

Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and the Lived Experience National Network
Interim Report November 2023



FIGURE 1: IMAGE OF ARTIST'S INTERPRETATION FROM LAUNCH GATHERING (ARTIST: MARGIE WOODFIELD)

Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network Interim Report November 2023

FIGURE 1: THE IMAGE ON THE FRONT COVER OF THIS REPORT WAS PAINTED BY ARTIST, MARGIE WOODFIELD. MARGIE WAS PRESENT AT THE INAUGURAL GATHERING OF THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LIVED EXPERIENCE NATIONAL NETWORK IN CAIRNS ON THE 22ND & 23RD OF JUNE 2021. SHE QUIETLY PAINTED WHILE WE WORKSHOPPED. MARGIE HAS CAPTURED THE MAIN POINTS AND THE FEELING OF THE GATHERING. THROUGHOUT THE TWO DAYS, PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS SPOKE WITH MARGIE AND HELPED HER TO CAPTURE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS AND MAKE TWEAKS SO THAT THE PAINTING FELT RIGHT FOR EVERYONE IN THE ROOM.

Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network
Interim Report November 2023

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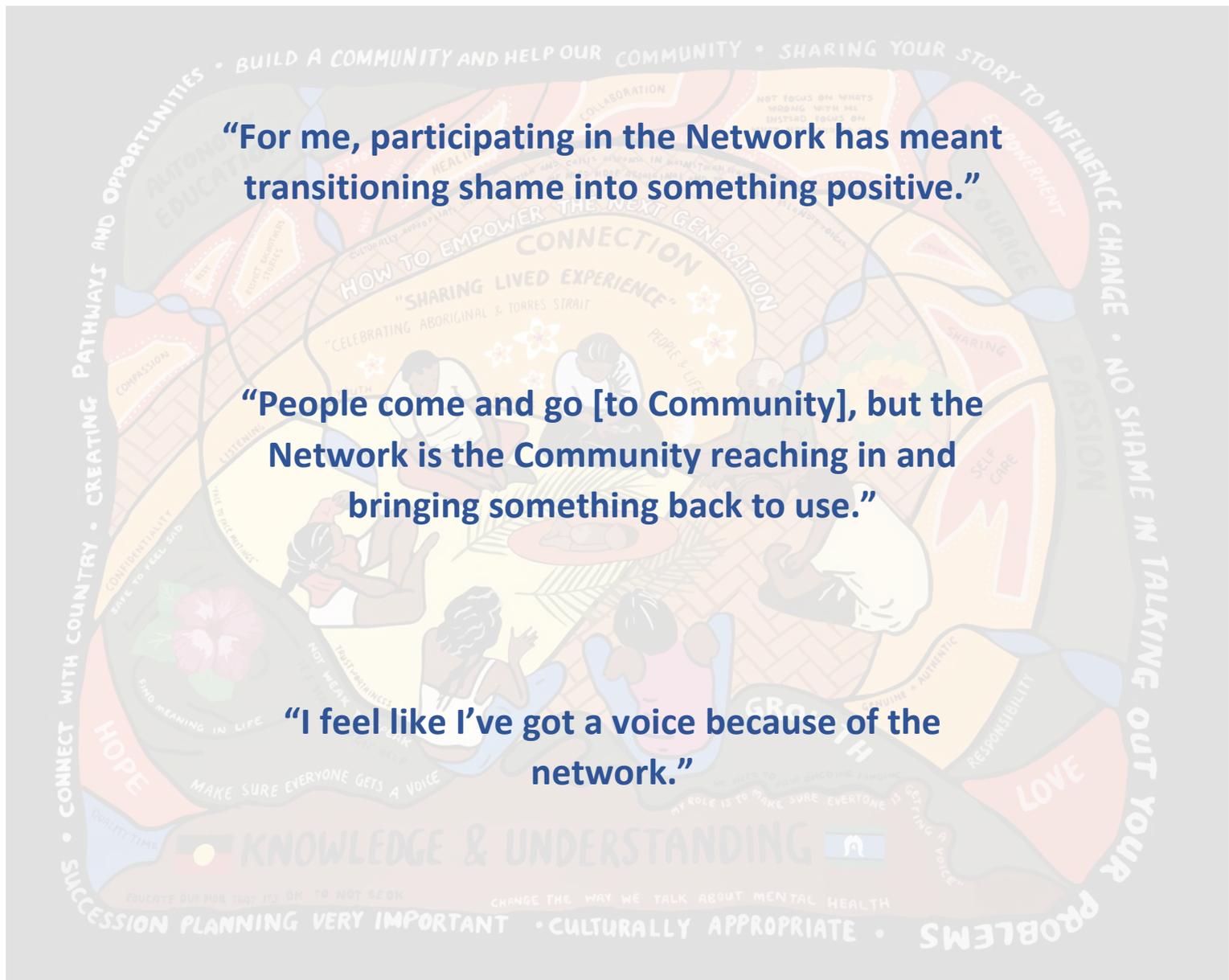
**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LIVED
EXPERIENCE CENTRE STAFF MEMBERS**

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Quotes from National Network Members Gathering 4

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Caution:

The knowledge shared here may cause a strong emotional reaction. Please take measures to care for your social and emotional wellbeing.

Help with a crisis

[13 YARN](#) – 13 92 76

[Lifeline](#)- 13 11 14

[Suicide Call Back Service](#) - 1300 659 467

[MensLine Australia](#) - 1300 78 99 78

[Kids Helpline](#) - 1800 55 1800 (5-25 year olds)

[Rape Crisis Line](#) - 1800 424 017

[1800 RESPECT](#) - 1800 737 732 (sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service)

[National Indigenous Critical Response Service](#) - 1800 805 801

General mental health support

[Beyond Blue](#) - 1300 22 4636

[Mental Health Line \(NSW\)](#) - 1800 011 511

[SANE Australia](#) - 1800 18 7263

Specialist services

[QLife](#) - 1800 184 527 (LGBTIQ+ communities)

[Veterans & Family Counselling](#) - 1800 011 046

[Multicultural Mental Health Line \(NSW\)](#) - 1800 648 911

[Butterfly Foundation](#) - 1800 33 4673

Indigenous-specific EAP

[Well@Work](#) - 03 9863 8146 or wellbeing@abstarr.com

Abstract

This evaluation report explores the impact and experiences of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) and the Centre's National Network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with Lived Experience. The report contextualises the National Network, exploring its origins, purpose, and key activities from the perspective of those involved. This report outlines the methodology employed to collect feedback from Network members, ensuring transparency in the evaluation process. Voices from four gatherings (2022-2023) are analysed to encapsulate Network members' experiences. The final section discusses findings and implications for stakeholders - AIATSIS, Black Dog Institute (BDI)'s ILEC, and National Network members. Key recommendations are outlined to inform the future of ILEC practices and Best Practice in First Nations Lived Experience Engagement.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge that this evaluation took place on many lands across the continent known as 'Australia'. We acknowledge all of the Countries, that have been nurtured and cared for by First Nations Peoples since the Dreaming, and who will continue to take care of these places when the present becomes time immemorial. We recognise that these places have been lands where learning, yarning and healing have taken place for millennia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

A very special thank-you to all of the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience National Network (referred to as the National Network hereafter) members who gave their time and perspectives for us to document their experiences. We also acknowledge the dedicated team at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) housed within the Black Dog Institute who, along with the National Network members, co-created this evaluation report.

From the ILEC National Network Participants:

We would like to recognise the warmth, care, and expertise of *The Seedling Group* Aunties in undertaking this evaluation with us. Many of us found the evaluation in itself to be a healing experience, one that helped us better understand the Network, the Centre and what we are all trying to achieve together. We feel a sense of renewed appreciation for First Nations researchers and Culturally-responsive methodologies, in capturing our stories in a way that honours us and helps us feel empowered in the process. We are grateful for the opportunity to share space and yarns with these fantastic First Nations leaders in research.

Intellectual Property

All of the information in this report remains the property of the ILEC. Indigenous intellectual property is collectively owned, including legal rights to protect that property. This includes cultural knowledge and cultural heritage, including that held in oral history. To protect against quotes and stories being used out of context, please contact ILEC for permission to reproduce any part of this document.

Ethics

This project was approved by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

Research Ethics Committee Number: EO275-20210720

Project title: Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience voices in mental health and suicide prevention.

Appendix 1 Ethics Letter of Approval

Terminology

ILEC ¹	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [Indigenous] Lived-Experience Centre
The National Network	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [Indigenous] Lived Experience Centre National Network
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
BDI	Black Dog Institute
TSG	The Seedling Group
DE	Development Evaluation

The words we use

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are often mentioned together to talk about the people who have always inhabited the land we now know as Australia, including the mainland, the islands off its coast and those to the immediate north. It is important to note that trading did exist across this continent before colonisation, therefore this continent was certainly not ‘discovered’ by the colonisers. The acronym ATSI is generally discouraged and seen as disrespectful because it is the shortening or familiarising of a term that represents a proud and diverse community of Peoples.

Community

The use of the word ‘Community’ in this report means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It can mean an individual or specific community or the collective use of the word meaning all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. If we write about ‘talking to community’ it means speaking to Elders or significant knowledge holders within a community or communities.

Country

The use of the word country in this report is multi-faceted. Rose (1996, p. 8) describes the term Country as multi-dimensional—it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals, surface water, and air. There is sea Country and land Country; in some areas people talk about sky Country. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time.

Cultural Safety

To be culturally safe is to understand one’s own culture and the cultural differences of others without challenge or judgement. Cultural safety is difficult to define as it is only the recipient of the care who can say if a practice is culturally safe (Eckermann et al.,2010). Cultural Safety is considered a journey rather than a destination.

¹ Whilst the full name of the Centre is the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre’, for the purposes of expressing the Centre as an acronym, and avoiding abbreviating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, we are utilising ‘ILEC’ as the preferred term where the ‘I’ stands for ‘Indigenous’.

Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness defined by Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA, 2019) is:

Strengths-based, action orientated approaches that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to experience cultural safety. It is a negotiated process of what constitutes culturally safe service provision as decided by the recipient of that service delivery. It is about the centrality of culture and how that shapes each individual, their worldviews, values, beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with others. It requires strengths-based approaches and recognises that if culture is not factored into all accessible services across the country, the quality and probable impact of the care and services are likely to be diminished.

First Nations Peoples

The term First Nations Peoples is a relatively recent term in an Australian context yet has traditionally been applied to many Indigenous Peoples all over the world. The Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia are often merged in terminology to use the term 'Indigenous' or 'First Nations'. The use of these terms is not always accepted by Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, preferring to use their own Nation's names such as Kabi Kabi or Meriam Islander.

Gatherings

The Gatherings are the meeting together of National Network members and ILEC staff members.

Indigenous

This term is widely used by government departments and academia to define Australia's First Nations Peoples but is not a word Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples chose for themselves. This means that it is not widely accepted in Community. Another reason for the common use of the word Indigenous is that it is significantly less wordy to use than the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

In this report the words Indigenous and First Nations are used interchangeably.

First Nations Lived-Experience – A Definition developed by ILEC

"A lived-Experience recognises the effects of ongoing negative historical impacts and or specific events on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It encompasses the Cultural, spiritual, physical, emotional and wellbeing of the individual, family or Community.

People with lived or living experience of suicide are those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, been bereaved by suicide or having a loved one who has died by suicide, acknowledging that this experience is significantly different and takes into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of understanding social and emotional wellbeing."

Shame

In Aboriginal English, the word shame remains within a continuum of its original dictionary meaning but is used differently. It describes situations in which a person is singled out for any reason if they are in trouble or being praised, or simply given attention where the person loses the security and anonymity they feel within their group (Harkins, 1990). The meaning of the word is contextual to different Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Trauma-informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based way of working and living that is based on an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma on people's lives and behaviours.

The Way we Work

The ILEC is committed to supporting strengths within the Indigenous community to build self-determination for all Indigenous Peoples. This includes recruiting Indigenous businesses, listening to Indigenous voices, seeking guidance and support from Indigenous knowledge holders and respecting Indigenous Knowledges (IK).

Working in a culturally-safe and trauma informed way (Tujague & Ryan 2023) is at the core of work done within the ILEC and National Network. This means following the recognised principles of trauma-informed practice (choice, culture, collaboration, safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment) as developed by Falot & Harris (2001) and adapted by The Healing Foundation to include Culture. The Seedling Group has on its team Indigenous psychologists who are able to support the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of all participants at every part of the research and evaluation process.

The Purpose of this Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation report is to document and outline the impact of the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) and the Indigenous Lived Experience Network (National Network) from the perspectives of the Network members. The evaluation was also conducted to discover what we could learn from the dynamic nature of the National Network. These learnings are also embedded in this report. This report progresses organically as the Network members' feedback dictated. However, specific research questions from the AIATSIS grant requirements are answered succinctly on page 37.

Scope of this Report

Although this report touches on the journey of the ILEC and the National Network, and the opportunities members have been presented with, its main focus is on the feedback from the National Network members about what their experiences have been on their journey with the Network. It is not meant to be an audit of the functions and deliverables of the ILEC.

This report has four parts

Part A- Context and Background of Lived Experience

Firstly, we give our findings context by explaining how the National Network came about and its purpose including some of the activities it carries out. We introduce The Seedling Group, the co-authors of this report. We describe the onboarding process used to build the National Network in some detail as this is a critical part of the culturally safe and trauma-informed way in which the ILEC strives to operate.

Part B- Methodology

This section of the report describes how we gathered Network members' feedback of what their experiences have been during their time with the Network. The report outlines the methodology and methods used to gather information for this evaluation.

Part C- Making Sense of the Feedback

Next, we collect and analyse all of the stories and voices from four Gatherings which occurred from 2022 to 2023 where we workshopped and yarned with National Network members about what it has been like to be part of the ILEC National Network. Figure 1 (The Evaluation Report Map) is a visual depiction of this report.

