



What does healing look like for you?

First Nations Hope and Healing Camps



“Aunty, I’m just wondering how old do you got to be for working with you guys because I love seeing the field of joy and excitement and the support of everyone.

And as a young man I thank all of you for the all the work and the efforts that all you older deadly mobs put into the camps.

Like, I’m really glad that I came on these camps it really showed me who am I and what I will be in the future.

I thank all of you guys for showing me who I am and what am I capable of doing”.

The First Nations Hope and Healing Camps engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have previously experienced or are currently experiencing vulnerabilities, aged between 11-18 years, to:

- build their sense of identity and belonging;
- enrich their understanding and connection to culture, and
- strengthen positive support networks across kin and community.

With a focus on hope and healing, the camps are designed to enhance the cultural, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in support of their transition to adulthood. Most of the young people are experiencing some form of disconnection to their culture, and they have faced negativity associated with their First Nations cultural identity right throughout their young lives. Recently released research conducted at the Australian National University, and published in the Australian Journal of Indigenous Issues, supports this with 75% of the 11,000 Australians tested for unconscious bias found to hold a “negative implicit or unconscious bias against Indigenous Australians”.

All of the mentors involved with the camps operate within a strengths-based framework that seeks to empower the young people on the camps to see themselves as strong, beautiful and deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All efforts are made to establish a culturally safe space for the young people where we promote positive role models and examples of Black Excellence. No deficit language is used during the camps to ensure we are not sending mixed messages. During the camps, the young people are able to enjoy an environment where their First Nations cultural identity is embraced and celebrated. We find every opportunity to acknowledge the strength in culture and connection to country



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and community. Each camp includes a variety of cultural experiences through foods, painting, stories, dancing, songs, Women's Business, Men's Business, and visits to sacred sites led by Elders and others from community. These cultural activities build a positive association with and connection to First Nations cultures.

Great consideration is given to selecting a variety of suitable mentors to be involved on the camps. Certain mentors are able to share their own lived experiences to give hope to the young people through recognition that they are not alone in what they have experienced and others have been able to overcome similar struggles in life to not only survive but thrive. The diversity of our mentors plays an influential part on the positive influence of the camps.

"We create a safe space to make them feel valued and cared for, as well as giving them a sense of belonging and hope."

Some of the young people have become disengaged from school and carry little hope for what the future holds. In some cases, this stems from the impacts of intergenerational trauma, other issues with family and friends, bullying, and interactions with child protection and/or youth justice. We share information on and examples of alternative opportunities and education pathways for them to explore. We identify and celebrate their strengths, and encourage and support each young person to pursue areas of interest and develop skills and knowledge on subject matters that they are passionate about and / or deadly at. We provide options for them to reengage in some form of education, perhaps on alternative pathways.

"We need to change the narrative, our young people are our future elders, and we want to get them in the best place possible to be the best parents they can be to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma."

Three camps were first delivered in 2017, and then three camps took place in 2019. There have been numerous obstacles to overcome in order to run the camps and issues with funding prevented the camps from running in 2018. Despite this, we remain committed to these camps continuing. We know the importance of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people being supported by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, outside of the usual services and supports usually only provided between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday.

"We talk about the importance of healing, connection to culture and country."

An essential element of the camps is the importance of being outdoors and how it connects to body, mind and spirit. Elders are involved with the camps, and they provide powerful examples of those proud to be First Nations Australians. Another important element of the hope and healing made possible by the camps is the peer connection developed within the young people. We have found the young people





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involved to gain much from connecting to other young people who have experienced similar situations in life. The young people have developed their own support networks that continue to exist outside of and independently of the program.

“They might not have a connection to their community, but they become part of our community.”

One young man sent a text message saying: “Aunty, I’m just wondering how old do you got to be for working with you guys because I love seeing the field of joy and excitement and the support of everyone. And as a young man, I thank all of you for the all the work and the efforts that all you older deadly mobs put into the camps. Like, I’m really glad that I came on these camps it really showed me who am I and what I will be in the future. I thank all of you guys for showing me who I am and what am I capable of doing”. This young person enjoyed the camps so much that he asked to return as a junior mentor for the next two camps. His goal now is to obtain blue card suitability to return as a senior mentor.

We have seen the growth in their confidence and comfort in acknowledging their Aboriginality. One young man, who returned to a second camp, asked if he could give a speech to thank the mentors at our closing ceremony. This inspired his older brother, who has an intellectual disability, to do the same. It is vital to ensure that we are empowering them to have a voice, helping young people speak up, particularly about communicating with their parents/carers about what is and what isn’t working for them in their own journey of healing. We encourage young people to understand that it is okay to say when things are not okay, and that it is important to reach out for support. The camps show them that there are many of us within their own local community that here to help.

Anne Taylor

Chair of the Committee for the First Nations Hope and Healing Camps





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