set timeframe.

### Community Consultant Co-researchers Training

A total of eleven local Community Consultants (two from Darwin, Northam/Toodyay, Toomelah, Perth, one from Kuranda, with apologies from Cherbourg and Sydney) were brought to Perth for a five-day training program from the 10th to the 14th September 2012.

The training was held at a local community organisation, Marr Mooditj Foundation. The training program covered topics such as basic Project management, research and research methodologies, particularly participatory action research, research ethics, collecting data and how to do this through one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. Making sense of the data through thematic analysis and reporting the outcomes was also covered in the first three days.





The National Empowerment Project team and the Kimberley Empowerment Project team developed and delivered the training program. This was an important part of the Project in terms of community capacity building, empowerment and local knowledge transference. The original Community Consultant Co-researchers from the Kimberley Empowerment Project shared their experiences with the next set of Community Consultant Co-researchers. Further, in one of the sessions, guests from a local Nyoongar research group led by Dr Michael Wright from the Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research presented their work and how they were undertaking their research Project from a community based, cultural approach.

The last two training days involved Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training delivered by Aboriginal professional trainers. Participants received a certificate for completion of the Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training.

As well as providing an overview of the National Empowerment Project and how to conduct the community consultations/research, significant workshops took place about the protocols for the Project and what needed to be in the interview guides.

An evaluation of the training program was conducted. Most participants rated all elements of the training highly and overall comments included:

*Excellent. I feel very honoured to be part of this Project process.*

*All facilitators presented very well. Delivery was excellent.*

*Overall I was impressed and enjoyed the training but feel that the beginning of the training was a bit of a blur, because of the lack of understanding about our exact role, but as the week progressed, it all fell into place.*

A *Community Consultation Co-researchers Training Kit* was developed for all Community Consultant Co-researchers to assist them to undertake the community consultations. This included general instructions for the consultants, as well as the ethics paperwork they needed for community participants to complete such as information sheets, consent forms and photograph consent forms (for focus group and stakeholder workshops only). Community Consultant Co-researchers were supported throughout the community consultations with regular visits, telephone contact and peer support provided via a website and email list.

## Conclusion

In order to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing, major challenges exist in terms of delivering programs that meet the needs of community. Working with community is critical where the social determinants of community distress and suicide have historical roots, which have contributed to a sense of powerlessness at an individual, family and community level. Solutions brought in by outsiders cannot address the risk factors or harness the protective factors, which lie within each community within the domains of cultural, social and emotional wellbeing. Rather, programs that enable communities to develop effective leadership and the ability to motivate and encourage people to embark on a journey of recovery are key to achieving effective and sustainable outcomes (Dudgeon et al., 2012).

By having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research collaboration with partnerships established in local areas, the National Empowerment Project represents a significant change in approach. It is also groundbreaking in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methodologies and community based understandings of mental health and wellbeing. The emerging body of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health from this Project is significant in itself and is intended to make a substantial contribution to the evidence base and content of community based programs aimed at improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, and cultural, social and emotional well-being. Ultimately, it is anticipated that the outcomes of the National Empowerment Research Project will demonstrate the need for community based Empowerment, Healing and Leadership programs that restore the cultural, social and emotional wellbeing of each community by enhancing the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA.



ANNO QUINTO  
EDWARDI SEPTIMI REGIS,  
XIV.

### 3. Background:

## Northam/Toodyay Noongar Boodjar

*(As amended by No. 42 of 1911.)\**  
for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal  
inhabitants of Western Australia.

[Reserved, 23rd December, 1905.]

[Royal assent proclaimed, 27th April, 1906.]

**B**E it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of Western Australia, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1. This Act may be cited as the *Aborigines Act, 1905*, and shall come into operation on a day to be fixed by proclamation.† Short title.

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,— Interpretation.

“Aboriginal institution” means and includes any mission, reformatory, orphanage, school, home, station, reserve, or other institution for the benefit, protection, or care of the aboriginal or half-caste inhabitants of the State, and in receipt of any annual or other subsidy or grant from the Government.

“Chief Protector” means the Chief Protector of Aborigines appointed under this Act.

“Department” means the Aborigines Department.

\* Assented to 16th February, 1911. † Proclaimed by ordinance 20th April, 1906. See Government Gazette, 27th April, 1906.

## Introduction

### Aboriginal People in the South West of Western Australia

Aboriginal Australians have histories spanning well over 40 000 years. In that time Noongar have occupied and managed the South West of Western Australia (WA) (Hallam, 1981). *Noongar* is the generic name that describes Aboriginal people whose ancestors originally occupied and continue to occupy the whole South West (Collard & Harben, 2010). Noongar Elder Reverend Sealín Garlett explains the importance of Country to Noongar people:

*Boodjar* means land to Aboriginal people. It really is the sense of identity and sense of belonging. This is my country where I belong. This is **demangarmarn**, my grandmother and grandfather's land. This is their land where their spirits move now. **Boorda** or later on, this is going to be the responsibility of my children and my children's children, their home and this place will always be linked to their spirit (Collard, 2002).

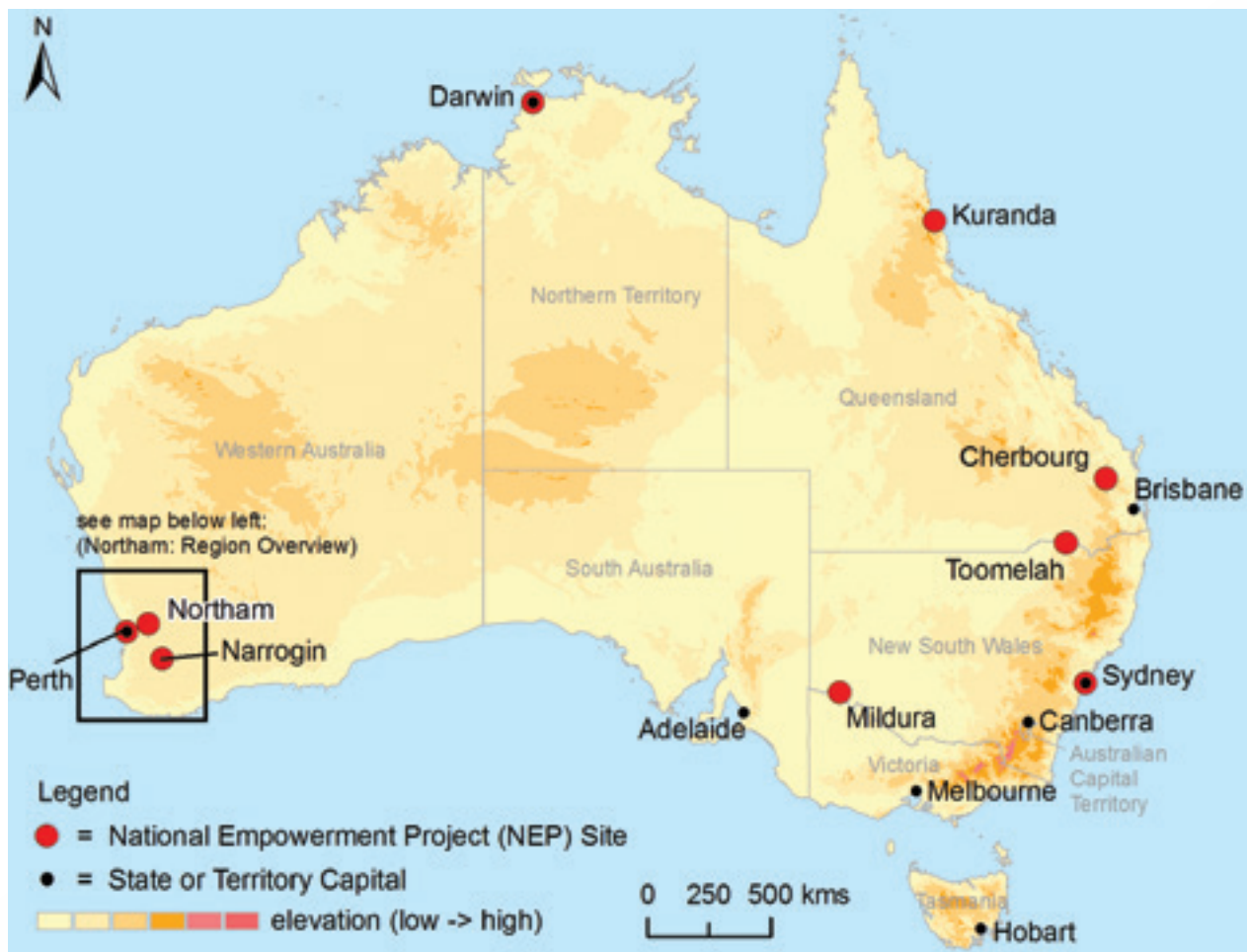
Figure 1: Map of *Noongar Boodjar the Peoples Land* (SWALSC, 2010-2012 adapted from Tindale, 1974)



The word *Noongar* is commonly accepted as meaning 'person' or 'people' (Mountford & Collard, 2000; SWALSC, 2010-2012). *Nyungar*, *Nyoongar* and *Nyoongah* are range of other spellings that are in common use today. The Noongar language changes a little as you move through the South West, and different Noongar people have described their regional dialectic groups using terms including *Amangu*, *Yuat*, *Whadjuk*, *Binjareb*, *Wardandi*, *Balardong*, *Nyakinyaki*, *Wilman*, *Ganeang*, *Wirloomin*, *Bibulman*, *Kwetjman*, *Mineng*, *Goreng*, *Wudjari*, *Ngokgurring* and *Njunga* (Tindale, 1974; Curr 1886; Scott & Roberts, 2011).

Noongar responsibilities, beliefs and values have been based on the same principles since *kura* (a long time ago). As demonstrated by the decision of Justice Wilcox in September 2006 that native title existed over the Perth metropolitan region (Host & Owens, 2009), today there is a growing awareness that Noongar communities maintain cultural capital, including intergenerational links to language, locality, story and song, which demonstrates the ongoing connection to Noongar *boodjar*, the peoples' country. A number of prominent organisations in the South West of Western Australia actively promote and maintain Noongar language, culture and heritage (Wirloomin, 2011; SWALSC, 2010-2012; WANALA, 2013; National Trust, 2012).

Map of Australia: Northam/Toodyay (National Empowerment Project Site)



## Perth

Located in the South West coast of WA, Perth is Australia's most isolated capital city. It is Australia's fourth-largest capital, but Perth's population is quickly growing due to its strong industrial economy (Robertson, 2011). The 2011 ABS population data indicates that Greater Perth has a total population of 1,728,867 with 27,105 (1.56%) of whom identify as Indigenous peoples (ABS, 2011a). The Greater Perth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population represents 38.9% of the State's total Indigenous population (ABS, 2011a).