Part D- Findings and Recommendations

In this final section, the implications of the findings are discussed for three stakeholder groups, the funder (AIATSIS), BDI's ILEC and most importantly, the National Network members. Some recommendations are made for the Centre and National Network going forward.

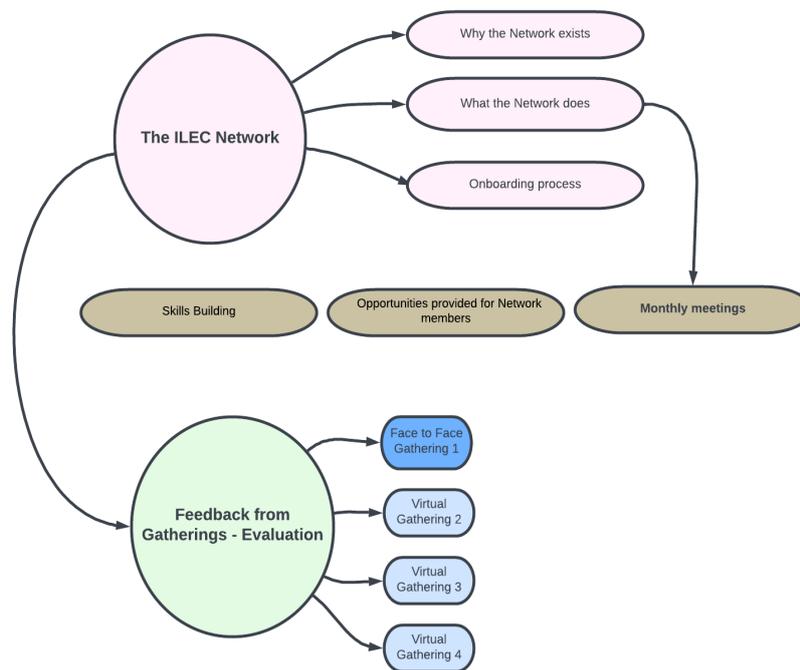


FIGURE 1 EVALUATION REPORT MAP

This map depicts the ILEC Network (or the National Network) and the reason it exists as well as what its activities are. It situates the Onboarding Process as a significant function that shapes the National Network. This links to the work carried out in this report, Feedback from Gatherings (the evaluation), which is informed by the four virtual gatherings undertaken.

Part A. Context

1. Why the Lived Experience Network Exists

In this section we explain the inception of the Lived Experience National Network and where it sits within the broader landscape of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) and the Black Dog Institute (BDI). We also explain who The Seedling Group is, the co-author of this report.

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The Black Dog Institute (BDI), The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) and The National Network

The Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) whose purpose is to influence Indigenous suicide prevention policy, practice and research, conducted a literature review (Dudgeon et al., 2018) to understand more about Indigenous suicide. The review found that Indigenous suicide is different in many inherent ways to non-Indigenous suicide. Factors such as colonisation and the ensuing genocide, forced removals from traditional lands and children being removed from families and communities during the 'Stolen Generations' contributed to unique factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. A workshop followed that brought Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples together to talk about their lived experience and how they may work together to help inform policy and practice in a safe and meaningful way. One of the main findings of the workshop was that there was a need for an Indigenous Lived Experience Definition and Network. Following a proposal to Federal Government, in September 2019, Minister Ken Wyatt formally announced the funding for the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre through the Black Dog Institute – the first of its kind in Australia and possibly the world.

The Lived-Experience Centre was founded to give a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who have been affected by suicide and poor social and emotional wellbeing. One way ILEC has done this is by building a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with lived experience (the National Network) who can provide lived experience expertise and insight into projects, policies, research, service design and delivery at regional and national levels.

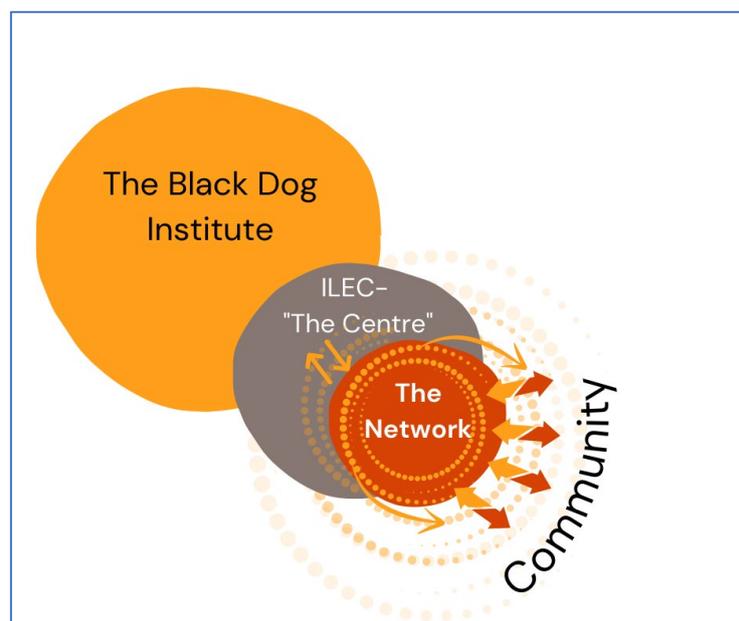


FIGURE 2 BDI, ILEC AND NETWORK DIAGRAM

A National Network Progression document, tracking key dates and developments, can be found in Appendix 2 and can be seen at a glance in Figure 3 'Timeline of the Indigenous Lived-Experience Centre'.

The Seedling Group

The Seedling Group (TSG) is a group of Indigenous psychologists and other consultants who assist CEO's, managers and operational staff to better understand Indigenous cultural practices and improve an organisation's ability to work effectively with Indigenous communities and business. The Seedling Group's particular focus is on Culturally-Safe and Trauma-Informed Practice (CSTIP) and Indigenous Evaluation (IE). Co-founder of TSG Nicole Tujague, has a specific interest in the research question, "What do Aboriginal Peoples think is important to measure when evaluating projects and programs that affect their lives?". Her research findings inform this work. The Seedling Group is a co-creator of this report.

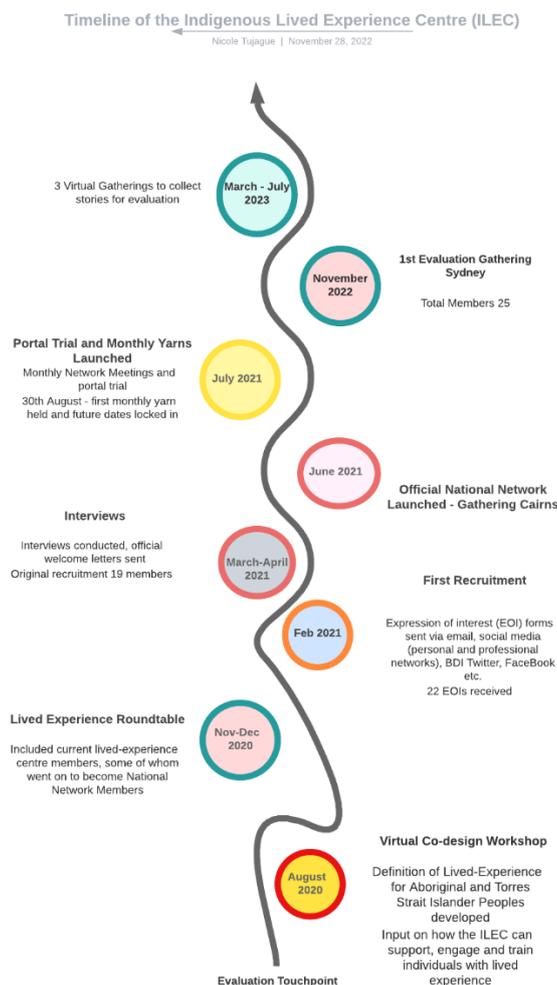


FIGURE 3 TIMELINE OF THE INDIGENOUS LIVED EXPERIENCE CENTRE (ILEC)

With this key understanding of The ILEC and why the National Network exists, we explore the three key activities the National Network members participate in: the monthly meetings; the engagements with external organisations, known as 'opportunities'; and skill-building activities.

2. What the Network Achieves

The ILEC is committed to best practice in lived experience engagement, encompassing paid participation (in accordance with the National Mental Health Commission's rate of \$86 per hour) for all activities, the provision of psychological support to minimise harm, and the requirement that all staff have lived experience themselves. Additionally, the ILEC adopts a culturally responsive and trauma-informed approach, along with maintaining a zero-tolerance stance toward lateral violence.

2.1 *Online Monthly Meetings (Monthly Yarns)*

The Network meets with ILEC team members monthly for a number of different purposes. These meetings are conducted online due to the varying locations of Network members across the country. Monthly Yarns serve as a chance to check-in, network and share. This is when new ILEC team members and National Network members are formally introduced. These monthly meetings are times designated to updating members on the Centre's activities, including what the team has been up to and upcoming opportunities. The meetings vary in size of attendance depending upon members' capacity at that time. Sometimes the meetings feature guest speakers, for example, on the 18th October, 2021, Bronwen Edwards, CEO of Roses in the Ocean spoke to the Network members about the types of resources they have developed and how they support communities in the Lived Experience space.

There have been 26 Monthly Yarns held since the inception of the National Network, with over 200 attendances by members at Monthly Yarns. Monthly Yarns, along with all structured activities, are subject to paid participation at a rate of \$86 per hour in accordance with the National Mental Health Commission's Lived Experience Paid Participation rate.

2.2 *Participation in external engagements and other opportunities*

The ILEC disseminates opportunities to the National Network from organisations that have been vetted for suitability (see Considerations for Organisational Readiness, Appendix 6) and supports the ongoing coordination of member's involvement in these opportunities. Over the two years of the Network, National Network members have participated in 22 opportunities with external organisations which were vetted and coordinated by ILEC. These opportunities have ranged from forming Lived Experience Advisory groups for National and State initiatives, sharing their stories in podcasts, sitting on event panels, guest speaking on webinars, and producing reports to encourage best practice for State and National bodies. National Network members have participated in opportunities with organisations such as 13Yarn, The National Mental Health Commission, The Western Australian Mental Health Commission, The National Coroner's Office, Woven Threads, LELAN and more.

2.3 *Skills/Capacity Building*

National Network Members have participated in two training opportunities which were vetted, coordinated and funded by ILEC;

- (i) Trauma-Informed Practice (2022)
- (ii) Sharing Your Story Safely (2023)

3. Onboarding Process

The onboarding process for applicants who express interest in joining the National Network is robust. First Nations' Peoples have a history of not having a voice in the way services are delivered to them. As such it was important that individuals were given the opportunity to participate but also to be held in cultural and therapeutic safety, and engaged with respectfully. To do this, a panel screening process assessed all applications. This process included:

- a. A risk assessment for symptomology, applicants' access to a viable support network, current mental health and suicide ideation status, access to professional out of session support and whether they were being impacted by Sorry Business and/or comorbid illnesses.
- b. Applicants' capacity and existing support to engage online
- c. Whether participants had good healing and self-care routines, family cohesion or connection to Country, language, cultural practices, resources, and service support. These were all considered high level resilience and safety measures.

There were also opportunities to invite applicants to contribute in other ways if they did not have the above criteria in place at the time of application.

The ILEC put in place practices to support successful applicants and staff members considering the following:

- a. Participant drop-out, participant withdrawal and participant feedback pathways.
- b. Privacy and security of records and knowledge shared. Communications aligned with the Australian Psychological Society and [The Australian Cyber Security Centre around cybersecurity strategies](#).
- c. Culturally responsive therapeutic support for during and post Gatherings. This was facilitated by the engagement of Aboriginal counsellors/psychologists who specialise in suicide prevention and holistic recovery case formulation. These measures ensure the whole Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) of the participant is supported.
- d. Consent to share information through written communications and then verbally during the Gatherings, to ensure that participants had a full understanding of why and what they were giving permission for. It was reiterated that participants could withdraw their consent at any point during or after the Gathering (See Appendix 4).
- e. Formal debriefing for therapists, facilitators and the Lived-Experience team was conducted immediately after each Gathering and a few days post gathering to ensure the safety and ongoing positive wellbeing for individuals who may be experiencing vicarious trauma.

Part B. The Methodology of this Evaluation

Our strategy for understanding and collecting Network Member voices

This evaluation has its roots in the National Network journey from its launch at the Cairns Gathering in June 2021. At the beginning of the evaluation period we carried out a literature review to scan the existing policy landscape in mental health and suicide prevention, for policy that included Lived-Experience voices. At the end of the evaluation period a refresh was done to see if there have been changes that may reflect the work of the ILEC and the National Network. The Literature review and the refresh can be found in Attachment 3.

At this Gathering, spoke about the ways in which we would like to carry out the monitoring and evaluation of the Network. At that stage TSG produced a literature review of government policies that reflected in any way, Indigenous Lived-Experiences Voices (see Appendix 3). Following the

launch, TSG, ILEC team members and the National Network met face-to-face for our first evaluation Gathering in Sydney in November 2022.

Methodology

Developmental Evaluation

We have chosen to use Developmental Evaluation (DE) as a Culturally safe participatory practice for this project for two main reasons. Firstly, DE allows for innovation and the creation of new knowledge as the project progresses. Secondly, it has the capacity to embrace the complexity of Indigenous communities. Critical components of DE are: a) building relationships; b) creating safe spaces for all participants' voices to be heard; c) challenging old ways of evaluation; and d) allowing co-creation (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2018). Developmental Evaluation in this project meant that we could start the process of data collection with the first face-to-face Gathering, then using what we learned from that event, decide what the subsequent Gatherings should look like. It also meant that we could take questions or learnings from each Gathering and use them as a starting point for the next Gathering in order to continue the innovation of the project.

Building safe spaces for people to share knowledge is a critical part of DE methodology. A safe space is a space where participants can work collectively and not have pressures or expectations put onto them as individuals. This is important as not everyone has the capacity to articulate their thoughts at all times, even though they may participate physically in the group. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are collective communities. We learn, work, create and thrive, acknowledging and including our extended networks. Safe spaces value collective working practices over individual competitive working practices. Collective working practices seek out and utilise existing strengths and aspirations within the collective. Everyone's skills and their knowledge are important and valid. Similar to the concept of collective healing, where healing happens on an individual level and a collective level, collective knowledge-sharing respects both the individual and the collective. Building safe spaces allows room for co-creation. Co-creation is a big part of how we used DE in this project as opposed to community engagement or co-design.

Co-creation

Co-creation has the potential to discover more than the process of co-design might do (Haviland & Pillsbury, 2012). The term 'co-create' has emerged from a suite of collaborative practice terms and in theory delivers more than 'co-design'. Like all collaborative practices, it challenges traditional hierarchies of power. It challenges who the 'expert' is in a meeting of minds, including for example, participants with a lived experience. Co-creation can disrupt silos of practice or the confines of working within disciplines. For this evaluation project, we needed to be open to findings that fit within multiple disciplines. There was always an overarching question of, "what are the possibilities of this Lived-Experience Network group?" It was important to capture the unexpected positive outcomes and direction that the network took. Working in this way has the potential to allow for creative responses and the moving of boundaries. It does this by merging perspectives (Haviland & Pillsbury, 2012). By melding multiple forms of knowledge, co-creation has the potential to deliver multiple forms of value. When you participate in co-creation, you not only get expected tangible outcomes, but because it is a relational process, interactions and relationships between people and content become fundamental (Rodriguez, 2012).

Co-creation encourages creativity and innovation, potentially delivering experiences that are relevant and specific to each context, not only for participants but also for the collective good (Breunlin & Haviland, 2008; Walsh et al., 2014). It involves non-linear activities triggered by different

challenges, exploration and dilemmas using different tools of discovery. Participants share various roles, that of curators, designers and makers. In this case, they negotiated multiple perspectives, agendas and points of view. Co-creation embraces diversity and complexity. In fact, complexity becomes a productive, rather than challenging aspect of co-creation (Fanjoy & Bragg, 2019). Complexity was ever present in the Gatherings and planning continually anticipated what that would look like. Peoples' availability, capacity and management of time was part of that complexity.

Cyclic Planning and Indigenous Time

We built into our evaluation design a cyclic method of data collection where we collected stories, circled back to previous conversations and then revisited our analyses of the stories. This minimised our own biases getting in the way of the Network members' perspectives we were hearing. This process is time-consuming but respects an Indigenous relationship with time. Indigenous concepts of time, which have survived through colonisation, are different to Western linear concepts of time. Time is thought of as circular, where the past is part of the present and the focus is on tradition, ceremony and stability, as opposed to being future orientated (Stanner, 1969; Yalmambirra, 2000). So instead of anticipating future findings of the evaluation, we could focus on what stories we had heard and how they relate to the new stories we are hearing. Do these stories carry a special message that we could have accidentally overlooked? Aboriginal time philosophy is also tied to obligation. Things that are important will take precedence over schedules. Participants came and went as they were able. The Gatherings were delivered in different time frames. One Gathering was face-to-face with an online component for those not attending in person; three Gatherings were on-line offered in four different time slots.

Experimenting with the Gathering Process

There were four Gatherings, one was face-to-face in Sydney (16th & 17th November 2022). Three more Gatherings were held online via Zoom. Gatherings 2, 3 and 4 were divided into four 2-hour online sessions to try to accommodate for peoples' busy lives and work schedules. Gathering 2 was held in March 2023, Gathering 3 in July 2023 and Gathering 4 in August 2023. These trial timings could be useful for future Gathering planning.

The Thought Ritual – An Indigenous Data Analysis Methodology

We (TSG) transcribed and made visual the stories that were collected from the yarns to find key themes and sub-themes using an Indigenous thematic analysis method called the 'thought ritual' (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). The four Gatherings produced four thought rituals (Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8). As we built the thought rituals, we noticed, considered and mapped the people, places, their relatedness and connectedness, as important threads. Thought rituals allowed us to combine Indigenous oral and cultural practices of yarning and storytelling, with thought experimentation (Horowitz & Massey, 1991). The data points on the thought ritual can include human and non-human relationships, including other kin sharing the lands where research takes place and relationship with Country.

The second stage was to identify similarities, differences and overlap between the data points. While this stage is similar to the traditional Western process of grouping concepts into themes, it is the point when Indigenous protocols of communal knowledge production, such as storytelling and the use of metaphors, come into play. Discussions with others, such as National Network members, peers and other professionals are used to analyse the stories.

The third phase relates to the use of metaphors and investigating the relationships and synchronicities between the data points. Yunkaporta (2019) speaks about metaphors and the way they fire new neural networks in the brain, creating new knowledge. Metaphors can be used to connect stories to culture and place. This stage involves a process of finding deeper meanings and patterns in the analysis, allowing the influences of ancestors or spirit into your thinking (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019).

The fourth stage allows for insights, transformations and moments of inspiration and realisation. This is when key findings emerge and signs or ‘somethings’ (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019, p. 4) are realised through deep reflection.

Pattern thinking is a fluid concept that runs through all four stages of this data analysis. We arrived at an in-depth analysis of themes through populating the thought ritual maps from each Gathering and re-engaging with participants to discuss the validity of our conclusions. We made changes as necessary before writing up this final report. The thought ritual was a vehicle through which we were able to make sense of all the findings as they related to the people, places, relationships, and their connectedness.

Process/Data Collection

The way we collected the data or stories, fell into several different methods. We met face-to-face for Gathering 1 which had a virtual component (Sydney November 2022) and engaged in virtual yarning (via Zoom) for the three other Gatherings (March-August 2023). During the face-to-face Gathering, we utilised group work, video interviewing, surveys and polling software. A communication plan guided the work involving the Network members (see Figure 3). Each Gathering began with a check-in exercise, where members were asked to reflect on how they felt emotionally and physically, integrating body and mind and preparing them to be present. This is a tool of trauma-informed practice that helps ground participants in discussion groups, particularly when sensitive issues are being explored. Each Gathering ended with a check-out exercise to make sure everyone was grounded and in a strong place to leave the yarn.

Yarning

Yarning is a research method fundamental to an Indigenous paradigm (Barlo, 2016; Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Dean, 2010), as it is one way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have handed down cultural knowledge for generations. Yarning can ensure cultural safety and empower individuals to contribute to positive outcomes in their community (Dean, 2010). It enabled TSG to capture stories that gave rich context to the research findings, while privileging Indigenous ways of knowledge sharing. Importantly, yarning was a method that enabled us to work in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way. The yarns began with a specific question, however the conversations went in many directions depending upon what had to be said. No time limits were put on people speaking during the yarning process. Everyone was given time to contemplate and gather their thoughts as we worked methodically around the room. If people didn’t have anything to say, it was accepted that listening was a valid way to contribute. If time permitted, the sessions ended with some knowledge sharing of different topics for people to take away with them.

Virtual Yarning

The planning for the Virtual Gatherings for Lived-Experience participants incorporated several important factors. The design, implementation, delivery and follow up post-virtual yarn connection, were guided by principles of Trauma Informed Practice, Telehealth client and practitioner safety ([Better Access Initiative](#) Guidelines), and Person Centered Therapeutic and Cultural Safety. All forms

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of communication, planning, invitation, engagement and pre- and post-therapeutic support held best practice for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority populations at its center.

The Communication Plan

Part B: Stakeholder and communications plan

Intended user/stakeholder	Priority	User's priority goals	Action you want them to take	Opportunities to listen to them	Mediums of communication (verbal, written, visual, audio-visual)	Channels of communication (formal, informal, newsletter, email, phone, zoom)	Notes on communication timing
BDI IEC	Second – will need to use the information to lobby for change	To enable lived experience voices and report back to funders	Feed findings back to policy makers, funders and the broader mental health and suicide prevention sector	Loom and written report, mural for continued co-design	Each ILEC staff member may have different preferences for mediums of communication It may be a mix of verbal, written, visual, audio-visual	Each ILEC staff member may have different preferences for channels of communication. It may be a mix of formal, informal, newsletter, email, phone, zoom	Can be a discussion point at gathering debriefing or bi-monthly catch-ups
Policy makers/minister	Third – inform policy changes	To decrease suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	Change policy to reflect findings	For Nathan and Vicki to complete: Coordinate through ILEC connections, and through BDI government/policy team	To be determined at a later date – For internal team discussion with BDI	To be determined at a later date – For internal team discussion with BDI	
Network Members	First – because it is their knowledge	Having their voices heard to influence policy	To read and digest information and possibly contribute to journal articles, share with others the positive	Loom with slides of main points so that people don't have to read the entire report – for network members to comment on. Electronic copy provided.	Verbal, written, visual, audio-visual (Determined by network members)	Email Phone Monthly yarns (12 months) Quarterly gathering meetings	Can be a discussion point at gatherings or monthly yarns

FIGURE 4 THE ILEC COMMUNICATION PLAN

Part C. Feedback from the Gatherings – What the Participants said

For each of the Gatherings, we begin with the Thought Ritual and follow with the analysis/explanation of what the main messages were. This analysis was done in groups and the initial findings were shared with the ILEC and National Network members for suggestions and confirmation.

Gathering One

Gathering 1 took place in Warrang/Warrane (Sydney) in November 2022. We acknowledged the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal People of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal People and the Gamaygal People, upon whose ancestral lands we gathered and shared. An official Welcome was given by Wiradjuri woman and city of Sydney councillor, Yvonne Weldon AM. The room where we met was bright and airy and Country was welcoming. The room was set up to be welcoming and familiar to foster a sense of safety. There were palm fronds, cultural pieces of importance such as woven mats from the Torres Strait, Aboriginal woven animals from the Central Desert area and other objects with cultural significance. Filling the room was the aroma from Australian essential oils. There were breakout areas where people could go to find quiet if they needed to. Throughout the sessions, grounding tools were taught to keep everyone grounded and to start building a toolkit of grounding exercises members could use at home or teach their families and communities. These exercises were fun and the psychology of why they worked was explained. There was a flash hailstorm in the mid-afternoon of the second day and comments were made about ‘ancestors talking to us’. The days were filled with conversations, workshopping and rich knowledge sharing. The first day ended with a cultural cruise of Sydney Harbour with cultural group, [Tribal Warriors](#) on board the *Mari Nawi* where yarning happened about local mentoring programs and motivational stories from Redfern mob while delicious food was shared.

During Gathering 1 a series of data collection activities were carried out. These included yarning circles, developing of a thought ritual about the values of the Network, video interviews and an online survey where participants were in pairs to discuss their views before posting them online to be recorded. Four groups workshopped possible frameworks for the Network. Figure 5 represents a thought ritual of the findings from the first Gathering and a summary of those findings.

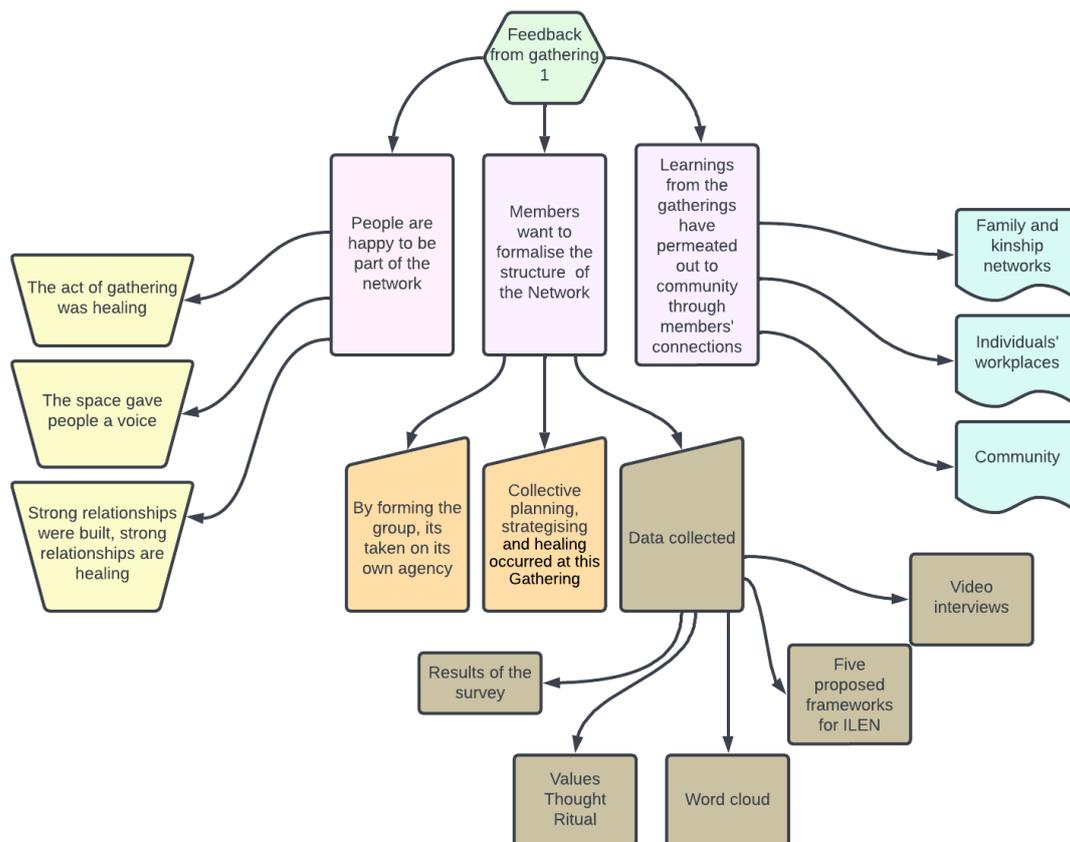


FIGURE 5 THOUGHT RITUAL FROM GATHERING 1

KEY MESSAGES FROM GATHERING 1

1. THE ACT OF GATHERING WAS IN ITSELF HEALING FOR THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED.
2. THE SPACE THE CENTRE AND THE NETWORK CREATED, GAVE PEOPLE A VOICE.
3. STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WERE BUILT, STRONG RELATIONSHIPS ARE HEALING.
4. THE NETWORK HAS DEVELOPED ITS OWN AGENCY. (IT HAS TAKEN ON ITS OWN CAPACITY TO ACTIVELY AND INDEPENDENTLY CHOOSE AND TO AFFECT CHANGE.)