Perth was the initial site of British colonial expansion into Western Australia. From 1829, the first fifty years of colonisation in the South West coincided with a drastic reduction in the Noongar population (ALSWA, 1995). Noongar Elder Tom Bennell discussed the colonisation of Perth:

*All this country belonged to the Noongars, and the white people come into this country and what did they get, nothing for it. They just took it from them ... The Noongar name is **Birrit**. See, the white people called it Perth (Collard, 1986).*

In the ensuing period until the mid 1970s, the Noongar and other Aboriginal people of Western Australia endured a range of racially discriminatory government legislation that entrenched intergenerational disadvantage and facilitated a process of cultural denigration, functioning to separate Aboriginal peoples from family, community, culture and country while actively discouraging pride in Aboriginal identity and cultural heritage (Haebich, 1988; 2000; SWALSC, 2010-2012).

Western Australian Government Acts of 1886, 1905, 1936 and 1945 have drastically restricted the potential for Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia to engage in gainful employment, own property, move freely and without interference by government officials, raise their own children and have contact with their immediate and extended families (Haebich, 1988; 2000; SWALSC, 2010-2012). In recent times, many Indigenous authors have examined the effects of these discriminatory policies, for example, Dudgeon and colleagues conclude:

*The Western Australian **Aborigines Act 1905** has special connotations today because of its gross erosion of rights, resulting in forcible removal of children and internment of Aboriginal people in bleak reserves, to live in servitude and despair. It marked the start of a period of formidable surveillance and oppression of Aboriginal people. The **WA Aborigines Act 1905** made the Chief Protector of Aborigines the legal guardian of every Aboriginal person and of 'half-caste' children. At the local level, police constables or pastoralists were delegated powers as Protectors of Aborigines. 'Half-caste' children were to be removed from their families so that they could have 'opportunities for a better life', away from the contaminating influence of Aboriginal environments. Missions and reserves were established. The Chief Protector also had the power to remove any Aboriginal person from one reserve or district to another and to be kept there. Aboriginal people were forbidden from entering towns without permission and the co-habitation of Aboriginal women with non-Aboriginal men was prohibited. Local Protectors implemented these new regulations (Dudgeon et al., 2010, p.30).*

Successive years of racist Aboriginal policy-making based on ideas of segregation and assimilation inevitably resulted in the near universal marginalisation of Western Australia's Aboriginal population. These policies impacted heavily upon Noongar people in the South West of Western Australia. In 1975, a federal parliamentary committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1975) indicated an appreciation of the negative intergenerational effects of these policies. Given this historical context, many Aboriginal people in Western Australia, including many Noongar people, did not grow up with opportunities to develop a strong economic base or acquire and maintain their ancestral language, cultural practices and intergenerational family networks.

Although *Noongar* language is considered ‘endangered’ (AIATSIS et al., 2005), the *Noongar* population has grown throughout the recent decades to well over 30,000 people, mostly living in the South West (Green, 2009; SWALSC, 2010-2012). However, Perth is also home to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents from all over Australia. Demographic data indicates that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Perth and the Southwest is heavily skewed toward the younger generations, the median age being 21 years (ABS, 2011a), which poses both challenges and opportunities for policy-makers.

### Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in WA

Many have concluded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples have largely ‘lost their culture and spirituality’ through exposure to generations of Christian beliefs and doctrines and the Western Australian Government racial policy influence. At first glance this may appear the case. However in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 census, 24% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who responded to the question about their religion, 24% reported they had no religious affiliation, compared with 21% of the non-Indigenous population. Among those surveyed only 1% reported affiliation with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional religion, with this being highest in very remote areas (6%) than in all other areas (less than 1%). In contrast, 73% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population reported an affiliation with a Christian denomination. On the face of it one may assume that Indigenous people have replaced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions with Christianity.

However, it is important to be cautious and look further. The evidence is overall that young people’s involvement in religion is declining. In 2011 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples were much less likely to identify themselves as following a religion than they were in 1976 (29% having no religion in 2011, compared to 12% in 1976) (ABS, 2013). This is consistent with the global pattern of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples rejecting the authority and relevance of the church (Englebretson, 1999). However, this does not mean that they reject the idea of spiritual experience. Indeed, according to Webber (2002, p.40), the majority of ‘*young people Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples believe in God, or some kind of supernatural force but do not see the church as important or helpful in expressing their spirituality*’. So it is therefore worth accepting the much broader definitions of spirituality evident in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophical and sociological traditions today.

Northam: Region Overview



Northam: Detail



There is also mounting evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples are very actively involved in 'culture' in Western Australia. ABS data from 2008 demonstrate very high levels of involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceremony, with 24% of those 15 years or over claiming they had attended an Indigenous ceremony in the 12 months prior to interview in 2002. Almost half (47%) had been to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funeral. Those in remote areas were three times as likely to attend a ceremony compared to those in non-remote areas (ABS, 2011b). In the 2008 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 65% of children and young peoples claim to have been to one or more selected cultural events (fishing and hunting, ceremonies and NAIDOC events) in the past year (ABS, 2011b).

Almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples (98%) said that they would like to participate in cultural events and cultural activities. Of these:

- 22% did so at least once a month
- 29% did so several times a year
- 16% did so once a year
- 15% did so less than once a year
- 17% had never attended cultural events/activities (ABS, 2011b).

According to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (ABS, 2008), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures has a great influence. For example, in 2008 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples aged 15 years and over and 13% of children (3–14 years) spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages. There is also evidence that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are identifying with a clan, tribal or language group, increasing from 54% in 2002 to 62% in 2008. Furthermore, in 2008 72% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15 years or over reported that they recognised a particular area as their homelands or traditional country. According to this study 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 63% of people aged 15 years or over were involved in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in 2008. In 2008, almost one-third (31%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had spent at least one day a week with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leader or Elder (ABS, 2011c).

The experiences and actions of this growing group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will undoubtedly shape the future for Noongar young people in and around Greater Perth, Northam/Toodyay, Narrogin and the wider South West of Western Australia.

## Northam

Northam is a town in WA situated at the confluence of the Avon and Mortlock Rivers, about 97 kilometers north east of Perth. This area is home to almost 100 culturally significant sites for Noongar people, including Burlong Pool (SWALSC, 2010-2012).

Northam was founded as a town in 1833, shortly after the establishment of the Swan River Colony, and endured a reported period of frontier violence until around 1841 (Garden, 1979). Noongar people in the region worked in agriculture and as intermediaries while fighting to maintain cultural practices under the pressure of colonisation and growing poverty through the 1800s (SWALSC, 2010-2012). In 1933 the Western Australian Premier authorized the entire Aboriginal population of Northam to be moved to Moore River Native Settlement by train (Haebich, 1988). In May 1940 the town of Northam was declared an area in which it would be unlawful for unemployed Aboriginal people to reside (SWALSC 2010-2012). Despite this, many Noongar people from Northam served in the armed forces through the 1940s (SWALSC, 2010-2012).

Northam received national media coverage in 2009 after its police arrested and detained a 12-year-old Aboriginal boy on charges of receiving stolen goods, the quantity of which amounted to one small chocolate (ABC News November 18, 2009). Reportage of this incident highlighted some of the contemporary issues facing young Aboriginal people in the area. The total population of Northam is 6,580 approximately 467 of whom identify as Indigenous peoples, the median age being 15 years (ABS, 2011b). Most Indigenous people in Northam identify as Noongar.

The 2011 ABS population data indicate Northam has a total population of 6,580 of which 468 (7.1%) are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Avon district incorporates a number of Noongar language groups, including Whadjuck which extends along the Swan River inland to beyond Wongan Hills; at Northam, Toodyay, York, Perth; south along the coast to Pinjarra (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, n.d.). As indicated in the Consultant Co-researcher's Report, Ballardong Noongar peoples are said to be the First Peoples of Country in the area.

### Local Programs/Services

In Northam, there are various programs for Aboriginal people that are provided/delivered by several major organisations. These also refer to other organisations in the town and Perth – however, it is not known if these organisations also confer with each other on the statistics of the programs they individually run (service deliverables/outcomes).

It has been suggested by Ballardong Elders and those who work in the various service provider agencies including schools/TAFE that it would be more conducive to a fuller picture of the health and well-being status of Ballardong Noongar peoples in the town if all agencies were to meet and share some of the outcomes of their individual programs (at least twice per year).

Though there is collaboration across some of the community programs, this is not enough and to bring about major change and more positive outcomes, there needs to be more cross-service, cross-program engagement.

There is a culture of competing for funding between agencies for government monies, and this is no different in Northam. Most funding submissions across a range of agencies have either a major Aboriginal component or smaller components that strengthen applications, however in the case of Northam, it is not clear where this occurs. There is also lack of clarity around:

- Which agencies have high success rates with their programs and why?
- What are the numbers of men, women and children included in submissions?
- If the programs have cultural themes and Aboriginal Elders/community and culturally appropriate workers/ members participating in facilitating roles, and programs that are aligned with what Aboriginal people want.
- How long the programs run and, if they are re-current, what are the timeframes?
- Whether they are evaluated by agencies on a regular basis and, more importantly, if Aboriginal people participate in the evaluations and if they understand what they are being asked?



### Toodyay

Though Northam was the nominated NEP site, consultations also took place with Aboriginal people in Toodyay, a small town approximately 28 kms from Northam. Toodyay also has an Aboriginal and colonial historical background, where various Aboriginal family groups who have family bloodline links to Northam and the Wheatbelt region. They are very proud of their homelands, town, cultural history and what the town has and is achieving for Aboriginal peoples and their families in the region.

Some of the Aboriginal families now living in Toodyay have moved from Perth and their places of employment and have again settled back in country, as well as secured professional positions in the various agencies established in the town.

They have also reinstated themselves back in the community across a wide range of community services including youth affairs and cultural initiatives and would like to see further cultural programs initiated and run from the town.

They are also interested in future collaborations around healthcare and cultural healing with other Aboriginal service providers including Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation – Auspice Agency Communicare Inc. (NEP Partners) and their cultural recovery/cultural identity and pride community reinvestment and cultural healing programs.



Many of the Aboriginal families living in Northam and Toodyay are 'Sister Kate's Homees' and their descendants (Aboriginal peoples with connections to the Sister Kate's Home where a high number of children were taken from their parents and families and placed there under the Native Welfare Act, are now part of the Stolen Generations in Western Australia) were housed), or are part of other Stolen Generations groups.

### Conclusion

Aboriginal people in Greater Perth, Northam, Narrogin and the broader South West of Western Australia face the challenge of maintaining community cultural, social and emotional wellbeing while dealing with a legacy of institutional marginalisation (Haebich, 1988; 2000). Noongar resilience and ongoing connection to country and culture remain powerful resources to draw upon today and into the future (Collard and Harben, 2010; Scott & Roberts, 2011). Evidence that a growing number of Noongar people, young and old, are identifying with clan and country, spending time with Elders and participating in cultural activities (ABS, 2011c) is encouraging, and must be nurtured by ongoing institutional policy and practice designed to redress the social and economic imbalances which characterise contemporary Australian statistics (ABS, 2006).