Gathering 1 – Message 1 The act of gathering was in itself healing for those who participated.

The overall sentiment amongst those who had gathered was that they were happy and proud to be members of the Network and that their engagement in it was contributing to their own healing. They recognised the diverse strengths that members brought with them, acknowledging that everyone had something different to contribute, like *'pieces of a puzzle'*. Members brought their own history, their networks and communities, to the work they did here. They want to serve their Countrymen, their communities. These feelings were expressed in some of the quotes from Gathering 1:

"Anything to do with community or Country, I'm in."

“When I started engaging with everyone and learning and listening, I realised it was contributing to my healing in so many ways.”

“We are all a team with different pieces of the puzzle”.

“I feel very happy to be here, to be healing, and listening and learning.”

“Healing is a journey, you gain those tools, knowing how to respond rather than react. There have been times when I haven’t felt too good, I’ve cried the moment we come on. You know this is a good safe space to do it in. And you get strength from everyone else. It’s not about sympathy, it about people understanding how we feel and the place that we live and work in and when we make those changes.”

Gathering 1 – Message 2 The space the Network created gave people a voice.

There was a feeling that being part of the Network is powerful because it means being safe, having a voice in places where policy is made, a voice that advocates for “our ways”, “to healing our ways”, that would be listened to. The gathering expressed a shared vision of being proactive, of contributing to change in the policies that make accessing appropriate services possible for mob.

Collecting tools and expanding skills to help their own networks was a great motivation to be part of the Network, along with the intention to “make a path for others”. There was a great willingness to listen to others, with one participant noting,

“... [I feel] a sense of calm when there is someone to talk to who is on the same journey”.

Other members added:

“So many years of trauma, just so grateful to be part of this.”

“I was a bit nervous to be a part of the group, and then to be accepted was wonderful but again that safety, being valued, being listened to, it’s very powerful.”

Gathering 1 – Message 3 Strong relationships were built; strong relationships are healing.

Being part of the Network and attending the face-to-face Gathering in Sydney required considerable commitment from the members of the Indigenous Lived Experience Network (the National Network) with many taking leave from work, from family commitments and from the programs that they have set up and are heavily involved in running in their own communities. For others, listening was a chance to ‘deconstruct’ and examine their own knowledge systems. New friendships were made, and old connections strengthened.

“Thank you for being patient with me as a group and allowing me to come in and out and back in, you’ve got my commitment that I’ll be here on a continued journey for our people.”

This gave the group a sense of belonging and safety. All cultures were acknowledged and welcomed in the space and cultural practices, such as Dadirri (deep listening) and yarning protocols helped everyone feel included. The network has enriched people’s lives.

“So many years of trauma, just so grateful to be part of this.”

Gathering 1 – Message 4 The Network has taken on its own agency

In forming the group, the Network has taken on its own agency; direction, purpose, form and function have been growing and taking shape from within the Network as a product of the interactions between its members. Once a safe space had been set up, groups participated in collective knowledge sharing, planning and strategising for the future of the Network. Collective and individual healing occurred at this Gathering as members told their stories and listened to others.

Motivating each of the members to join the Network, was the recognition of its potential to make changes that honoured our many ways of knowing, being, and doing when it comes to suicide prevention for mob. When the members gathered, they arrived with that potential firmly in mind. What remained to be solidified in the minds of participants, was the way the Network would function, how it would produce tools, share knowledge, and influence policy. These are questions which the group aimed to define for themselves by producing four model frameworks.

Stories emerged of how learnings from the Network were already being shared through family and kinship networks, through members’ workplaces and community groups. At this Gathering, members were curious to learn from each other and benefit from sharing knowledge. This included sharing knowledge about programs that were already operating at grassroots in different places and how they were benefitting communities. Being in the Network is a chance to learn from others and share what members have learned.

“Thank you guys for sharing, it makes me feel better that I’m not alone and makes me think differently later on. Maybe there is something I can use somewhere else - different participation, different people sitting in front of me, different clients, different consumers, they’re all different. And it’s a great help being in an institution like this one, rather than just [me].”

“From people to pathways, to programs, to procedures, to practice, to policy that is our business. And knowing what’s out there- being like a clearing house, knowing what you know - knowing what you know and putting that here and being available for community in that time of crisis, being able to access is most important; being able to reach that blue collar to that real flash murri...doesn’t matter [who you are]”

“It’s awesome to be able to be linked in with other people and other networks and be involved in, as I said, policy and legislation creates change.”

Gathering two

Gathering 2 was held online and split over four 2-hour sessions in order to meet different Network members’ schedules across the country. This breaking up into smaller groups was trialled to see if having multiple times made it easier for members to attend, providing choice in line with trauma-informed practice principles. From this trial it became clear that having four sessions was too many, as there tended to be fewer people in each group, increasing the possibility that evaluation and support staff would outnumber participants. Everyone agreed that online yarning was effective, however missing many of the elements that a face-to-face Gathering delivered.

Gathering 2 began with a discussion about the fourth finding from Gathering one, how the learnings from the Network have already started permeating out into community. The question asked was “Are the Centre’s activities making significant changes at the community level?” A new grounding exercise was covered, and we took the opportunity to refresh previous grounding exercises that participants could recall, supporting the building of members’ skills toolkits and honouring the cultural practice of reciprocity. Further to this practice, TSG facilitated space to explore racial trauma as it affects First Nations’ Peoples.

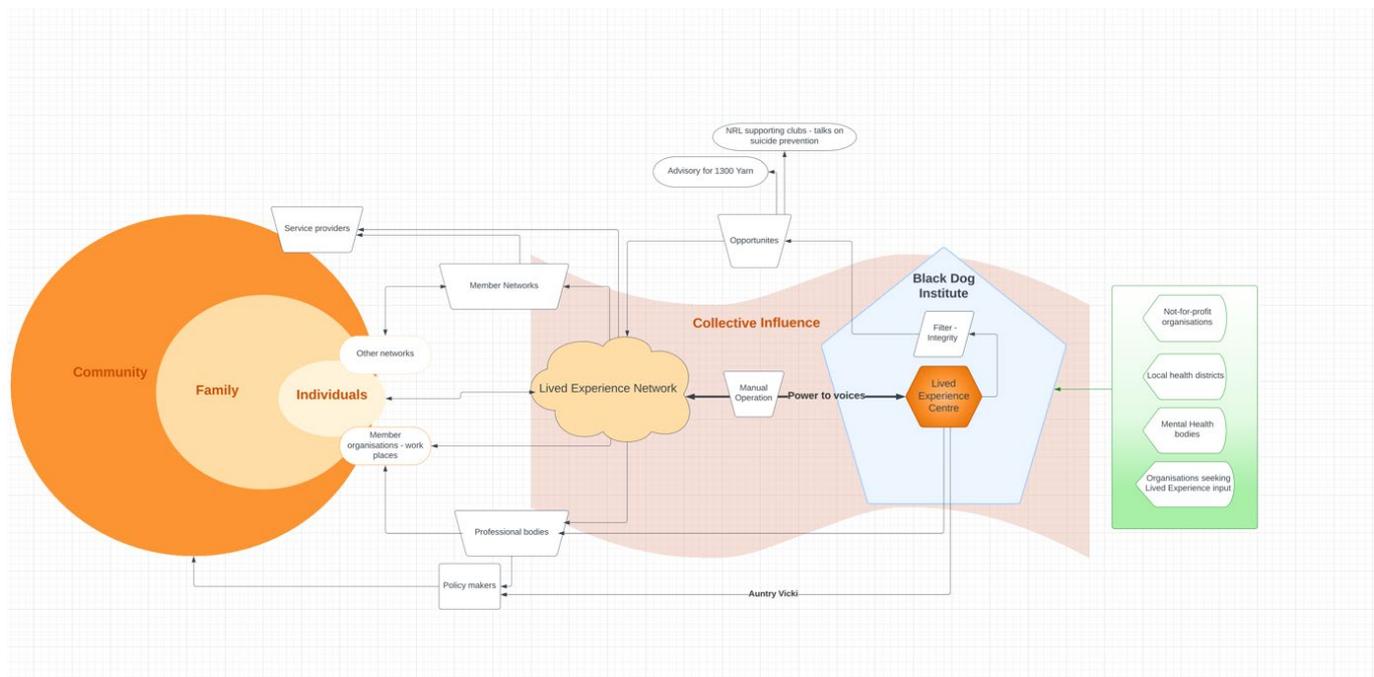


FIGURE 6 THOUGHT RITUAL FROM GATHERING 2

KEY MESSAGES FROM GATHERING 2:

1. OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS APPROACHING BDI AND ILEC WERE BEGINNING TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NETWORK MEMBERS TO HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD
2. NETWORK MEMBERS' WORKPLACES, PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND OTHER NETWORKS WERE BENEFITING FROM THE MEMBERS' GROWING CONFIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE
3. MEMBERS FELT SUPPORTED BY THE ILEC AND HAVING BDI AS THE MAIN BODY SUPPORTING THEM

Gathering 2 – Message 1 Opportunities from organisations who are seeking a lived experience perspective in their projects had begun to approach BDI and ILEC for Network members to participate in opportunities

In Gathering 2, members shared examples of external engagements they had participated in where they could speak to and advise organisations, sporting clubs and community groups, on lived-experience perspectives. The ILEC disseminates opportunities to the National Network from organisations that have been vetted for suitability (see Considerations for Organisational Readiness, Appendix 6) and supports the ongoing coordination of members' involvement in these opportunities. Opportunities also include sitting on boards, focus groups and advisory groups. The information and learnings from the National Network flow out into the networks, community bodies, professional bodies and professional networks, but information also flows back into the network by the same means. As one network member pointed out:

“Each of us have this small amount of power, not power but opportunity to make change in our lives and how do we use it? When do you influence it...?”

Other participants added,

“Being that contact, that person, and having the resources at hand, if not we can forward them on to someone who can help them. Just having an understanding of the different services and the service providers through linking in with all the Network members in our group, all the things we’ve been doing...everything is lining up”.

“Everybody is playing a role in this network, and this platform is very important, especially in the community, and just to be bold and step out and speak, and the comfortability of how you guys made me feel, I feel like I can speak now with a bit more grounding and bit more depth, and if I don’t know the answer, I’ll ask one of you.”

The members felt that these opportunities gave them a chance to use their experiences in a meaningful way to hopefully help others and influence policy change. There is a range of engagements that our members and Centre have participated in, such as individual member engagements (eg. Podcasts or guest speaking), ongoing projects by several members in a working group (such as production of best practice reports for State and National bodies), , submissions to broader frameworks influencing the sector, inclusion of ILEC definition or resources in broader reports or initiatives, and advocacy by the Head of Centre in their role on multiple National and International Advisories and boards.

Some examples of these engagements (not related specifically to discussions in Gathering 2) include:

Individual Member Engagements Examples

- Members were lived experience panellists on three [Expert Insights Podcasts](#);
Episode 53- Impacts of The Voice to Parliament on First Nations Peoples
Episode 55- Intergenerational Sharing of Culture for Improved Social and Emotional Wellbeing
Episode 57- - Mental Health & Climate Change

These episodes are public resources available on Spotify and Apple podcasts, and all feature one of the ILEC National Network members as a panellist. Episode 53 is featured on the Monash University website as a resource: https://www.monash.edu/about/strategic-direction/strategic-plan/voice#tabs_3256467-05

- A member was a guest presenter to VIC Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing Community of Practice Meeting, organised by Orygen and YACVic

Projects conducted by a Working Group of Members Examples

- ILEC was commissioned by the Western Australian Mental Health Commission to form a working group of Lived Experience members to create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Lived Experience ‘Peer’ Workforce Guide which will be publicly available in early 2024.

- ILEC partnered with the Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention to produce a Lived Experience report on [Coronial Responses to Suicides of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#)

Submissions to Influence Broader Frameworks/Initiatives Examples

- Advocating for LE perspective within consultation session on 28/04/23 for the [Review of Sector Funding Arrangements and Service Provider Capability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services and the Integrated Team Care \(ITC\) program.](#)
- [Announcement of Two Separate National Peak Bodies](#) to raise LE voices- 1) for Mental Health Consumers and 2) Mental Health Carers, Family & Kin
During the scoping stage, members were encouraged to submit responses on the structure of the peak body to ensure First Nations voices were included. Three ILEC National Network members and two ILEC staff submitted responses. Aunty Vicki McKenna, Head of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre, now sits as a project advisor for the process of establishing the two peak bodies, to be a vessel for voices of First Nations Lived Experience.
- Submission to the NT Lived Experience Framework

Inclusion of ILEC Definition or Resources in Broader Frameworks Examples

- National Lived-Experience (Peer) Workforce Guidelines - https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/a33cce2a-e7fa-4f90-964d-85dbf1514b6b/NMHC_Lived-Experience-Workforce-Development-Guidelines
- Framework for Mental Health Lived Experience (Peer) Work in South Eastern NSW - <https://www.coordinare.org.au/assets/South-Eastern-NSW-Lived-Experience-Peer-Work-Framework-2021.pdf>
- Lived Experience Governance Framework - <https://nmhccf.org.au/component/edocman/the-lived-experience-governance-framework/download?Itemid=0>
- National Suicide Prevention Advisor Final Advice in ‘Compassion First’ - <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-suicide-prevention-adviser-final-advice?language=en>

Advocacy by the Head of Centre to National and International Bodies and Conferences Examples

The ILEC Head of Centre represents the Centre and the perspectives of the National Network on the the following representative bodies;

Organisation	Group
Australian Institute for Health and Welfare	Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring Group
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	National Expert Advisory Group
Lifeline	Lived Experience Expert Advisory Group
Australian Institute for Health and Welfare	Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse Steering Committee
Lancet Commission	Indigenous Suicide Prevention Writing Group

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Department of Health and Age Care	National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Senior Officials Group
Department of Health and Age Care	National Peaks Process Advisory Group Member
WA Mental Health Commission	Western Australia National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum Communications Group
Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network	PHN External Member
Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention – UWA	Expert Advisory Group
National Mental Health Carers and Consumers Forum	Project Steering Group
Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention – UWA	Partner / Researcher
Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention – UWA	Aboriginal Advisory Committee
WA Mental Health Commission	Expert Advisory Group for special project
World Indigenous Suicide Prevention – Conference	World Board
Wellbeing Symposium Ongoing Working Group	Working group

The ILEC Head of Centre presented on the Centre and the perspectives of the National Network at the following conferences;

Conference	Year
Thirilli Forum	2019
Leaders in Prevention Summit	2020
Australian Association for Infant Mental Health Forum	2020
MHLEEN Annual Forum	2021
Nexus Conference	2021
Suicide Prevention Conference	2021
MHLEEN Annual Forum	2022
National Mental Health Consumers and Carers Forum	2022
MHLEEN Annual Forum	2023
Gayaa Dhuwi Annual Conference	2023
WANADA Forum	2023
The MHS Conference	2023
Roses In the Ocean Summit	2023
AIPA Conference	2023

Gathering 2 – Message 2 Spreading Knowledge about Suicide Prevention has been successful. There was much discussion in Gathering 2 sessions about how being part of the Network has given members confidence and language to speak about suicide prevention in their own workplaces, professional bodies, family networks and with friends. This filtering out of knowledge and expertise into community is a significant benefit and outcome of the Network.

The reach of the National Network was also broad in terms of age. Being invited to speak at an Australian Football League (AFL) academy in a major city brought one member face to face with youth aged 7 to 17 years of age to raise awareness and educate about the rising rate of self-harm and suicide. The speaker felt that what they had learned through the Network allowed them to hold the audience's attention and share knowledge with the young people. The feedback from the club was that the talk resonated with the group which consisted of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, and useful information from the network could then be distributed. Comments on distributing information from the Network included:

"I feel can speak now with a bit more grounding and more depth and if I don't know the answer, I can ask all of you."

"I am able to talk to the subject matter of mental health and suicide prevention with mob on a personal level because I am a lot more informed. I'm able to take that information back that I'm accumulating from the Centre and experience from it and talk to mob more freely about it."

"I do it personally, and professionally as a community speaker."

Gathering 2 – Message 3 Members felt that they benefited from being part of a collective influence with the Black Dog Institute behind them.

Being part of the network means that when talking about suicide prevention with mob, another member said, they felt better informed and able to talk more freely about it and be clearer. Talking about suicide felt *"less taboo"*.

Gathering three

Gathering 3 was also held in several online sessions during July of 2023. Kelleigh (TSG co-founder and psychologist) spoke about safe story sharing. Some members had just completed some training about that subject through the Network and contributed to the conversation. In the evaluation Gatherings 1 and 2, members had used the word 'healing'. Therefore, the question to start the yarning for Gathering 3 was, "Has being part of the ILEC National Network been healing for you and/or your family? What does healing look like for you? What else could we do that would be healing?"

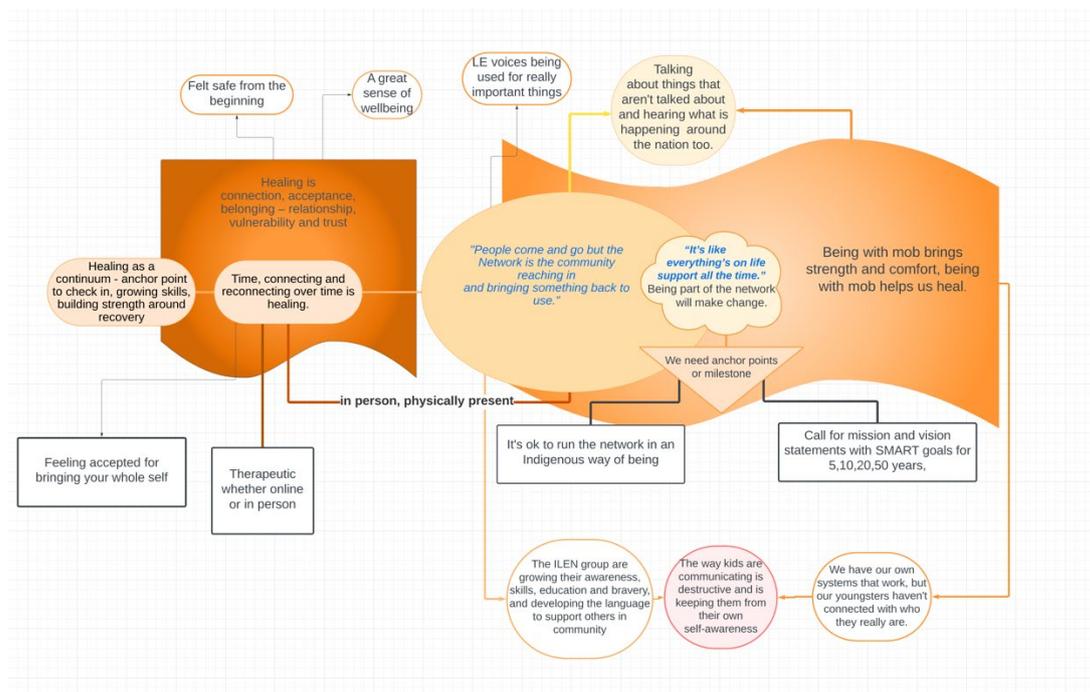


FIGURE 7 THOUGHT RITUAL FROM GATHERING 3

KEY MESSAGES FROM GATHERING 3:

1. DIFFERENT PEOPLE WANT DIFFERENT THINGS FROM THE NETWORK
2. THE NETWORK OFFERS A SAFE PLACE TO TALK AND BE HEARD
3. MEMBERS OF THE NETWORK FELT THAT HEALING MEANT DIFFERENT THINGS AND HAD MANY NAMES

Gathering 3 – Message 1

There are conflicting needs within the membership for structure, direction and strategy for the National Network.

As new members of the Network are joining continuously, many have different expectations for the group. Some want a clearly defined structure and direction and a strategy for the National Network. They spoke of goal setting and measuring outcomes. Others are there to listen, find their voice and heal. Some members said they were happy with the organic way the Network was growing and that it aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The tension between Western and Indigenous methodology has created a desire for structure without bureaucracy, and a focus on the practical over the procedural. Many voiced how grateful they were to be visited in their remote communities and told about the Network in person, having no further expectations beyond connecting with others on the same journey. Others have a need to see their work reflected in policy change and hear the results of their engagements with outside organisations, thereby closing an information loop that would allow them to gauge progress or change. Many members expect to have tools to take back into their community and want clarity about the timeframe of when and how they will be available. Despite lengthy discussions about the purpose of the ILEC and the National Network and the playing of an explainer video in the evaluation Gatherings, not everyone had a good understanding of the mission or the vision of the Network.

“There is nothing [written] so that I can say to someone, this is what I am a part of, this is what we do, and this is our goal is.”

Gathering 3 – Message 2

It feels like a safe place to talk and be heard.

Many Network members said that they felt safe from the beginning when they joined the Network. One member described how the trauma of working in the Suicide Prevention space in general had felt for them: “It’s like everything’s on life support all the time” and how this group provided the support they needed. Others described the need for support in the community as critical and unaddressed.

“Who supports the people left behind? It’s a big need.”

Some said that suicide was not discussed in their community, and it felt good to be able to talk about it and hear the stories of what others were doing in their communities around the nation. They felt like being with mob helped them heal. One member said he felt empowered. Participation gave him a different lens to view his own trauma and this in turn gave him his voice. Another said that meeting with the network helped him navigate his own mind. Participating for one member meant transitioning shame into something positive.

“When I am in my own space, with my own people, I’m talking about Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People, our mob that is where I feel my strength, and when I feel comfortable, I know that I can heal just sitting next to that people and getting that strength from them.”

“Its not about sympathy, it about people understanding how we feel and the place that we live and work in, and when we make those [healing] changes.”

“It’s an opportunity to experience or listen to what’s happening around the nation because...we’re in a remote island and there is not much happening and sitting here I only look at the news or YouTube so it’s giving me that platform not only to take in information but for me to speak.”

Gathering 3 – Message 3

Members felt that healing meant different things and had different names.

Although some members spoke easily about ‘healing’, others preferred to describe their journey in the Network in other ways. One participant explained healing as being a continuum and that when the Network met, the Gatherings were anchor points when they could grow skills, build strength and recover. Others agreed that connecting and reconnecting over time was healing. They felt that it

was a place where they could bring their whole selves and be accepted without judgement and that was healing. The group agreed that the Gatherings were therapeutic whether held in person or online.

“For me, in participating in these yarns, will help us, help me, listening to other stories, other yarns will better make me a person that can maybe do a better job, or improve my ability to have my mind focused differently”.

One member talked about a healing journey, gathering the tools to allow them to respond rather than react, while others outline hope of real national change as healing, because the network is listening to people from community directly, and members from lots of communities are connecting with each other.

“Our norm was getting a government position or a really high position for our voice to be heard. So, the thing I love about the concept of this group, is having a voice where we can impact policies that will impact our communities, a group that wants to know what we think and how we feel.”

“We are all from different states, different areas so therefore if you can take something away that you’ve heard from here, that you can build into your community, that’s a national change, isn’t it?”

Another Network member brings the idea of healing back to the self and that indescribable knowing that healing has taken place.

“It is therapeutic, I feel comfortable with mob, in person or online, this Network has enabled me to be more comfortable in my own skin.”

Gathering four

Gathering 4 began with a short video explainer from Aunty Vicki McKenna, Head of the ILEC, about what she had been doing to spread the news about the ILEC, the National Network and including Indigenous lived-experience voices into practice and policy. This video was made during the evaluation process, in response to members asking about how their participation in the Network was influencing policy.

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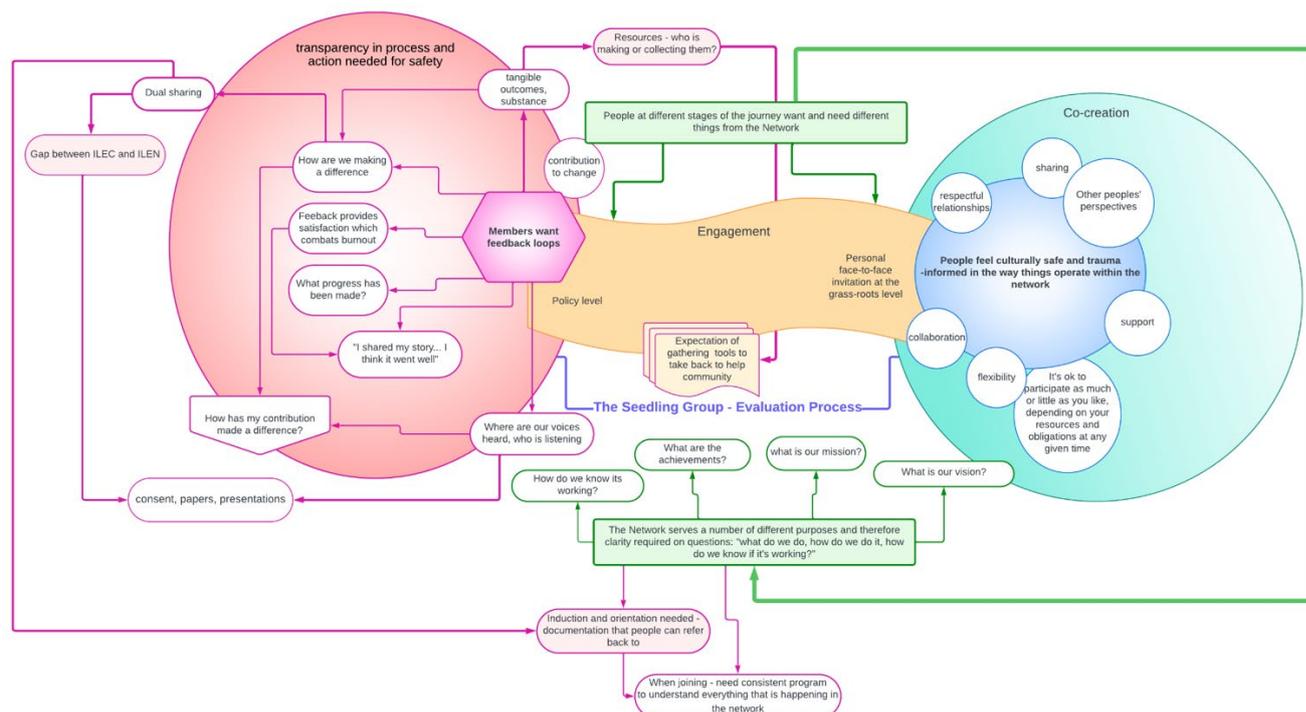


FIGURE 8 THOUGHT RITUAL FROM GATHERING 4

KEY MESSAGES FROM GATHERING 4

1. THE NETWORK IS MANY THINGS TO MANY PEOPLE
2. THE LACK OF A NETWORK STRUCTURE MEANS THAT INFORMATION IS NOT GETTING BACK TO MEMBERS
3. MURAL IS NOT BEING UTILISED, THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME FEEDBACK LOOPS OR A MEMBERS' PORTAL WHERE MEMBERS CAN SEE TANGIBLE OUTCOMES

Gathering 4 – Message 1 The network is many things to many people.