## 4. Project Methodology



The aim of the National Empowerment Project was to consult with nine communities across Australia to identify the ways in which an Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program might assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deal with the many issues and factors that contribute to community distress and suicide.

The NEP was led and overseen by a research team (Pat Dudgeon, Adele Cox, and Sabrina Swift) who were responsible for the day-to-day management of the Project and its deliverables. The research team also provided support to each of the nine participating communities and the Community Consultant Co-researchers working at these sites.

Two highly skilled local Community Consultant Co-researchers were engaged through local partner organisations at each site. Their role was to undertake a comprehensive community consultation and to develop and deliver a two day cultural, social and emotional wellbeing program in each of their communities.

Consultations took place with individuals, families, communities and relevant stakeholders and local service providers in all nine sites across the country. These included Perth, Narrogin, Northam/Toodyay, Darwin, Kuranda, Cherbourg, Toomelah, Sydney and Mildura. These sites represented a diversity of language groups, community history and local issues.

## Research Approach

The Project used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process as was used with the *Hear Our Voices* Project (Dudgeon et al., 2012). This demands a community driven and inclusive approach. PAR is appropriate as it:

*...involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts, which make sense of it... Participatory action research is not just research, which is hoped that will be followed by action. It is action, which is researched, changed and re-researched, with the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them – whether that is to implement a central policy or an organisational or service change. Instead it tries to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be helped, determined the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry (Wadsworth, 1998, p.9-10).*

In Australia there are concerns amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about research that is being conducted in Indigenous communities. From past experience, research has rarely served the interests of or included in genuine ways the marginalized people it involves. There remain concerns whether current practices are serving to continue the process of European colonisation, as research has been frequently conducted by non-Indigenous Australians with little benefit to communities (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Oxenham, 1999; Rigney, 2001; Nakata, 1997). Numerous Indigenous scholars and researchers, including Smith (1999) are challenging western concepts and paradigms that have been deployed to understand Indigenous peoples and their issues. There has been a movement that demands the proper inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the beginning to end of any research activity (Dudgeon, Kelly & Walker, 2010).

The NHMRC Values and Ethics – Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (2003) and the updated NHMRC Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) have evolved to a stronger engagement of Indigenous people in research. These Guidelines explicitly acknowledge the role of research in colonisation and assimilation (NHMRC, 2003). These direct researchers to, 'make particular effort to deal with the perception of research held by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as an exploitative exercise' and, 'demonstrate through ethical negotiation, conduct and dissemination of research that they are trustworthy and will not repeat the mistakes of the past' (NHMRC, 2003, p.18).

PAR includes participants in 'all the thinking and decision making that generates, designs, manages and draws conclusions from the research' (Reason, 1994, p.325). By using a PAR process, the NEP required Aboriginal people and experiences as a centrally important inclusion and it aimed to strengthen cultural reclamation, The engagement of community through partnerships with organisations and employment of Community Consultant Co-researchers as part of the research team was critical for a number of reasons; to ensure Aboriginal cultural knowledge and experience, to engage in a shared research journey for the creation and articulation of Aboriginal knowledges to capacity build local community and people, and to produce outcomes that would be of benefit to the communities. PAR is further defined as *...inquiry by ordinary people acting as researchers to explore questions in their own lives, recognise their resources, and produce knowledge, and take action to overcome inequalities, often in solidarity with external supporters* (Dickson, 2000 in Wenitong et al., 2004, p.5). Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) have argued that conventional methods of conducting research are not only disempowering but ineffective as well. PAR enables communities to develop knowledge that can be useful to

people and directly improve their lives by producing valued and concrete outcomes, and further, to encourage people to construct their own knowledge, separate to that which is imposed upon them, as a means of empowering them and bringing about social change.

The NEP aimed to empower Aboriginal local people and to give them a 'voice', so it was essential that a methodology was used that would ensure this to happen. The key components of PAR are that:

- It views participants as research partners and their perceptions and knowledge are at the heart of the knowledge generated; it views them as being the experts of their own cultures.
- It is qualitative, reflective and cyclic and focuses on developing people's critical awareness and their ability to be self-reflective.
- It is concerned with concepts of power and powerlessness in society and aims to motivate people to engage in social action.
- It values the opinions and experiences of marginalised groups, which are predominantly oppressed in society.

PAR ensures that a transformative process is facilitated with real and concrete outcomes for participants.

### Data Collection

The NEP used a qualitative research process in the collection of data because this form of data takes into consideration the complexity of a person's experience, situation and gives them the space to fully express themselves and their stories. Three hundred and seventy one participants took part in the Project across the nine sites, where they participated in a series of one-on-one interviews, focus groups and workshops. To gather information that could be used for programs, the research team were mindful that participants from across the groups that make up Aboriginal communities should be included. Hence, the consultations involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples (18-25), the elderly, women and men and small numbers of non-Indigenous people (e.g. those who worked in the stakeholder services and programs). In Northam and Toodyay, a total of 40 people were consulted.

During the one-on-one interviews, workshops and focus groups the Community Consultant Co-researchers asked the participants to consider several questions:

- What are the issues affecting you, your families and your communities?
- What do we need to do to make ourselves, our families, and our communities stronger?

As a means of fully engaging in discussions, the participants were asked to consider the following topics:

- What participants understood about empowerment, healing and leadership.
- What the concepts of empowerment, healing and leadership meant to them.
- What people believed was required for an effective Empowerment, Healing and Leadership program.

One significant outcome of the workshops and the focus groups were suggestions for future program(s) that could be delivered in the communities as well as the content (e.g. topics, delivery methods) of these programs that participants viewed as being particularly relevant.

In terms of analysing the information that was gathered, a thematic analysis approach was used. This involved gathering together the information from all sources and forming meaningful groups of themes from it. Powerful meanings and issues emerged from the themes, in particular the issues negatively affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The collection of information or the collective voice of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples builds a strong perspective to the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This information when viewed alongside the previous literature review (as part of the Kimberley Empowerment Project) clearly provides a way forward, articulating what the issues are and how these need to be addressed in culturally appropriate ways that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take control of their own destinies.

## Community Consultations

The local partner organisation in Northam/Toodyay was Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation (Auspice Agency Communicare Inc.), which is made up of Home Kids and their descendants and is set up to assist the Sister Kate's Home Kids and their families. The Aboriginal Corporation provides cultural healing and advocacy relief service information to Homee families in WA and nationally. SKHKAC has also developed their programs around the 'Give Back' principle and now deliver their cultural healing and community engagement programs to other Stolen Generations groups and the wider Aboriginal community.

Two local Aboriginal Community Consultant Co-researchers were specifically employed to:

- Conduct local community consultations to identify cultural, social and emotional wellbeing issues at the local community level and identify ways to reduce community distress and suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Prepare and facilitate local community workshops and interviews with community members.
- With the National Empowerment Team collate and analyse responses and feedback from community workshops and interviews.
- With the National Empowerment Team provide written reports on community consultation processes and outcomes for each site.
- Assist with the development of local community empowerment program (local training modules and resources).
- Report project developments and findings back to the community and stakeholders to ensure maximum community engagement and ownership of the project.
- Prepare and deliver a two day cultural, social and emotional wellbeing empowerment and leadership program locally for community members.

The Northam/Toodyay Community Consultant Co-researchers were Tjalaminu Mia and Dezerae Miller who worked as a team to promote the NEP concept, develop a work strategy and undertook extensive community consultations in Northam and Toodyay.



## Communities and Stakeholder Recruitment

A key feature of the community consultations for the National Empowerment Project was the ability to engage and employ local Community Consultant Co-researchers from the local areas. These local team members were critical as they were to be able to engage and involve the community members as part of the community consultations that were integral to the Project.

The Community Consultant Co-researchers' local knowledge and networks, along with the existing relationships and networks that other team members had with the communities, was critical to the successful completion of the community consultation process.

The Project team and Community Consultant Co-researchers developed lists of government and non-government agencies, local groups and individuals in the community to advise them in person, via email or through word of mouth about the forthcoming workshops. In the days leading up to the community consultation meeting, various members were contacted and reminded of the meeting and asked to confirm their attendance.

Although some community members would confirm their attendance for one of the community workshops, many times they didn't attend, likely due to other issues or matters arising and taking precedence.

A number of focus groups/workshops and one-to-one interviews were then conducted over the specified periods within the Project.

### Profile of Consultations Completed

Data was obtained through community and stakeholder focus group discussions and one-to-one individual interviews. A wide variety of people were consulted from across all age groups 18 years and above with both male and female participants. This consultation process involved a total of 40 people (25 in Northam and 15 in Toodyay).

The majority of the participants in the community consultations were Aboriginal people. Overall, there was a predominance of female participants (67%) with male participation being at 33% (Figure 1) and a predominance of people in the 36-50 and 50+ age groups (Figure 2).

Table 1: List of Number and Type of Participants

LOCATION	INDIVIDUALS
Northam	25
Toodyay	15
	40

Figure 1: Female and Male Participants

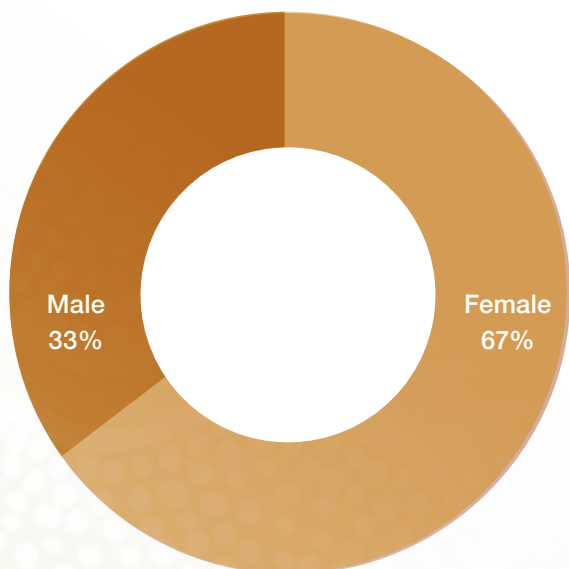
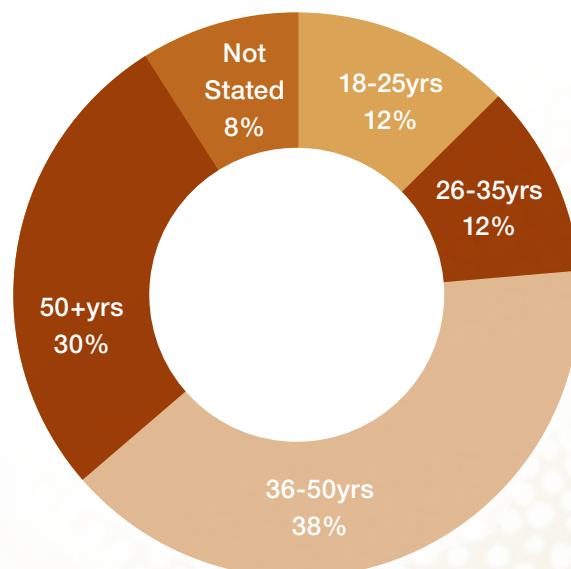
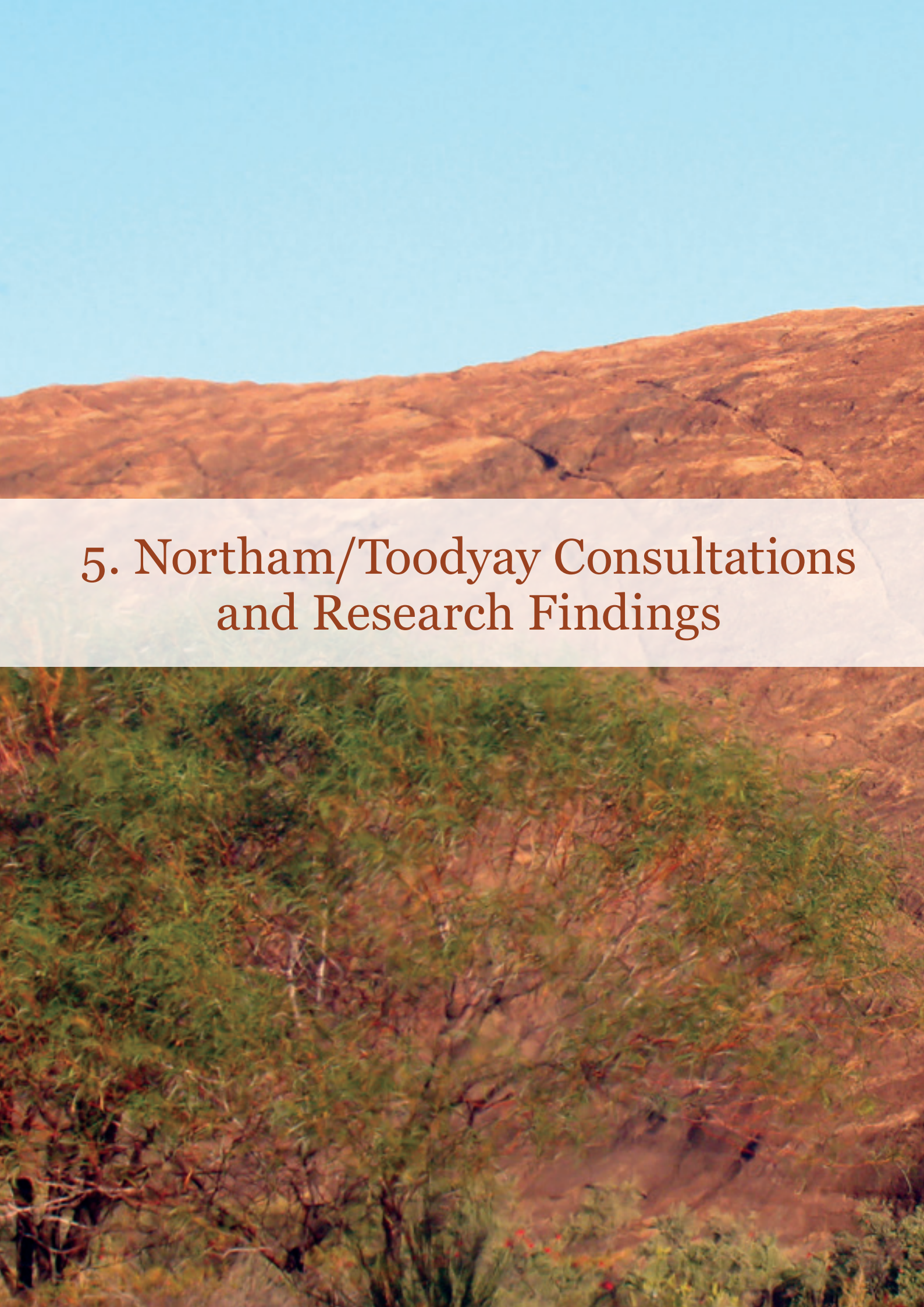


Figure 2: Age of Participants







## 5. Northam/Toodyay Consultations and Research Findings



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The following section presents an overview of the information gathered from one-on-one individual interviews and community and stakeholder focus group discussions. These have been analysed in a three-stage process:

- Community Consultant Co-researchers' Summaries. As well as the information from interviews and focus groups Community Consultant Co-researchers gathered information from interviews and focus groups according to a pro-forma provided by the Project.
- Amalgamation and Thematic Analysis. Because of the richness of the information from interviews and outcomes of focus groups and to do justice to the quantity of information, outcomes were quantified as accurately as possible on the basis of discrete items or themes of information.

The themes were derived entirely from within the data, rather than any pre-conceived categories.

In the case of Northam/Toodyay, this amalgamation amounted to 58 pages of information.

- Highlighting Major Themes. To provide an insight into the most common themes for each site, the key emerging themes for each question have been ranked.

Direct quotes are in italics.

## 2.0 ISSUES CONFRONTING INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Participants were asked a range of questions about issues they perceived to be impacting on individuals, families and on the community as a whole. A key opening question relating to individuals was:

- To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting you?
- To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting your family?
- To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting your community?

Table 1 presents an overview of the most common themes emerging from the responses to these questions.

**Table 1: What Northam/Toodyay People Say are the Issues Confronting Individuals, Families and the Community**

THEMES	RANKING
Family Breakdown/Feuding	1
Health/Mental Health Issues	2
Violence/Abuse	3
Substance Abuse	4
Impact of the Stolen Generations	5
Cultural Prejudice/Discrimination	6
Youth Issues	7
Inadequate Resources/Services	8
Lack of Trust/Respect	9



## 2.1 Family Breakdown/Feuding

Aboriginal people are concerned with the escalating fighting between family groups and the younger generations. There are concerns about the impact this has on the community accessing available programs as well as on their wellbeing and mental health. It is perceived that suicide might become an alternative way of dealing with the high stresses faced by people in contemporary times. Concerns about family breakdown were strongly felt by women who saw the need to work together, to embrace each other more in a positive way in order to 'get our people stronger'. They also saw the need to include men in the programs.

People said:

- ◉ *There is a lot of family feuding at the moment in Northam that is affecting me.*
- ◉ *A lot of the issues involve family violence and family feuding. Most of the family members in the town are related which brings a lot of conflict, especially when alcohol is involved.*
- ◉ *Feuding here in Northam can erupt any time. Northam is not a very ... uhm, it's an unpredictable place. It just happens, yeah I think it's just because they want to work out who it seems to be the Boss ... who's the hierarchy of the town, who has been here the longest.*
- ◉ *With the family, things have happened in the past that still affects me as a young mother now. Trying to get on in society, going through the emotional struggle being an Aboriginal person.*
- ◉ *We have a fair bit of family feuding and domestic violence in the Wheatbelt and this needs to stop. I'm glad I attended one of the workshops you put on because some of the main issues affecting our people were discussed, and there were a few good suggestions put on the table, which I feel might work if there is an opportunity to implement them.*
- ◉ *There's also feuding ... I hate to use the word 'riots' ... between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as well. It just can't be said that Indigenous people are feuding. There's the whole Indigenous, non-Indigenous thing in the town as well.*

## 2.2 Health/Mental Health Issues

Community participants expressed concern over a range of physical and mental health issues in the community, with suicide perceived as an alternative way of dealing with the stigma of mental illness and the high stresses caused by how they live their lives. The many dimensions of health and mental health issues within the Northam/Toodyay Aboriginal community assumed major significance throughout this consultation process. It also highlighted the timeliness – at this point in time – of the National Empowerment Project.

People said:

- ◉ *The psychiatrist had to try and change my mind and the way that I thought because, having these problems ... wasn't a good thing. And being sat on and told that no one would respect you on the grounds that you've got a problem... like a physical, mental issue – it's all draining in a sort of a way.*
- ◉ *I know someone, maybe in her late 60s. She's diabetic. She doesn't take insulin, but she just controls it by diet and tablets, yeah? High blood pressure and all of those things.*
- ◉ *There are quite a few Aboriginal people working in healthcare services in both Northam and Toodyay who are parents/grandparents and family members of suicide victims and you can feel the hurt in them. They have kept working to help their families and people but they do need more help. I think the state and federal government should support them and the community as a whole by allocating further funding solely to address this issue at all levels – something needs to be done before it is too late. So I hope with the NEP Project in the town and Wheatbelt area this will bring people together as a group, and apply as a group to the government for the assistance needed.*
- ◉ *It's really heartbreaking to see the affects of suicide in the Aboriginal community – it just doesn't affect immediate families but the wider Aboriginal community too – its all becoming all too 'NORMAL' in the town and region, so there needs to be more funding made available to address this major issue...*
- ◉ *I have seen some improvement to the health of the younger Aboriginal generations of Northam but it's a slow process but changes are occurring – health education being a big focus of the program. What I would like to see happen is a program to be developed where Aboriginal youth go bush with the Elders – this can happen in two separate groups – young men and young women working with men and women Elders out bush – learning about their cultural heritage and the traditional healing ways of their ancestors, I think this is one of the missing links to change the well-being of Aboriginal people in the town.*

As noted in the Report by the Consultants/Co-researchers:

- There is limited information about cultural recovery, community reinvestment and cultural healing in Northam/Toodyay, the surrounding district or in Perth that adequately address the health, mental and cultural concerns of the Ballardong Noongar and their families and youth.
- What the Ballardong people feel is that the programs offered in their town by major service providers that deal across the board with the many health related issues is that a collective cultural perspective is missing and this needs to be addressed. They also feel there needs to be a collective community agreement by the Elders from each family group, in order to work together addressing the issues impinging on their cultural, social and emotional well-being (as an Aboriginal group from the region).
- Ballardong Elders and those who work at the coal-face of the many health related issues affecting families and youth in the town feel that empowerment and leadership also play a major role in their collective wellbeing, and that this needs to be further addressed within a group consultation process, with positive strategies put in place so they all can move positively into a better future.
- They feel holistic healing around mind, body and medicine that includes traditional Aboriginal Noongar healing knowledge and practices should be part of a holistic approach and treatment plan that enables a sense of wellbeing. They also feel that government policy around healthcare and prevention should be looked at more closely, to enable a better service that incorporates a focus on the cultural and emotional wellbeing of the whole community.



## 2.3 Violence/Abuse

Family feuding and other forms of violence can impact on the daily lives of people, even as far as feeling unsafe to walk the streets or engage in social events. Many were concerned about violence among younger people, the future of families and the community. Violence and various forms of abuse in the town were frequently repeated themes, with family and community violence being perpetuated 'in a vicious cycle'.