The needs of Network members tended to change over time, but in general, participants needed transparency, good communication and dedicated feedback loops. Those members at the beginning of their journey with the Network expressed relief that ILEC reached out into community and came in person to start building relationships with them. They often felt that they *'just needed help'* and connection to the Network was a much-needed chance to receive help through connection.

"Vicki [McKenna] came out here and talked to me personally, and that is what I needed."

For some members who had been with the National Network longer, there was a feeling of concerted effort and commitment to effect change in this space,

“This is not a support group for me, I’m not here to be supported, I’m here to make change.”

Some felt they had no way of knowing if their contribution was making a difference.

“We [The National Network] is the first of its kind but what does that mean, how are we being effective?”

Members were unclear if agreements or statements about the functions and structure of the Network had been made, and therefore longer serving members felt there was a lack of transparency within the organisation. Transparency and trustworthiness are principles of Culturally Safe Trauma-Informed Practice.

This idea of transparency came up again when people wondered where their voices were being shared, where the ILEC was being presented, or if journal articles had been written about the work the ILEC was doing. This may also speak more broadly to the topic of informed consent.

“Where are our voices being heard? Who is listening? Where are our names being shared? We don’t know”

Transparency in the form of feedback provides satisfaction, a protective factor against burnout. One Network member attending the online Gathering 4 checked in feeling exhausted as they had *“spent all day telling [their] my story”*, and that *“they thought it went well”* but as there was no feedback loop, did not know for certain.

“You have aligned yourself with something that is doing lots of things, but you don’t know what they are. You just have this need to connect. It relies on trusting key people to stay safe.”

At the same time, the overarching sentiment to come out of the many conversations with a wide range of Network members, was one of cultural safety. Throughout the Gatherings, members reported evidence of the principles of trauma-informed practice in all of the interactions within the Network and between its members and the ILEC.

“This group has the bravery, awareness, and language to support others in community.”

Gathering 4 – Message 2 The lack of a Network structure means that information is not getting back to members.

Members felt that the network has grown organically by a process of co-creation and demonstrates cultural safety and the members felt that the processes were culturally safe and trauma-informed. However, they expressed a disconnect between National events such as the Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference and the National Network where they felt their involvement would be critical.

For many of the National Network members they are expecting tools (formalised resources) to take back to community. They felt that there needs to be a virtual space where people can access things. They suggested a need for a member's portal where members can see tangible outcomes, without that there is no substance.

Gathering 4 – Message 3 Mural (an online tool introduced for the Evaluation process) is not being utilised; there needs to be some feedback loops or a members' portal where members can see tangible outcomes.

Again, the challenge of members joining the Network continuously meant that not every member had the same information about the tools that were available to them.

Key Findings

All of the yarns did not happen in isolation. By Gathering 4 the main messages began to connect.

The six key findings of this evaluation report from the researcher's perspective are:

1. The program has been healing/therapeutic for network members whether meeting online or in person, however, there are major benefits to meeting in person.
2. Change to programs and practice has been seen mainly at grassroots level and policy change has been slow (suggestion from the Literature Review and its refresh).
3. It is community reaching in to take something it can use. Network members have grown their knowledge and bravery and are taking necessary new skills back into community where they are supporting others. This is how national change can happen.
4. There are conflicting feelings about the direction and progress of the National Network. Despite yarning in detail about the mission of the National Network, members remain unclear about what it is. Although it came together organically and is true to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, members do want structure, purpose and process outlined in a framework.
5. It is lots of different things to different people at different times. The Network has agency.
6. The evaluation process has served as a feedback loop. It has highlighted the necessity for a process of listening, following up and checking about the function and purpose of the network itself.

Part D Implications for different stakeholders

The foundation of the Indigenous Lived-Experience Centre and the Indigenous Lived-Experience Network has been hugely successful. It has established the foundation for an ongoing and developing framework where people with lived experience can come to share knowledge, build relationships and heal. The initial and early workings of the Centre have proven busy and continually evolving from ongoing, rigorous monitoring. Relationships have been established with many organisations who have now included lived-experience voices into the way they work. The implications for the three main stakeholders have been different and are addressed separately in this section. Figure 4 sets out the thought process in developing these arguments.

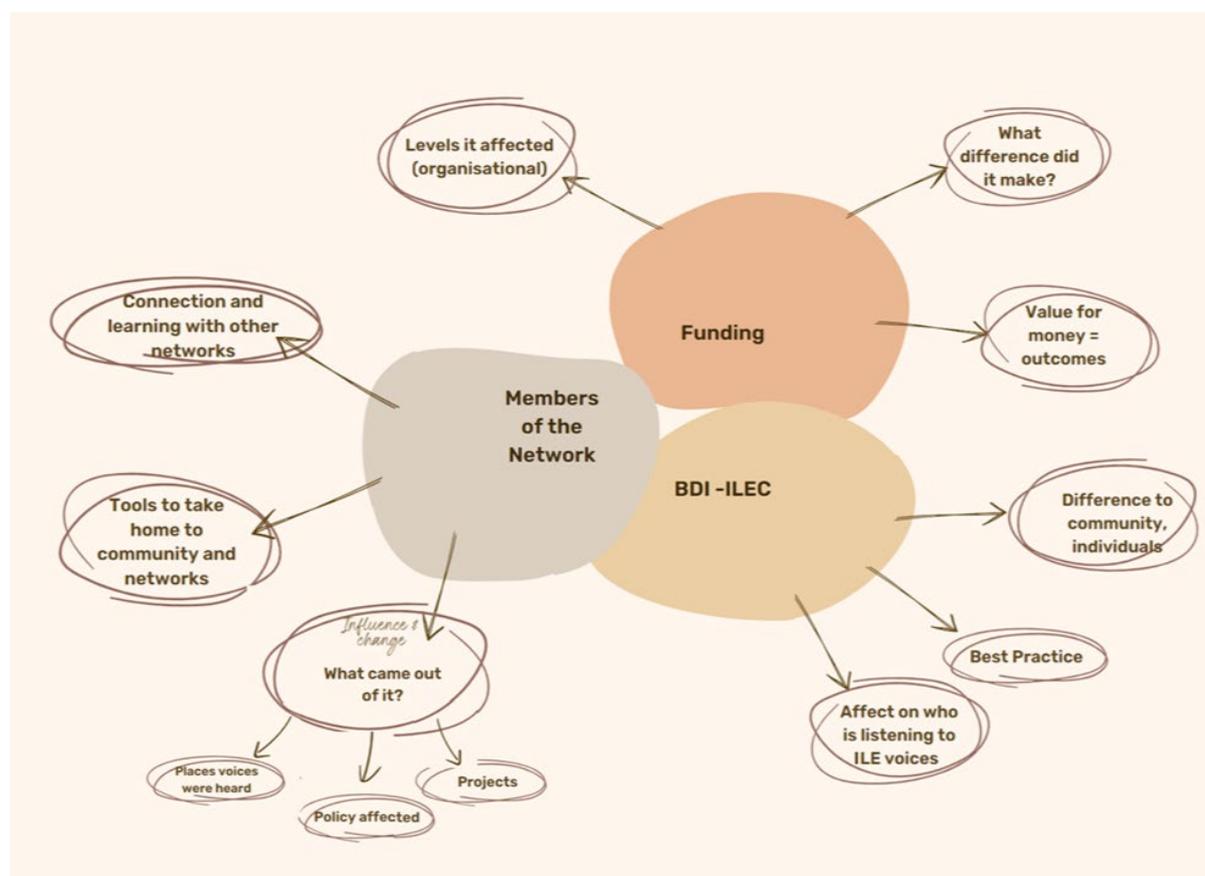


FIGURE 7 QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSING STAKEHOLDER IMPLICATIONS

Figure 7 suggests implications that the three different stakeholders in the ILEC and National Network project might find useful from this report. The funder may be concerned primarily with the impacts of the funding of this project on suicide prevention and at what levels the impacts were felt (national, state-wide, organisational, community, etc.). While the ILEC may also be concerned with impact to individuals, families and communities, it has the opportunity to map a 'best practice' formula when working alongside Indigenous people with lived experience. The members may feel a variety of different findings are useful including what skills and learnings were gained and what resources could be accessed to use personally and to take back to their communities. Members may find it useful to know how their involvement in the Network has impacted policies that affect peoples with a Lived-Experience of mental health challenges and suicidality. This next section attempts to cover these areas of interest.

Implications for the funder

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived-Experience Centre is thought to be the first of its kind Nationally and globally. The funding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived-Experience Centre and its Network members has proved to be a rich experience of learning about what a specialist group such as this might be able to achieve. One of the intentions of the group was to elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a lived-experience of suicidality to inform services, care and programs. This has been achieved largely through grass-roots level program involvement. A literature review of policy that includes these voices was conducted at the beginning of the program and again at the completion of this evaluation in the form of a refresh. The updated literature review revealed that little change could be detected on a policy level. This could be that voices are not reaching policy makers or that policy cycles rely on longer timeframes to affect change. Further monitoring of policies that affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is necessary to follow this higher-level outcome.

Implications for the Lived Experience Centre

The ILEC now has the foundations for a best practice framework for others to learn from when working with First Nations groups globally. The processes of onboarding, communicating with outside organisations in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way, and keeping the National Network safe and supported has delivered key learnings. There are opportunities for the Centre to further develop their processes especially in terms of refining their communication plan and in particular their feedback loops to keep Network members informed. An example of this is, a lot of the things the Network members spoke about wanting to know, were covered in different monthly meetings or upon orientation into the Network, but not everyone attends each meeting and therefore many members are not aware if or where a central repository of information exists. Communication between the Centre and the National Network members has been frequent and regular but would benefit from more closed loops where members hear about how their involvement in projects has been received. As Network members are busy and carry cultural loads, this would need to be co-designed with them. A best-practice framework to share with other First Nations Peoples and governments is potentially a valuable future outcome for the ILEC.

Implications for the Lived Experience Network Members

The Lived-Experience Network Members said that involvement in the network has been hugely rewarding, has built critical life/work skills and given them a voice. They feel proud to be associated with the Centre and have built meaningful relationships. The members felt that their participation in the network has been healing in different ways, using the words respected, valued, and heard. Lived Experience Network members would like to develop and formalise a strategy for the Network going forward and have begun discussions about what that would look like.

AIATSIS Grant Requirement Research Questions

The following summary addresses the original AIATSIS Grant Requirement Research Questions for this evaluation. The questions address individual, Community and ILEC outcomes.

Individual Outcomes

Does participation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre National Network contribute to healing? Do National Network Members feel supported to use their Lived Experience stories for change at the community and national level?

When talking about healing, much has been written in attempts to define the experience. Healing has been defined as an experiential, energy-requiring process that creates a space to return to wholeness, integration, balance, and transformation (Wendler, 1996). Egnew (2005) describes healing as a personal experience of trans-descending suffering and returning to wholeness. When speaking with the National Network participants, different names were used for their experiences of healing.

From this evaluation exercise, it is clear that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre National Network has had a profound and transformative impact on its members, offering them growth, empowerment, and healing. Participants in this network experience significant personal and professional support and development, gaining essential life and work skills that have opened doors to new opportunities. This newfound knowledge and support have empowered members to actively engage in suicide prevention work, enabling them to better serve their communities.

One of the network's key strengths is its commitment to respecting, valuing, and seeking the voices of its members. This validation of their lived experiences has allowed participants to contribute meaningfully to positive change within their communities. Contributions have been made to organisations seeking to learn from these lived experiences. It is intended that the National Network will provide evidence to inform bodies that influence Indigenous policies guiding Indigenous practices and programs. Participants take pride in being part of a network where their voices are heard and respected.

The network has fostered deep and meaningful relationships among its members. This sense of belonging and support extends beyond the network's boundaries and serves as a source of strength and resilience in their personal lives. The connections formed within the network are instrumental in promoting overall social and emotional well-being.

A crucial aspect of the network's impact is its healing power. Members consistently describe their experiences within the network as ones where they feel respected, valued, and heard. Feeling respected validates the importance of members' experiences to others, feeling valued underscores the significance of their contributions, and being heard signifies that their voices matter. These are the words that Network members use when describing what healing means for them. This healing extends beyond the individual level and becomes collective, as members draw strength and support from one another's stories.

The network serves various purposes for its members and their needs change over time. Newer members of the network expressed relief and gratitude that the ILEC team personally reached out and initiated relationships. They felt a profound need for assistance and connection, viewing their involvement with the network as a lifeline. In contrast, long-standing members felt a sense of commitment to formalise the structure of the network and to shape its direction. They were also more focused on the tangible impacts and sustainability of the network. This commitment reflects the positive impact that the network has had on members' lives and their belief in its potential to continue fostering well-being and resilience among its members and exerting a more direct influence on policy.

In summary, participation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre National Network is undeniably transformative and healing. It equips members with valuable skills, provides a platform for their voices to be heard and respected, and fosters a sense of pride and belonging. The Network's emphasis on meaningful relationships and collective healing underscores its essential role in promoting social and emotional well-being and resilience among its members. The overall sentiment among participants is one of happiness and pride in being part of this transformative network, driven by a shared commitment to serving their communities and countrymen.

Community Outcomes

Are the Centre's activities making significant changes at the community level? Is the community engagement as part of the Centre's activities effective in the recognition and advocacy of Lived Experience?