People said:

- *Then they moved me to Sister Kate's in Queens Park. And that's where I lived most of my 13 years of my life there. And then when I was displaced again from that place ... from that home and sent to ... Centre Care because of the abuse ... I got abused by the people that were looking after me.*
- *Well, personally I don't feel safe, like going for a walk along the river about 8.00 at night, there are young teenagers roaming around. And I don't feel safe in my own town, like I keep to myself because of the feuding. And they are just, you know, having fights all around town and you don't feel safe. I just keep to myself really so, and I am safe when I do that.*
- *It really hurts to see our children the way they are – fighting all the time or walking the streets of Northam either drunk or drugged up – them living for their next drink or high. It's no way to live their lives – they are our future, if they are all like this, then what is going to happen to our families and our culture...*
- *We are addressing those issues [abuse] now. My family have been through that and are trying to make a change. I am a survivor of sexual abuse myself. I have lived through that, and recognising it and trying to heal from within. Because that's what happened and it was kind of like, I guess it was like a way of living or way of being and it wasn't right, you know. And they didn't realise that they were doing wrong.*
- *It's the same with domestic violence; young boys see their parents ... their dad bashing on their mum. So they end up growing up thinking that it's okay to hit women, when it's not. So it is a vicious cycle. And so the people who perpetrate, they were victims themselves.*

## 2.4 Substance Abuse

Substance abuse emerged as a major issue for individuals, families and the community. It was seen as being closely linked to other issues in the town, and something without an easy solution. While substance abuse was, for some, an immediate way of coping, the impact on individuals, families and the community was a recurring and significant theme through the consultations.

People said:

- *A lot of my family, especially my parents, my father's siblings, as Stolen Gens have used drugs and alcohol to cope.*
- *There's heaps of problems with drugs and alcohol in the town – a high number of my cousins are doing them and drinking, so they are not really themselves. They are getting sick from it all – and the choices they make doing all this stuff is causing some of the problems we are now talking about. Not sure how anybody is going to stop all these problems.*
- *Drug and alcohol abuse is a way of coping and a way of living. That's the only way that they know. From the pain and suffering that they endured with the loss of their parents, and then what their parents inflicted on them. They have seen their parents drink and do drugs so they think it's the norm; it's what we do. They don't want to go out and socialise and get employment to have a sustainable job to look after their children, to have that family life.*
- *I think if there was less alcohol and drugs, a lot of people wouldn't be in prison, living the hard life on the streets and having a destroyed life.*

## 2.5 Impact of the Stolen Generations

Participants talked about the impact of the Stolen Generations on themselves (the 'Stolen Gens') who grew up in Sister Kate's Home in the late 1960s. Many have not forgotten what happened to them and their brothers and sisters. The impact has also extended through later generations. Data from these community consultations suggested more government support and funding was needed to deal with the aftermath of the Stolen Generations.

People said:

- *The Stolen Generations has caused a lack of parenting and communication skills in our family. A lot of the children and kids had no relationship with their parents because of that ... parents didn't know how to be parents.*
- *It [Stolen Generations] has had a lot of influence on people's life, which they couldn't do anything or prevent anything happening to them. It has affected their children and my children, their grandchildren today. I mean if things like that didn't happen then maybe we would have a different relationship with our families and would be maybe better people, and then most of my family members would not be in prison.*
- *I had not much contact with my sisters, or my brothers, because they [Welfare] stopped me from visiting them.*

*I just had the people that were around me in the house. And a lot of the time those sorts of things [abuse] were never spoken about. I had to live with the people that stopped me from talking to people that I should have been talking to.*

- *And I felt really sad, because I thought, 'What, do I have to be locked up here for the rest of my life?' I thought it was prison for life, you know? And that it was my punishment.*
- *The thing is, we never got to have that bond with our parents. So, in the end, we grew up with strange people. We ended up thinking their way and not ours.*
- *We need to have more input from government with funding to help sort out our youth because they are fighting all the time – quite a few of us oldies are from the Stolen Gens and this has affected our young ones – they are now the Lost Gens of our peoples – it's a crying shame and something needs to be done about this ... and sooner rather than later.*

## 2.6 Cultural Prejudice/Discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination against Aboriginal people has a long history and one often not understood by younger generations. For some there is hope that more engagement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Northam/Toodyay holds hope of breaking down the stereotypes.

People said:

- *Through oppression, Aboriginal people have faced years of intergenerational trauma and our younger generations don't understand why we and they are the way they are. They're having a good time and getting caught up; all of a sudden a white person will say something to them and they have this thing inside of them that they don't understand really. They have very limited insight into why they react the way they do.*
- *You know, I work at XX and because I drive a XX a lot of the staff members think I got it through a Noongar land claim. I worked to get my stuff. That's where stereotyping comes from. Not all Noongars are on welfare.*
- *The community coming together and breaking down barriers of racial discrimination is a good thing. We need more community engagement with white fellas living in Northam.*
- *Because of the stigma that white people have against Noongars, how are they going to get a job? They will say to them 'Oh, well, there's no job here.' 'Oh, no, we haven't got enough work ... the place is taken'. There could be plenty of jobs out there, but they aren't going to share it with Noongars, because as far as they're concerned, they're nothing but drug dealers, drug addicts, drinkers, and a person that you can't rely on.*
- *When I was there, there weren't many Aboriginal people working. There were a lot of the white fellas didn't want to share anything with the Noongar people, because they were most probably frightened that they would get their things stolen. They didn't give a Noongar person a chance to show them that they were employable.*

## 2.7 Youth Issues

Concerns about young people and the need to teach, and show by example, that they don't have to behave the way they do, was a common theme. Some called for more programs addressing youth issues. Sometimes the focus was on young women.

People said:

- *There are not enough initiatives for the younger generations. They are lost. Someone should just take the initiative and say: 'Look, come on, let's go and do this'. I know quite a few young kids when they turn 16 just forget about going to school, especially young girls. These days from age of 13 upwards, they can start having kids.*
- *The majority of them are just wrapped up in the white society of things and they are not taking notice of their Elders or listening to them. They don't know the respect and love and everything that combines as one in the Aboriginal sense. That's where the healing will come, but a lot of them don't take any notice of that.*
- *We need to teach or show by example to our young girls and adults that they don't have to behave the way they do – they need to have more respect for themselves and their cultural counterparts – other Nyoongar women – they don't need to fight each other at every turn, we are all cultural sisters at the end of the day even if we are from different family groups.*

## 2.8 Inadequate Resources/Services

Though participants acknowledged progress has been made with various healthcare programs delivered by service agencies in the area of healthcare and healing, a need was seen for more focus on cultural inclusion, with a stronger emphasis on cultural healing practices and cultural knowledge with Aboriginal Elders and the community themselves taking lead roles. Some were concerned with inadequate services in the area of disabilities.

People said:

- *We have quite a few health services and healing programs delivered from the service providers in the town but something is missing – we get help for physical sicknesses but there is no programs that include a cultural and spiritual focus, I think this is the thing that is missing.*
- *I have got a disabled son and the services are very ... Yeah and the services are very, well how can you say it, lacking. This is very stressful.*
- *Disabilities of children, the elderly, teenagers in the town need to be looked at. The majority of society today think that they are either drunk or some other things affecting them but don't realise it's a health factor.*
- *They do have a community support centre here but I don't know enough about that. But just watching, through my eyes kids have got nothing to do. There is ... nothing. That's why most of them go down to Perth. It's sad but ... that's how it is ...*

## 2.9 Lack of Trust/Respect

Issues of trust and respect were also common themes, including the need for self-respect, as well as respect for others and for Aboriginal culture.

People said:

- *I think trusting is important. You don't know who to trust. Also respect is another one. You have got to earn respect.*
- *There should be respect for Indigenous people here, or Aboriginal people, because they were here before I moved in. A lot of them don't know who I am but they associate me with my partner. As for the white people, you still have to get their respect because they have an opinion on you, Aboriginal people that is. They are dole bludgers, don't want to work and blah, blah, blah.*
- *A personal point of view on the government side of things. The way they treat and disrespect Noongar mob, Aboriginal mob is not good – other people around the town too.*

## 3.0 MAKING INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY STRONG

Participants were asked the following questions about strengthening individuals, families and the community:

- What do we need to make ourselves strong?
- What do we need to make our families strong?
- What do we need to make our communities strong?

Table 2 ranks the key themes emerging in response to these questions.

**Table 2: What Northam/Toodyay People Said Makes Individuals, Families and the Community Strong**

THEMES	RANKING
Aboriginal Culture/Identity	1
Bringing People Together	2
Empowering/Motivating People	3
Cultural Healing/Better Health Care Provision	4
Stopping the Fighting	5
Specific Programs/Services	6
Education	7
Enhancing Communication	8

### 3.1 Aboriginal Culture/Identity

In response to questions about strengthening individuals, family and the community, a focus on Aboriginal culture and identity emerged as the predominant theme. Key to this was addressing the loss of Aboriginal culture and identity, along with the need for learning, especially about their cultural heritage and the traditional ways of healing. Specific reference was also made to a dedicated Cultural Centre in a central town location. Learning about culture and traditional ways could be in the more formal transmission of cultural knowledge through Elders, but it could also be simply as people coming together to yarn, share and heal.

People said:

- ◉ *But there is so much I have lost because we don't speak our own language, we speak English. My grandmother never spoke Aboriginal language; she doesn't know it. My father doesn't know much Aboriginal language. And it's only now that I have started picking up words in Noongar. Luckily, my children have got that in their curriculum at school where they actually learn LOTE, Noongar language. But it's a slow process and should be addressed immediately so that our children can speak our language and know who they are ... instead of coming to the point where I did, asking who I am, what am I?*
- ◉ *Well I think that if we take up what we know, and learn by what we hear from the Elders in the community, then maybe that will be breaching the gap, getting it together. And, having those healing places for the Elders and the young people to get together, and tell stories about people. So that ... that there is help to heal the wounds of each other, you know?*
- ◉ *There should be more [cultural programs]. There is not anything around where there are programs like they do in the metro area for people to go and identify and have the knowledge to start practising their ways. Because of the shame factor and stuff that we hold, it's difficult to heal.*
- ◉ *It is 2013 and to establish something like a Cultural Centre we are looking at local government. I am hoping and pushing for them to start doing it now. It would make such a huge positive impact. Because there will be identification; there would be ownership; there would be empowerment there. We would be able to run leadership and cultural healing, social and emotional wellbeing programs for our people. It would be a positive thing and make a positive and a huge impact.*
- ◉ *I don't know, maybe an arts and crafts class you know, something that would bring all the ladies together. At the same time they can be yarning and healing one another.*
- ◉ *Just have a good old yarn will help bring people together. It doesn't matter what the topic is; it could be about your children, it could be about your husband; it could be about your sisters, your brothers ...*

- ◉ *When I come up to Northam I have been around some of the Elders, listening to what they say, and when they start really yarning some real good stuff comes out, things I didn't know about. They can teach us kids a lot – I would like to go BUSH with them sometime, I know I would learn a lot about my Noongar culture and I think it would help me a lot too, stop me feeling like I don't belong anywhere.*

### 3.2 Bringing People Together

A strong message about strengthening families involved actually bringing families together so they could communicate more effectively. Often this was linked nostalgically to what families did together back in the old days; in past years, however it also had its modern variants of 'barbecues'. An interesting analogy that emerged talked about old and new clay to build bridges.

People said:

- ◉ *Families just need to come together and start communicating.*
- ◉ *What we need to do, instead of all getting together when someone you know is really sick and probably got two or three months down the track to live, we shouldn't be getting together for that. It should have been happening all along. You know, the family unit stuff is just not there anymore.*
- ◉ *Have a family day out where everyone could get together and share their problems, you know, not in a violent way – in a positive way.*
- ◉ *Probably some sports game or something to keep brothers and sisters together and with family more.*
- ◉ *Family barbeque and things that don't involve alcohol or drugs would be good. I mean even getting together for family photos and meeting other different family members, so you know who you are and your background, your history and things like that.*
- ◉ *Things can't be like the olden days, but it can be something like the old days; the young fellas need it. It's a bit like mixing old clay and new clay to model a bridge, so that there's no longer pot holes in that bridge, so everyone can get from one side to the other, without there being a gap.*

### 3.3 Empowering/Motivating People

When discussing how individuals could become stronger, the concept of empowerment was often mentioned. Dimensions of that included: seeking help; speaking up; seeking role models; having purpose and importantly, having a future vision to work towards. Sometimes it involved giving something back to the community.

People said:

- ◉ *Get people together, get things moving. Motivation and inspiration are important. I don't know how people will go about doing this, but it'll give them a lift.*

- ◉ *The one thing is empowering yourself, just keep voicing your opinion. Keep asking for help if you need it, even though you don't like asking for help – you never know what can happen.*
- ◉ *If I want something I will work for it. I look towards the future. And I also look at other people, how they act. And it's sad but I learn from their sadness and it just makes me – I don't know – want to get up and do things ... and be better than stuck in a rut.*
- ◉ *What I think needs to happen around here, is to get something up and going that it will only take a few Aboriginal families for things to take off and other families and the kids will really get in there and follow. My strongest belief in Northam is that if everyone gets involved, makes a contribution, it is going to be different here.*
- ◉ *What defines strength is ... how can I put it into words? Self-respect and stuff like that is important. I try not to think about the past and try to move forward in life; and pick myself up and say I've got a new job, so forth, so on. That's what I think people have to start doing, realise what they're doing and pick themselves up.*
- ◉ *People who have time need to sit down and think about things ... chuck some ideas out there, let people know what needs to be fixed, what needs to be finished and what needs to be done. It's sort of helping the community to help itself, like doing a garden of traditional foods or medicines. Everyone to also learn to grow their own vegies. Bringing the community together so that they learn how to fix a house, how to keep their community tidy – that would be good too.*

### 3.4 Cultural Healing/Better Health Care Provision

Along with 'empowerment' people also talked specifically about needing to understand and resolve personal issues so that change can 'come from within'. Along with individuals needing to heal to strengthen themselves, there was a parallel need for the community to heal. Just as individuals needed to have a future vision to move forward, the community needed to let go of the past and look to the future.

People said:

- ◉ *All the trauma that people have suffered, they actually can't comprehend. That thinking mechanism is not there. They're in crises mode; with Aboriginal people we know that that crisis mode is always there. It never disappears. They're in denial. They're always in the fight or flight mode.*
- ◉ *The community healing is strengthening in the community. They need to let go of past hurts that hinder them moving forward. They've come so far, and then it's just 'You said this, I said blah, blah, blah, blah'. And then they can never get past the problems of today.*



- ◉ *There's such a lack of insight into their own issues. You might tell them something and they go 'Yeah that's what that person needs ... it's them fellas there who's got more of a problem than me, so deal with them first'. Whereas change comes from in here; inside yourself. There's that lack of insight into that.*
- ◉ *Let's have healing days with separate families, help them heal and then after a certain amount of time when they're ready, let's bring them together. I think that's what will work here. Something like that needs to happen, because the feuding is so ingrained. Northam will never be a strong Aboriginal community until that healing happens.*
- ◉ *It is good to know about the healing pits, to come and to bring the flower essence healing. Me and my dad used the flower essences and just being a part of that is good.*

### 3.5 Stopping the Fighting

A strong (and hopeful) message about how to make the community stronger related to stopping the fighting, which might involve: understanding the cycle of European history; understanding the spiritual battle; and hope that at the end of the day, brothers and sisters would 'make up'.

People said:

- ◉ *That's how it was when the Europeans first came here; their thought was to divide, conquer and rule. And that same little cycle is going on today; it's happening with the Aboriginals, and they have got no idea that this little cycle is still happening today. That's what causes a lot of friction and things.*
- ◉ *Aboriginals have got a spiritual battle, as well as a physical one. If their spirits are lifted up above to the line of equality, they will all learn to stand as one and there will be no division. It is because of that division they are all below that line. They have got to lift their spirits ... united we stand.*

- There is family violence with the majority of those fighting are first cousin's children – even right down to brother and sister. But you know for a fact that a brother and sister are going to make up at the end of the day.

### 3.6 Specific Programs/Services

Some participants saw the need for specific programs and services to strengthen individuals, families and the community. Some saw the need for programs to engage young people and stem the tide of personally destructive behaviour; some talked about the need to focus on women and to help them through healing processes. People said:

- We need a lot more programs for the young children especially the youth, because there is a breakdown of communication in the family. I think that what programs need to have is a lot more of outing events. These will stop children from getting into trouble and keep them away from the alcohol and the drugs and out of prisons.
- I think it would be a wonderful idea if women and their kids went on healing camps together, no men, just us sisters and our kids – that would feel good.
- I think it is really important if there were women and their kids going out bush, camp a few days and let country heal us. It's very much needed in the community. But, also, there has to be follow-up. There can't just be like ... bringing us sisters together to talk about stuff. It may cause some hurt. Opening up cans of worms can always be dicey, but good things can come from this.

### 3.7 Education

Education also emerged around the themes of healing, empowerment and building self-confidence.

People said:

- I think the healing that has to be done in this town, is to talk about the big issues affecting us as a whole community, and education both culturally and mainstream is another one...
- The area that I'm really big in, is education; Mudjil social wellbeing education really, and it's about learning about self-identify, self-empowerment and coping mechanisms. It's also about normalising issues in family life; sexual abuse is so hidden, well let's not normalise it. Not to say that it's okay, but it's okay to start talking about it and to start dealing with it. Suicide ... same with that. It is also so hidden.
- Education – education around self-confidence and building esteem also needs to be looked at. If we were accepted more as a valued group of people in Northam, then this would help our self-esteem grow – it would empower us too.

- There should be more funding for schools; more funding put into our children because it starts with our children. I am just happy that my children get to learn you know, a bit of you know, Aboriginal language and LOTE and stuff like that. But we need more, more of it to happen.

### 3.8 Enhancing Communication

Enhanced communication was also seen as something that would strengthen families.

People said:

- More communication is needed. Listening and better communication with each other would give people a better chance to heal and be a happier family.
- Better communication is needed. It would be wonderful if this happened, because changes would come from it – wonderful ones.
- Sometimes communication within family is hard – communication with family members. Half the time you wouldn't even know what was going on, especially the young males and females; they don't let anybody know what is going on in their lives, because of past history between their parents.

### 4.0 CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING, EMPOWERMENT AND HEALING PROGRAMS

Table 3 presents the key themes emerging from the following question: What types of cultural social and emotional wellbeing, empowerment and healing programs might be useful for your community?

**Table 3: What Northam/Toodyay People Said About Preferred Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Empowerment and Healing Programs**

THEMES	RANKING
Stolen Generations Focus	1
Communication and Cultural Focus	2
Getting Together	3

## 4.1 Stolen Generations Focus

Given the prominence of the Stolen Generations issue in this community, it is not surprising it came through as a strong theme in response to the question on the types of programs that might be useful. As indicated in the following responses, it is a very current issue and one where local initiatives have already been taken.

People said:

- *There are so many Stolen Generations people here in this town and surrounding areas who have been affected by that experience, but we only have one Bringing Them Home counsellor. As a descendant, what use can I make of that?*
- *If we do have a cultural centre, I would be using it every day and bringing the Stolen Generations together. When you look at all the Stolen Gens today, when they come together it just brings out this joy because they knew one another in the home or in the missions.*
- *I would love to be a part of Sister Kate's Home Kids and NEP getting together to bring a healing bush camp to this town and I think a lot of the community would love to be a part of that too. A lot of them are Stolen Gens and from Sister Kate's; we do have a lot of 'Homees' here. Just to share up, yarn up and be together to celebrate our survival ...*
- *Our family, our lives, our people, our culture and our country is like an extension; now I have got sisters, aunties, my father who were in Sister Kates - they didn't really talk too much about those times but they are now. And this started just 12 months ago at Hyden at a women's healing camp where I met TJ, she's a SK Homee, and now we are working together on NEP, it's great. My family are starting to be involved and starting to talk up about things that they never really talked about since they were kids you know, because they weren't really allowed to talk about those things. But now they are opening up and wanting to express themselves and have their point of view and heal from within. That's where it all starts from, is from within and with one another.*

## 4.2 Communication and Cultural Focus

Communication, which was an important theme for strengthening families, also emerged as an important aspect of strengthening community, especially communication around Aboriginal culture ... as indicated around anything to do that would re-educate us about where we came from.

People said:

- *When I talk about the dreaming track, I talk about Northam being situated in a very special dreaming place. We should be going out and showing our young kids that and talking about the dreaming tracks, especially going on women's camps. I went on one women's camp and it was the most amazing experience I ever had ... sitting down with all the Yorgas, nans and aunties and just sharing up and yarning and being together as strong Aboriginal*

*women. It was about trying to capture the true essence of strength and what that means to them and what that means to me. Having those kind of camps and meetings or gatherings is about celebrating who we are and defines us as who we are as people, as one, as Aboriginal people.*

- *It is important for Elders getting together to tell stories to the young women about their struggle with their life and trying to make an impact to change perspective in life nowadays. Even if they can get together for tea and coffee, or whatever; just to sit down and try and change the minds of young people.*
- *When I watch the Noongar channel, I see it and I really wished that they had something like that when I was growing up. Because it's so important. You learn different cultures, meanings, words and understanding; in that you've got to be proud of who you are and it is uplifting.*
- *Women's camps, men camps, children's camps. You name it ... anything to do that would re-educate us about where we came from; storytelling about how we used to do it back then would be good.*

## 4.3 Getting Together

Again, just as it would strengthen individual families, getting people together would strengthen the whole community.