The activities of the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre (ILEC) have brought about significant changes at the community level. A large and growing number of organisations have actively sought the insights of Network members. These organisations have been keen to involve Network members in their advisory groups and discussions, to gain valuable lived-experience perspectives for their projects.

Community engagement as part of the Centre's activities has proven to be highly effective in the recognition and advocacy of Lived Experience. Network members shared their experiences and advice with external entities such as organisations, sports clubs, and community groups, thereby contributing to the improvement of the way these organisations work. The ILEC played a crucial role in curating opportunities and partnerships with organisations that were carefully assessed for suitability. These opportunities included participation in advisory boards, focus groups, and other forums.

The Network's influence extends beyond the Network itself. Information and knowledge flow outwards to community organisations and professional networks. Information also flows into the Network itself through learnings and experiences of external engagement and its member's affiliations. Network members embraced their responsibility and influence to drive change through their lived experiences, strategically determining how and when to participate in opportunities as they arose.

Participation in the Network profoundly transformed its members. It bolstered their confidence and equipped them with the language to discuss suicide prevention in diverse settings, from workplaces to personal and professional networks. This dissemination of expertise throughout the broader community marked a significant achievement for the Network, enriching the collective understanding of suicide prevention.

The Network's impact so far has spanned generations, as illustrated by a member addressing a youth audience aged 7 to 17 at an Australian Football League (AFL) academy; its coverage spans the country, reaching across cities and into rural and remote communities; it also reaches into a diverse range of networks, professional bodies, and other communities.

The Centre's activities reflect a growing demand for Network members lived-experience perspectives. Their willing contributions have not only benefited external organisations but have also empowered Network members to drive meaningful change, disseminate knowledge, and engage in discussions on suicide prevention with newfound confidence and clarity. This collective effort has brought about positive changes at the community level.

Centre Outcomes

Are there changes in the existing policy landscape in mental health and suicide prevention that states the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience?

How many initiatives is the Centre and its members involved in that have meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Input?

How we have set up the Centre's activities for succession, ensuring that the information of the Centre is passed to communities?

(Including partnership with First Nations communities globally to share our information and knowledge, using the Centre's learnings as a reference for other First Nations communities in Lived Experience advocacy)

It is perhaps too premature to see policy change that realises the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience input. However, the increasing volume of mentions of the lived-experience as a concept, in publications and programs is promising. Examples of these can be found in our Literature Review Refresh (Appendix 3). In our previous detailed review on the literature on lived experience of suicide in Indigenous contexts, we conclude that "it is surprising and somewhat disappointing to find that more studies that draw on the rich vein of experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in particular, have not surfaced through the reasonably rigorous searching process" (The Seedling Group, 2020, p. 17). We then carried out a short update which drew on 34 reports and studies published since 2020, using similar search terms as we used in our earlier review: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal, Indigenous, lived experience and suicide/suicidality*. Of these, 32 specifically use the term 'lived experience'; 30 are Australian; 25 focus on suicide, suicidality, or suicide prevention; and 20 have an Indigenous focus. The majority are research and evaluation studies, while 9 are reports, mainly into suicide prevention policies and practices that mention lived experience.

This result is encouraging. It indicates that the work on the ground is flowing into research, reports and studies which should ultimately inform policy. This grey area of when and how policy will be informed is reflected in one of the main recommendations of this evaluation, that more clarity is needed around how National Network activities can and will impact policy. The Literature Review Refresh (Appendix 3) suggests that work needs to be done to move past the inclusion of the Lived-Experience definition in various documents and programs, to understanding what further work needs to be done to include the voices in policy and program design.

We are now at an academic impasse, where the lived experience movement in the Australian suicide prevention sector requires deeper understanding about what inclusion of lived experience is and how 'living' the lived experience can enhance suicide prevention activities ... 'lived experience' needs to be unpacked ... Rather than focusing on definition alone, it is vital for the suicide prevention sector to better understand the role of suicide in people's lives, and how those with lived experience can most valuably help while being best supported, to enable more appropriate activities for preventing suicide and suicide-related harm (Wayland et al., 2020, p. 11).

The many initiatives of the ILEC and the National Network are extensive and far reaching. They are discussed in detail in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 of Part A of this report, as well as in Appendices 8 and 9.

The participants are interested to know more about the ILEC's plans to ensure succession of the knowledge gathered through the National Network. No participant at the time of the evaluation spoke about connections with other First Nations communities in the lived-experience space. As this

network is perhaps the first of its kind globally, it is recommended that work needs to be done in establishing meaningful connections and partnerships with other First Nations communities. This includes the publishing of findings that will affect those communities. Work now needs to begin to share the learnings of the ILEC and National Network with other First Nations communities working with Lived Experience voices.

What is next for the National Network?

A question proposed by the members is a good way for us to think about the future. “How have we set up the Centre’s activities for succession, ensuring that the information of the Centre is passed to communities?”

Key Recommendations

There are five key recommendations that have emerged from this evaluation process with Network Members.

1. The ILEC must develop its communications plan to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed about activities, developments, publications, media mentions and outputs that result from its work or are relevant to the Network members.
2. A monitoring system of public policy impacted by the ILEC and National Network needs to be set up for members to see the impact of their work.
3. The design of a framework to delineate the way in which the network works, its aims, functions and values is necessary. This resource should include the mechanics of how the actions of the National Network will influence policy. It should take into consideration members at different stages of their journey with the National Network. Perhaps this document or piece of work is the strategic vision for ILEC.
4. Research needs to be carried out to understand more deeply how Indigenous lived experience voices can prevent suicide and suicide-related harm.
5. The ILEC must now develop an operational systems manual that ensures all processes are recorded and continually updated. This could include an internal monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework. A MEL framework is critical for sustainability of best practice as new staff members come onboard.

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Appendix 1
Ethics Approval Letter



AIATSIS

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REC Reference Number: EO275-20210720

**Project Title: Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience voices in
mental health and suicide prevention**

Dear Ms Darwin,

Thank you for submitting the above research project for ethical review.

I am pleased to advise you that the above research project meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)*. Ethical approval for this research project has been granted by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee.

Approval of this project from AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee is valid from 7 January 2022 to 7 January 2023 subject to the following conditions being met:

1. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project.
2. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee of any event that requires a modification to the project or project documents and submit any required amendments in accordance with the instructions provided by AIATSIS. These instructions can be found at <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>.
3. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will submit any necessary reports related to the safety of research participants in accordance with AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee procedures. These instructions can be found at <https://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>.
4. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will submit an annual report to the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee one year from the date approval was granted. Annual reports must be submitted in the specified format, available at <https://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>.





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5. The AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee must also be notified when the project is completed at all sites no later than one month after completion.
6. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee if the project is discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
7. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above and will submit any associated required documentation. The instructions for obtaining an extension of approval can be found at <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>.
8. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee of his or her inability to continue as Coordinating Principal Investigator including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only. This project cannot proceed at any site until separate research governance authorisation has been obtained from the CEO or the Delegate of the institution under whose auspices the research will be conducted at that site.

Should you have any queries about the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee's consideration of your project, please contact the Secretary of the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee, by emailing ethics@aiatsis.gov.au. For more information, please visit <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>.

The AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee wishes you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Kevin Williams
Chairperson

A/Prof Andrew Crowden
Deputy Chairperson

7 January 2022



Appendix 2

ILEC Key Milestones

National Network Progression Tracking Key Dates and Developments

2020

August 25th

Virtual co-design workshop to discuss:

- a. A definition of 'Lived Experience' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and
- b. Provide input on how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre can support, engage, and train individuals with lived experience.

Workshop included stakeholders of the ILEC at the time, including some people who would go on to become National Network Members. In November there was a Lived Experience Roundtable during which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy was renewed.

2021

February

Expressions of Interest (EOI) online forms sent to stakeholders who had engaged in previous opportunities via email, social media through personal and professional networks, and distributed through Black Dog Institute (BDI) Twitter, Facebook, and other channels.

Expressions of Interest were open for six weeks.
22 EOIs were received in this first intake.

March/April

Interviews conducted and official welcome letters sent 29th and 30th of March, and 13th April

June (mid)

Visit to Torres Strait to spread word of the Lived Experience Centre by Leilani Darwin and Aunty Vicki McKenna. One new Network member recruited.
Now 20 Network members.

June 22nd and 23rd

First Annual Gathering of the National Network held in Cairns, attended face-to-face by 16 members, 8 members joined online.

July 27th and 29th

Monthly Yarn trial was held which included a portal walk-through.

August 30th

First Monthly Yarn, in which dates were locked in for future monthly yarns.
Now 21 Network members.

September 13th

Lifeline/Woven Thread project sent out to members.

September 20th

Monthly Yarn

September 18th

Monthly Yarn

October 18th

Lifeline Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Advisory Group for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis line (13Yarn) opportunity sent

out

October 27th

Under the Radar Project sent out

November 15th

Monthly Yarn

December 13th

Monthly Yarn (11 members attended)

2021 Network Activity Summary

	Network Commenced on June 21st
1	dual in-person/online Gathering in Cairns (14 Network members attended)
1	Community Engagement Visit to the Torres Strait
6	Monthly Yarns (7 meetings total but 1 st one was in two parts/two options)
21	Total Members Recruited over 2021

2022

January

Monthly Yarn – Cancelled due to high rates of COVID19.
Psychological support promoted.

January 21st

Monthly Yarn. Dr Tanja Hirvonen (new psychological support) introduced. (10 members attended)

ILEC is featured in 2022's [Closing the Gap Report](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/2022_close_the_gap_report.pdf) on pages 22-23. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/2022_close_the_gap_report.pdf

March 4th

One member requests to step away-due due to other commitments - not withdrawn.

21 Members total

March 17th

One requests to step-away due to other commitments.
Has not engaged since interview, unavailable on Mondays due to work schedule.
Not officially withdrawn.

21 Members total

March 21st

Monthly Yarn (13 members attended)

April 6th and 7th

Trauma Informed Care Training being delivered by We Al-Li (funded by ILEC for members, based on member suggestions for capacity building activities)

Attendees:

3x ILEC Staff, 5 Network members.

April

Monthly Yarn cancelled- BDI shutdown period.

May 16th

Monthly Yarn (10 members attended)

June 20th

Monthly Yarn (10 members attended)

July 18th

Monthly Yarn (7 members attended)

July 27th

First ILEC Webinar, hosted by Network member Michelle

Panel was Auntie Vicki McKenna, Leilani Darwin, Auntie-Professor Pat Dudgeon

August 15th

Monthly Yarn (6 members attended)

September 26th

Monthly Yarn, postponed by one week due to availabilities. (7 members attended)

October 17th

Monthly Yarn (8 members attended)

November

Auntie Vicki visits Torres Strait Islands

November 9th and 22nd

Interviews – Welcome letters sent

New (4) members recruited.

25 Members total

November 16th and 17th

Annual Gathering in Sydney (17 total attendees, 11 members)

December 19th

Monthly Yarn (5 members attended)

2022 Network Activity Summary

1	In-person gathering in Sydney, 11 members attended
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Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network
Interim Report November 2023

1	Community Engagement Visit to the Torres Strait
1	Training Funded and Delivered to Members
9	Monthly Yarns (2x cancelled- COVID19 (Jan), BDI shutdown (April). 1 replaced by in-person gathering (Nov))
4	Additional Members Recruited
25	Total Members 2022

2023

January 16th

Monthly Yarn (7 members attended)

February 15th and 16th

Interviews with new members.

28 Members total

February 20th

Monthly Yarn (13 members attended)

February 23rd

National Coroner's Office Lived Experience Project In-person workshop, Canberra, ACT

March 9th and 10th

ILEC Staff present at RITO (Roses in the Ocean) Summit, Hobart

March 20th

Monthly Yarn (7 members attended)

March 27th – April 6th

Various sessions for Evaluation project 'Gathering 2'.

April 17th

Monthly Yarn (11 members attended)

April 18th

WAMHC Peer Workforce Project Online All-Day workshop

One member formally withdraws from the National Network

27 Members total

April 19th

Network Member is LE panellist on Expert Insights Podcast

May 4th

'Sharing Your Story' Training, facilitated by Evolve WA (funded by ILEC for National Network capacity building)

May 10th – 12th

ILEC staff present at MHLEEN (Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network) Conference, Cairns, QLD

May 15th

Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network Interim Report November 2023

Monthly Yarn (11 members attended)

May 17th – 19th

ILEC Staff present at WANADA Conference with WAMHC

May 22nd -26th

ILEC Staff visit Torres Strait Islands for Community Engagement and Presenting at Torres Strait Islands Wellbeing Symposium. New (3) Network Members recruited.

30 Members total, 1 departed member

June 19th

Monthly Yarn (7 members attended)

2021

September

Lifeline/ Woven Threads – input into the setup of Indigenous Crisis Line

1 ILEN member

Lifeline Australia and Gayaa Dhuwi Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Advisory Group – Build Phase.

4 ILEN members

National Mental Health commission

Working on findings of National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy.

6 ILEN members

Black Dog Institute -Indigenous Governance Group

1 ILEN member

Black Dog Institute - Cultural Governance Group -Under the Radar Project

Coroner's Office – Engaging with coroners around suicide.

3 ILEN members

2022

March – September

ILEC completes suicide prevention module presentations to NSW PHNs outlining ILEC activities and considerations for readiness to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience.

July

Radio interviews promoting ILEC with Aunty Vicki McKenna

Ngaarda media – Roebourne Radio Station 96.1FM. Western Australia, Pilbara region.

Cairns Indigenous Community Radio Station, Bumma Bipperra Media (BBM) 98.7FM.

Adam Evans from National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS)

August

Meeting with NACCHO to discuss local Lived Experience Network projects ILEC has received funding for.