People said:

- *We all need to work together for this community. It would help make each other feel safe, because a lot of the families and young ones don't feel safe, like to even walk down town after school to get something to eat.*
- *It is about togetherness. Once people get together they will start understanding each other more.*
- *Get together as much as you can – a barbecue or play ball or do something. Anything.*

## 5.0 BARRIERS TO PROGRAMS

Participants were asked the following question about what they perceived to be barriers: What do you see are the barriers for introducing any programs?

Table 4 presents an overview of key themes emerging from their responses.

**Table 4: What Northam/Toodyay People Said About Barriers to Introducing Programs**

THEMES	RANKING
How the Program is Delivered	1
Access Issues	2
Shame Factor	3



## 5.1 How the Program is Delivered

A very strong message about the delivery of any programs introduced is that there must be trust in the people delivering programs in the community, matched with the desirability of that person/s being Aboriginal.

People said:

- *I think it would be good to have Aboriginal people that run the program. A lot of Aboriginal people like to have people that can relate to them. It is important to have that understanding so they know what they are talking about. It would be more comfortable for an Aboriginal person to actually be there with them to direct them in the right direction.*
- *When introducing cultural healing programs in the community, there needs to be strong trust in who delivers the program. A lot of Wadjula programs get introduced and then they are only out there for a short term; there is no consistency. People like to see established and ongoing programs. Even if they don't use it immediately, they know that it's there, that they can always go back to it. Often, white people come in because they think they can save other people.*
- *The community doesn't know who they [Wadjulas] are and they don't trust them. And that is a big thing – trust. I believe that the people who need to be delivering need to have that rapport and trust with the people in the community. If they know that they can trust them, they can participate in any of the programs that get delivered. If they don't trust you, they are not going to rock up or show up or do anything.*

## 5.2 Access Issues

Sometimes barriers to people participating in the programs have to do with access issues, for example, not being able to access transport, not having access to information about the program, or the program being too far away.

People said:

- *Transport is a big issue, because in the community I see a lot of Aboriginal fellas, they're on foot. They don't have cars, they don't have any transport and the majority of them all have family commitments.*
- *Yes, there needs to be more public transport in Northam and Toodyay.*
- *Organisations need to let Aboriginal people know well before the event happens 'Hey, there's a new program out there and we'll go and get in contact with these fellas about it'.*
- *Location. If it's here in Northam, you could have a lot of people attend. If it's in Perth, you're not going to get people from Northam to be able to go to Perth. Transport issues, distance, financial difficulties and family commitments are major factors.*

## 5.3 Shame Factor

Feeling 'shame', with roots in how people were treated as part of the Stolen Generations, was seen to be a strong factor impacting on the current lives of the Aboriginal community, and in this case, on their reluctance to participate in programs.

People said:

- *Everyone knows Aboriginal people are shame. Yep, what more can I say? It's ingrained in Aboriginal people. This has come from what's happened to us and our culture. One way to combat this is with the younger generations. Empowering them to believe in themselves. With oldies they'll always have that shame. That's just how it is for them; it goes back to how they were bought up in missions.*
- *I know when I came out of New Norcia I was so ashamed to look up. Every time people looked at us we always walked with our heads down ... too shame. Yeah, they used to say: 'Oh you're no good, you're bad and good for nothing'. The Spanish nuns used to tell us those things and we weren't allowed to look up because boys were walking past. We would get hit if we didn't look down. We got in the habit of walking with our heads down. Yeah, they bought the shame to us.*

## 6.0 PREFERRED PROGRAMS IN THE COMMUNITY

Towards the end of the community consultations, after interviewed participants had worked through questions about issues in the community and aspects of making individuals and the community stronger, they were asked the following: What would you like to see in a program(s) and how would you like it delivered? An overview of their most common responses is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: What Northam/Toodyay People Said About Programs and their Delivery**

THEMES	RANKING
Cultural Aspects	1
Ownership of Program Delivery	2
Addressing Negativity/Racism	3

## 6.1 Cultural Aspects

While many examples were given of programs and activities that would strengthen traditional Aboriginal culture there was also an awareness of the importance for those working in the community to better understand Aboriginal culture and ways of speaking.

People said:

- ◉ *We need programs about Aboriginal culture, like spiritual awareness. I would like to see like day care centres that are run for Aboriginal children that are run by young Aboriginal teenager girls. I would like to see arts and craft classes going where they can all go and like you know, husbands, wives and whatever and sit down and just be together.*
- ◉ *To be culturally aware, I would like people [officials] to come around, sit down, get to know our environment and where we come from, how we live. This will help them see and understand us and our culture. They can see a little bit of how we live daily and stuff like that, rather than for us to go to their office to meet up with them.*
- ◉ *It is important for language too. When Aboriginal people speak, a lot of the conversations use slang words or some of the Aboriginal language. Most people won't understand what we're saying. But then another Aboriginal person will know exactly what that person is saying and what they're going on about.*
- ◉ *I'd like to see code dressing – Aboriginal people wearing a design on their clothing that speaks as: 'I'm an Aboriginal person', and that shows how proud they are of who they are.*



## 6.2 Ownership of Program Delivery

Who runs programs in the community was an important theme. Issues raised include; the desirability of having local Aboriginal people run the programs; the lack of sufficient local people to do so, compensated by the fact that there are some 'Wadjulas' or 'white people' with whom the community can work.

People said:

- ◉ *Having Aboriginal people running the program would be appropriate because they'll have more of an idea of how people feel, you know.*
- ◉ *Leadership is very, very important. I think that there's such a lack of role models here in Northam. Unfortunately, now everyone is just really focussed on their own families, and that's a lot to do with all of the feuding that is going on in this town. It's not a community thing anymore, that's just gone.*
- ◉ *Personalise it with Aboriginal people because we need to work together, in harmony with one another and the wider community; non-Aboriginal people working together. There is only a few [non-Aboriginal] people around here that I call my sisters, that are Wadjula Yorgas you know, because they understand and they recognise and they acknowledge who Aboriginal people are.*
- ◉ *Well, you can have Aboriginal people as well as white fellas. It would be great to see Noongar people, Aboriginal people, plus white fellas working together. I see this a lot and it's good to see.*

## 6.3 Addressing Negativity/Racism

One of the themes that people would like to see addressed was addressing the negativity, stereotyping and racism that exist in the town.

People said:

- ◉ *Negative feelings get passed on. White people pass off all their Negative feelings and attitudes. When they have experienced negative things in their lives and pass it onto other people it is not good for anyone.*
- ◉ *But what I have heard, you know, there is a lot of, racism in Northam. It's not the Aboriginal people, it's others and they just pass it on.*
- ◉ *Aboriginal people can't handle a lot of the racism in Northam. They carry this as a burden that's not theirs. Yeah that's where they get blocked out. It's the attitudes of Europeans in shops and other places. It wouldn't hurt them to smile or say hello.*
- ◉ *We bleed the same blood, we are not different from white people. They have got an attitude problem passed down through their ancestors. Aboriginal people can't seem to handle it. Like it's just like alcohol. Like racism, alcohol is something that's not really for an Aboriginal person.*



## Conclusion



Community consultations with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Northam and Toodyay suggest people perceived a number of critical issues for individuals, families the community. These issues were also highlighted through the two day cultural, social, emotional and well being workshop which was delivered in Northam (Toodyay people also participated) following the Community Consultations.

The consultations revealed a range of pressing concerns faced by individuals, families and the community as a whole. High among these was a concern with the fighting between family groups and within the younger generations, and the impact this had on the community as a whole. Closely allied to this were concerns over the physical and mental health wellbeing of the community, with a suggestion that suicide was becoming an alternative way of dealing with the stigma of mental illness and the high stresses that are part of contemporary life. The many dimensions of health and mental health issues within the community assumed major significance throughout this consultation process and underlined the timeliness of the National Empowerment Project.

Also linked to family feuding and concerns with mental health was a concern with the general level of violence and abuse in the community. Substance abuse was closely linked to other issues raised by participants, and something that was seen to have its genesis in past history and the Stolen Generations. Prejudice and discrimination against Aboriginal people has a long history and one often not understood by younger generations. For some there was hope that more engagement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Northam/Toodyay may have potential of breaking down the stereotypes. As a group, young people were the focus in terms of bearing the consequences of the issues impacting on the Aboriginal community in Northam and Toodyay.

The inter-related issues impacting on individuals, families and the community had direct relationships in what people perceived was needed to redress the problems. In response to questions about strengthening individuals, family and the community, a focus on Aboriginal culture and identity emerged as the predominant theme. Key to this was addressing reclamation of Aboriginal culture and identity, along with the need for learning, especially about cultural

heritage and traditional ways of healing. Learning about culture and traditional ways could be through more formal transmission of cultural knowledge through Elders, but it could also be simply as people coming together to yarn and share. This 'coming together' was linked nostalgically to what families did together in the old days; past years, however it was seen to also have its modern versions in the 'family barbecue', family outings, and 'going bush'.

Healing and empowerment were also key themes around strengthening the community. Healing of individuals was linked to, and paralleled by, the need for the community to heal. Individuals needed to undergo healing to strengthen and empower themselves, to enable them to have a future vision, purpose and to move forward. Similarly, the community needed to let go of the past through healing in order to embrace a positive future.

Given the prominence of the Stolen Generations issue in this community, it is not surprising that when asked about preferred cultural, social and emotional wellbeing, empowerment and healing programs, the Stolen Generations was again a predominant theme. Addressing Stolen Generations is a very current issue in Northam and Toodyay and one where local initiatives have already been undertaken. Understanding the Stolen Generation's trans generational impact on people today is an important part of understanding the whole history of contact and helping individuals know their Aboriginal heritage and identity. Many examples were offered of programs and activities that would strengthen traditional Aboriginal culture. Participants were also clear that programs in the community needed to be delivered by local Aboriginal people.

As mentioned earlier in this Report, the disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is evident across all indicators and measures such as low employment, low income, lack of housing, lack of access to services, disrupted social networks, disrupted connection to land, high prevalence and experiences of racism and high levels of incarceration. These indicators are inter-related:

*There is a clear relationship between the social inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples and their current health status. This social disadvantage, directly related to dispossession and characterised by poverty and powerlessness, is reflected in measures of education, employment, and income (Thompson et al., 2012).*

While these have historical causes, they are perpetuated by contemporary structural and social factors. This was evident in all the sites that were part of the Project, and this certainly is a picture that the research outcomes of the Northam/Toodyay consultations portray. There will be a full discussion of these in the consolidated Report. This Site Report however, focuses upon recommendations pertaining to what types of programs might benefit the community. While some concerns and the priority of these varied across the sites, it was remarkable that most were shared across all the participants who were part of the Project. Many of the themes reflected previous findings from the literature and program review and consultations in Hear Our Voices (Dudgeon et al., 2012). The principles that informed the Project were upheld by all consultations across the sites.

The following is a summary of the key issues and recommendations compiled through the community consultations and cultural, social and emotional wellbeing workshop:

**Recommendation 1:** Principles: A program needs to be community owned and culturally appropriate. A local Northam/Toodyay empowerment program needs to have community members identifying their problems and designing the solutions. Any program needs to have legitimate community support; be culturally appropriate and locally based; take a community centred and strengths based approach; aim to capacity build, that is, employ and train local people and ensure a valued role of Elders in all aspects.

**Recommendation 2:** Delivery: Any program should be flexible and delivered on country, where possible; and be able to meet peoples' different needs and stages in their healing journey. The program should consider gender issues so that separate male and female modules can be delivered if and when necessary. A program should also be delivered in a manner whereby opportunities for education, training and employment, and leadership focus are provided as potential prospects.

**Recommendation 3:** Content: The content of programs should include modules that address cultural, social and emotional wellbeing, healing, and self-empowerment. Other skills could include life skills such as problem solving and conflict resolution skills, goal setting, nurturing strengths in families and the community, and communication skills (especially with family).

While the National Empowerment Project provided a great opportunity for local Aboriginal people's voices to be heard in Northam/Toodyay, there is also great scope and potential for many of the local services and programs to use this valuable information to better inform their delivery and support.

It is also important for local Aboriginal people and the community in the area to utilise the information presented in this Report to better enable discussions and suggestions for change going forward.

Ongoing support and commitment is certainly required, and it is our hope that the stories and voices of the Northam/Toodyay people be heard and listened to in a way that can positively influence the necessary changes and responses required at the community level, otherwise our communities will continue to struggle with the high levels of community distress and suicides. The consultations showed that amidst the problems and issues confronting community people on a daily basis, there is considerable optimism and hope for a better future.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: NEP Community Consultant Training Program

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>Introduction to NEP, the Team and C/Consultants.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome to Country</li> <li>House Keeping</li> <li>Team Introductions</li> <li>How the Project Came About</li> <li>Role of UWA</li> <li>C/Consultant roles</li> <li>C/Consultant to share Who They Are and Where They Come From.</li> </ul>	<b>Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing. PAR Working in Empowering Ways With Our Communities, Ethics and Principles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UWA and NHMRC ethics that underly the Project. 'Keeping Research on Track' booklet</li> <li>Forms and Other Documents</li> <li>Workshop on Project Principles</li> </ul>	<b>Research: Collecting the Information:</b> (Continued)  <b>Research: making Sense of the Information</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>	Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training	Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training
<b>MORNING TEA 10.00–10.30</b>				
<b>Introduction to Research – Made Simple</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic Project Management,</li> <li>What is Research? (quantitative and qualitative)</li> <li>Participatory Action Research (PAR)</li> <li>Aboriginal Ways of Research</li> </ul>	<b>Research: Doing It – Collecting the Information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to do In-depth Interviews</li> <li>How to do focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercise on identifying Themes</li> <li>Why Taking Photos are Important</li> <li>Reporting the Information</li> <li>Reports</li> <li>Using Quotes</li> <li>Using Photographs</li> </ul>	Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training	Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training
<b>LUNCH 12.00–13.00</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The importance of an 'Aboriginal Inquiry Methodology' by Dr Michael Wright, Danny Ford, Margaret Colbung and Team</li> </ul> <b>Community Tour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation</li> <li>Documentation</li> <li>Ethical Considerations</li> <li>Exercises</li> </ul>	<b>Reporting the Information</b> (continued)	Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training	<b>Closing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation</li> <li>Certificates</li> <li>Closing Celebrations</li> </ul>
<b>HOME TIME 16.00–17.00</b>				

### Documents Distributed

National Empowerment Project – Community Consultation  
Co-Researchers Training Manual

Keeping Research on Track,

UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights

NHMRC – Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research

Research as Intervention: Engaging Silenced Voices  
– Dr Michael Wright

## Appendix 2: The National Empowerment Project Workshop/Focus Group Program

Duration: 3 to 4 hours.

### 1. Introduction:

- a. Introduction of community consultant/researcher – personal background.
- b. House Keeping/Ground Rules.  
Have a tea break when appropriate.
  - i. Toilets/exits.
  - ii. Consent Forms (Participants will be talked through this).
  - iii. Photo permission forms.
  - iv. Confidentiality.

### 2. Welcome/Acknowledgement to Country

### 3. Participants to introduce themselves. Briefly.

### 4. Objectives/Aims

- a. Background information.
- b. How the idea came about.
- c. How we are going to do the Project (methodology).
- d. Project protocols.

### 5. Definitions of social emotional well being, empowerment and healing (brief presentation)

Definition: 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health, and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land, family and spirituality are central to well being. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognized as well as the broader concepts of family, and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and caring. Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health, mental health problems in particular' (Social Health Reference Group, SHRG, 2004:10).

National consultations undertaken by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation in *Voices From the Campfires* (2009) found that Aboriginal people saw healing as a spiritual journey that requires initiatives to assist in the recovery from trauma and addiction, and reconnection to the family, community and culture. Healing was described as: ...holistic and involves physical, social, emotional, mental, environmental, and spiritual well being. It is also a journey that can take considerable time and can be painful. It is about bringing feelings of despair out into the open, having your pain recognised, and in turn, recognising the pain of others.

It is a therapeutic dialogue with people who are listening. It is about following your own personal journey but also seeing how it fits into the collective story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trauma (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team (2009:11).

Empowerment: ... a social action process that promotes participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterised as achieving power to dominate others, but rather to act with others to effect change (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988:380).

This social action process is about working 'towards the goals of individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice'.

Empowerment can operate at the level of the individual, the organisation and/or the community. Thus as a concept, empowerment can be understood as encompassing personal, group and structural change (Wallerstein, 1992:198).

Self-worth, hope, choice, autonomy, identity and efficacy, improved perceptions of self-worth, empathy and perceived ability to help others, the ability to analyse problems, a belief in one's ability to exert control over life circumstances, and a sense of coherence about one's place in the world.



Empowerment occurs when an individual has obtained self-worth, efficacy and an acquired sense of power. They have access to information, resources and learned skills that are self-identified as important. Empowerment can also be considered a journey, emphasizing growth and transition.

Essentially, movement towards empowering practices can be termed empowerment. Viewed as a continuum, empowerment is the process of enabling individuals to acknowledge their existing strengths and encouraging the use of their personal power.

Maybe start with an open question and go around the group: What are some of the issues effecting individuals, their families and their community? This will lead into the definitions.

Break into smaller groups and discuss:

- What do we need to make ourselves, our families and our communities strong?
- Would a program be useful?
- What are some of the barriers that you can see that will stop someone from attending an empowerment and healing program?
- What aspects of a program design will help the program success? For example, how long, where it should be held, what things should be in a program?
- Summarise outcomes and ask participants how these outcomes should be included in an empowerment and healing program, (Break into small groups if necessary).
- Any other comments?
- What happens after this? How participants might stay involved with the Project.

## 6. Close

**Appendix 3:  
National Empowerment Project Interview Guide**

*Note: This interview guide was workshopped with Community Consultants during training.*

INTERVIEWER:		COMMUNITY:	
LOCATION: For example – office, home, outdoor place.		DATE:	
INTERVIEWEE:		GENDER:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
AGE GROUP:	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 25	<input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 35	<input type="checkbox"/> 35 - 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 +

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Interviewer to give information form and tell people:

- About the Project and who is involved.
- Confidentiality.
- Go through consent forms and ethics.
- Background information and the other sites.
- Project methodology (how we are going to do the Project ie community consultations on what people think are the big issues).
- Definitions of cultural social and emotional wellbeing, empowerment and healing.
- That notes will be taken and another contact will be made to confirm the interview outcomes.
- That a community feedback forum will be held.
- 

**WHAT DO WE  
NEED IN THE  
COMMUNITY?**

To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting YOU?


To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting your FAMILY?


To get an understanding, what are some of the issues affecting your COMMUNITY?
What do we need to make ourselves strong?
What do we need to make our families strong?
What do we need to make our communities strong?
What does cultural social and emotional well being mean to you? What does empowerment mean to you? What does healing mean to you?

What types of cultural social and emotional well being, empowerment and healing programs might be useful for your community?


What do you see are the barriers for introducing any programs?


What would you like to see in a program(s) and how would you like it delivered?


How often should the program(s) be run, where and when?


## WHAT IS OUT THERE?

What current course/programs/services do you know of in the local area? *(we don't want to duplicate work but rather build on)*


## GENERAL COMMENTS

Any other comments?




**Appendix 4:  
The National Empowerment Project Interview: Stakeholders**

DATE:		INTERVIEWER:		COMMUNITY:	
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STAKEHOLDER:	
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**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this is to gather information about what relevant programs are currently offered in the community. This is not a confidential interview. Should a confidential interview be required another appointment will be made.



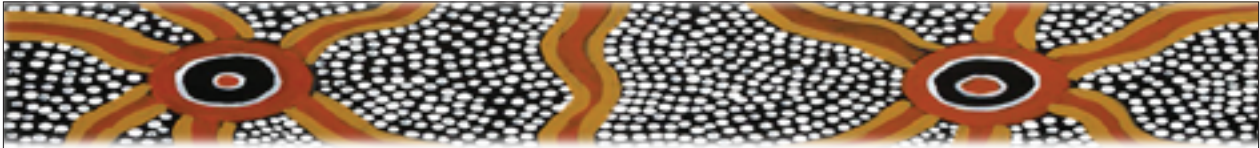
From your work what do you think are the big issues and needs in the community? What can we do to make the community stronger?


What programs have you previously and currently provide to community members? Give details. Do you think the programs are successful? Why and in what ways? By stakeholders and by the community?


Have you seen a change in community following your past and current programs?


What aspects of a program design will help a program be successful?
Do you see empowerment and healing programs useful in the community?
How could you support a program? For instance, would you refer your Aboriginal clients to such a program?
Any other comments?

## Appendix 5: Sample Community Notice



# National Empowerment Project

The Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation in Conjunction with the National Empowerment Program Is Holding a Two Day Workshop  
The NEP Project Is Based On Cultural, Social And Emotional Well-Being For All Aboriginal Families/Youth/Children, And The Stolen Generations Living In Northam And The Wheatbelt Region.

**Where:** Bridgeley Centre located on 91 Wellington Street,  
Northam

**When:** 6<sup>th</sup> 7th of June 2013 @ 10.00am to 3.00pm each day



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
*Advance International Excellence*

**Contact:** Tjalaminu Mia – 0432 233 800

Dezerae Miller - 0408 759 422