August 30th

Radio interview promoting ILEC with Aunty Vicki McKenna
Koori Radio

September

Attendance at National Mental Health Commission's Consultation on Consumer and Carer
Peak body – Aunty Vicki McKenna

October 30th – November 6th

Visits through the Torres Strait Islands – Aunty Vicki McKenna

November 21st, 22nd

Attended National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF) in Adelaide – Aunty
Vicki McKenna

2023

January 30th

Attended Better Access Forum in Canberra.

Provided feedback about the Better Access Scheme to Health Minister – Aunty Vicki

McKenna.

Opportunity: Travel Bursaries for WA members to attend Lived Experience of Suicide Summit
in Hobart.

February 7th -8th

Visited WA Mental Health Commission in Perth to meet with stakeholders regarding ILEC
plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Peer' Workforce Guide.

March 3rd

LELAN Lex Governance Framework

Request to review Lived Experience Governance Framework

March 9th and 10th

Attended Roses in the Ocean Lived Experience Summit.

Contribution to 'Conversation Café' – Aunty Vicki McKenna and Eliza Kitchener

Closing plenary -Aunty Vicki McKenna

March 14th

BDI – Expert Insights Podcast

Sought panellists for podcast/live webinar on social and emotional well being impacts of The
Voice to Parliament.

April 1st

Ambulance Victoria

Partnership and establishment of Lived Experience project group to improve cultural safety
of Ambulance Victoria, service design changes and advocate for the needs of Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander consumers and develop training.

April 19th

Towards Zero Suicides Initiative – St Vincent’s Hospital

April 27th

Cancer Mind Care, Victoria

Advice and partnership to establish a First Nations specific version of Cancer Mind Care, an online platform for psycho-oncology support for people affected by cancer.

May 11th and 12th

Attended Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network Forum in Cairns.

Provided update on work being done by ILEC.

May 2nd -5th

Attended Suicide Prevention Australia conference in Canberra.

Aunty Vicki McKenna presented with LiFE award -Western Australia, LiFE award – Innovation.

May 22nd -26th

Visited Torres Strait Islands to continue community engagement, recruit National Network members and further scope lived experience network.

Eliza Kitchener and Aunty Vicki McKenna

July 15th

Attended launch of three Lived Experience projects (with various levels of ILEC input)

A Scoping Paper for Formal Lived Experience Expertise Training Programs and

Supports

Lived Experience Governance Framework and Toolkit

Lived Experience digital library.

This is not a complete list of activities in external engagement by the Lived-Experience Center and Network.

Appendix 3

**LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SUICIDE IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS:
A BRIEF UPDATE OF LITERATURE 2020-2023**

**THE SEEDLING GROUP FOR
BLACK DOG INSTITUTE**

SEPTEMBER 2023

Introduction

In our previous detailed review on the literature on lived experience of suicide in Indigenous contexts, we conclude that “it is surprising and somewhat disappointing to find that more studies that draw on the rich vein of experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in particular, have not surfaced through the reasonably rigorous searching process” (The Seedling Group, 2020, p. 17). This short update draws on 34 reports and studies published since 2020, using similar search terms as we used in our earlier review: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal, Indigenous, lived experience and suicide/suicidality. Of these, 32 specifically use the term ‘lived experience’; 30 are Australian; 25 focus on suicide, suicidality or suicide prevention; and 20 have an Indigenous focus. The majority are research and evaluation studies, while 9 are reports, mainly into suicide prevention policies and practices that mention lived experience.

Use of the term ‘lived experience’

It appears that the term ‘lived experience’ has come to have significant currency in the literature. All but one (Murray et al., 2023) of the reports we canvassed discuss the importance of hearing from the voices of lived experience in suicide prevention programs and policies (Bower et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2021; Hodges & Reid, 2021; KPMG, 2020; Maple et al., 2020; Northern Territory Government, 2022; Suicide Prevention Australia, 2022). Interestingly, while the recent book chapter by Pat Dudgeon and her colleagues focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based suicide prevention (Dudgeon et al., 2020), they do not include drawing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experiences of suicide as part of their strengths and evidence-based approach. This type of approach is also supported by Canadian researchers who argue in relation to Indigenous suicide prevention in schools:

Indigenous communities are developing community driven responses to suicide that are culturally relevant and strengths based. It is critical that these models are considered when developing such suicide prevention within schools as they diverge from medicalized focused approaches and attend to broader social dimensions (McVittie & Ansloos, 2022, p. 105).

Some make a distinction between the lived experiences of carers and ‘peer workers’ (or the ‘lived experience workforce’) and those who have attempted suicide themselves (for example, Suicide Prevention Australia, 2022; Van Zanden & Bliokas, 2022). One of the recommendations from the SPA report was to “provide support training to the lived experience workforce, and increase opportunities to hear from a diverse range of lived experience expertise” (p. 20). Others emphasise the lived experiences of carers as a priority population, for example one respondent in the study by Maple et al. (2020) comments:

Lived experience of suicide can be greatly enhanced by listening to the voice, needs, and experiences of those with firsthand experience. I believe without this inclusion, understanding and suicide prevention is starkly incomplete (p.31).

Lived experience in the suicide prevention literature does not always refer to direct lived experience of *suicidality* – for example, one paper refers to the “lived experience of *suicide (prevention) training*” (Hawgood et al., 2022); another refers to lived experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *mental health or suicide prevention* (Leckning et al., 2020), while yet another focuses on lived experience *leadership* (Loughhead et al., 2023).

Lived experience of suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts

Of the recent research studies into lived experience of suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts that we examined (Armstrong et al., 2020; Cleland & Masocha, 2020; Dabkowski et al., 2022; Davies et al., 2020; Day et al., 2021; Handley et al., 2021; Heard et al., 2022; Leckning et al., 2020; Meurk et al., 2023; Meurk et al., 2022; Page et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2022), the majority were focused on research into lived experience in education and/or training contexts. Examples include: a course that uses videos of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with lived experience of suicidality talking about their experiences (Armstrong et al., 2020); social work courses informed by Aboriginal literature, lived experience and practice wisdom (Cleland & Masocha, 2020); two evaluations of a culturally based suicide prevention program (We-Yarn) where “facilitators with lived experience were vital to the success of the workshops” (Davies et al., 2020 p. 579; Handley et al., 2021); and an evaluation of an Aboriginal mental health program where one of the key messages was that the program’s quality depended on the facilitator “being raised up in culture”, with feedback comments including “lived experience is a good platform to teach out of” and “training should always be delivered by black fellas” (Day et al., 2021, p. 50).

A common theme in the research literature is a call for researchers to be more proactive in involving people with lived experience (Ali et al., 2021; Ansloos & Peltier, 2021; Gibson et al., 2023; Grattidge et al., 2023; Sabrinskas et al., 2022; Stapelberg et al., 2021; Van Zanden & Bliokas, 2022). The role of the ‘peer worker’ is recognised in one study as critical within the context of suicide prevention, quoting a peer worker respondent who comments:

when you are working with Aboriginal clients you really have to gain that trust and rapport because I find they’ve usually been let down before or have their back up about services because they’ve been let down in the past or not treated with respect (Van Zanden & Bliokas, 2022, p.515).

We conclude this brief update with a caution articulated well by authors we quoted in our previous review:

We are now at an academic impasse, where the lived experience movement in the Australian suicide prevention sector requires deeper understanding about what inclusion of lived experience is and how ‘living’ the lived experience can enhance suicide prevention activities ... ‘lived experience’ needs to be unpacked ... Rather than focusing on definition alone, it is vital for the suicide prevention sector to better understand the role of suicide in people’s lives, and how those with lived experience can most valuably help while being best supported, to enable more appropriate activities for preventing suicide and suicide-related harm (Wayland et al., 2020, p. 11).

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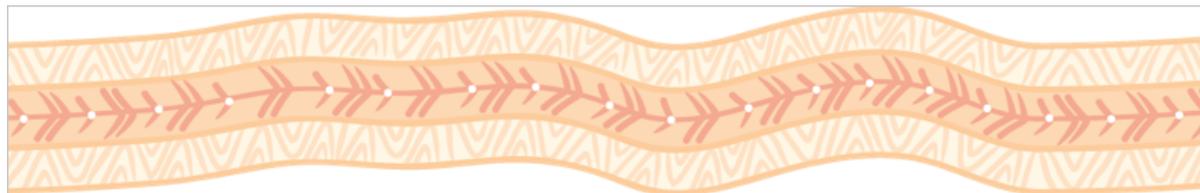
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Appendix 4

Consent for Evaluation Gatherings Information



Informed Consent Form

Project: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre

Name of Researchers: Leilani Darwin, Victorina McKenna, Kelleigh Ryan, Nicole Tujague, Nathan Meteor, Tiamee Schafer, Kelly Clark, Dr Clinton Schultz, Stacey Vervoort

Organisations: The Black Dog Institute, The Seedling Group, Marumali Consultations

1 I understand what the Lived Experience Network is about

I have had a chance to ask questions about the Network, and I am comfortable with the answers that I have been given. I know that I can ask more questions whenever I like.

I understand what will happen to my information during my time on the Network as explained to me.

2 I have volunteered to participate in the Lived Experience Network

I know that I do not have to participate in it if I do not want to. I made up my own mind to participate – nobody is making me do it.

3 What will happen if I want to stop participating?

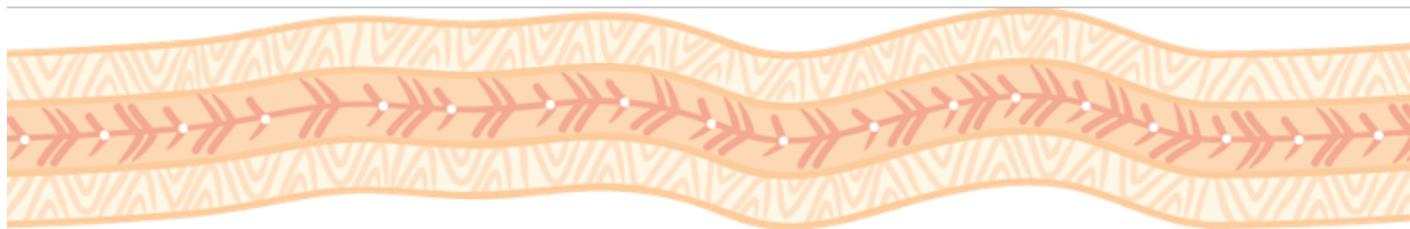
I know that I can withdraw from the Network at any time with no concerns or ramifications.

If I leave, the Network will be allowed to use any information that I have given before I give notice to leave. I understand the network will record the date I resign for future reference.

4 Having my picture taken or being filmed

Black Dog Institute
Hospital Road, Randwick NSW 2031
T. 02 9382 4530 | W. blackdoginstitute.org.au





I agree to be photographed/videoed for the Network.

I agree that those tapes/photos/videos/DVDs can be shown to other people.

I agree that those pictures can be put into a book or magazine or shown on TV or the internet.

5 Risks and benefits of the research

I understand that being in the Network may carry some risks.

- This may require us to discuss trauma and/or suicide, that talking about these issues may be upsetting.

6 Who will be the authors of the research?

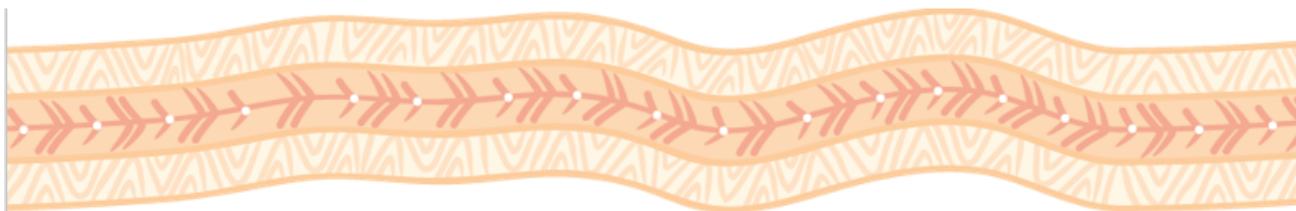
I understand that the Network may write a publication, or a media release, I agree to become an author. My name will be mentioned on the report/paper as a contributor.

7 Will people find out personal things about me from the research?

The Network will check with me before they put out any public information about me and that it only contains the accurate personal information.

8 What about culturally restricted information or artifacts?

I understand that, if the Network finds out secret or sacred information, or are given secret or sacred artifacts, they will not tell or show them to the any people without discussing with me first.



9 Intellectual property and copyright

I understand that I will retain any Intellectual Property from my personal contributions.

The Network will SHARE COPYRIGHT in any books, articles, databases or conference papers (or tapes, CDs, videos, DVDs etc.) produced as a result of my being a member of the Network.

10 Paid Participation

I understand that I will be reimbursed for my contribution to the Lived Experience Centre in line with Black Dog Institute's Lived Experience Paid Participation Policy which is at \$60/hr, or \$420 a day.

11 Evaluation

I understand that evaluation of this program may include my views and perspectives. I understand that any of my stories or quotes will be de-identified unless I particularly want my name mentioned on them. I know that I can recall any quotes or stories if I change my mind up until publication of the evaluation documents.

12 Complaints

I know that, if I am worried about anything that happens when I am a member of the Lived Experience Network, I can ring up the Head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and talk to them about it.

I understand that this research has been approved by AIATSIS, and if I have any ethical concerns or complaints I can contact AIATSIS at ethics@aiatsis.gov.au



12. Declaration

Participant

I have read this Informed Consent Form and I agree with it.

Please print and signed member name.....Date.....

Please provide me with a copy of this document.....Yes.....No.....

Date.....

Researcher

I declare that the research has been explained and understood by the potential research participant

Researcher Name.....

Researcher Signature.....

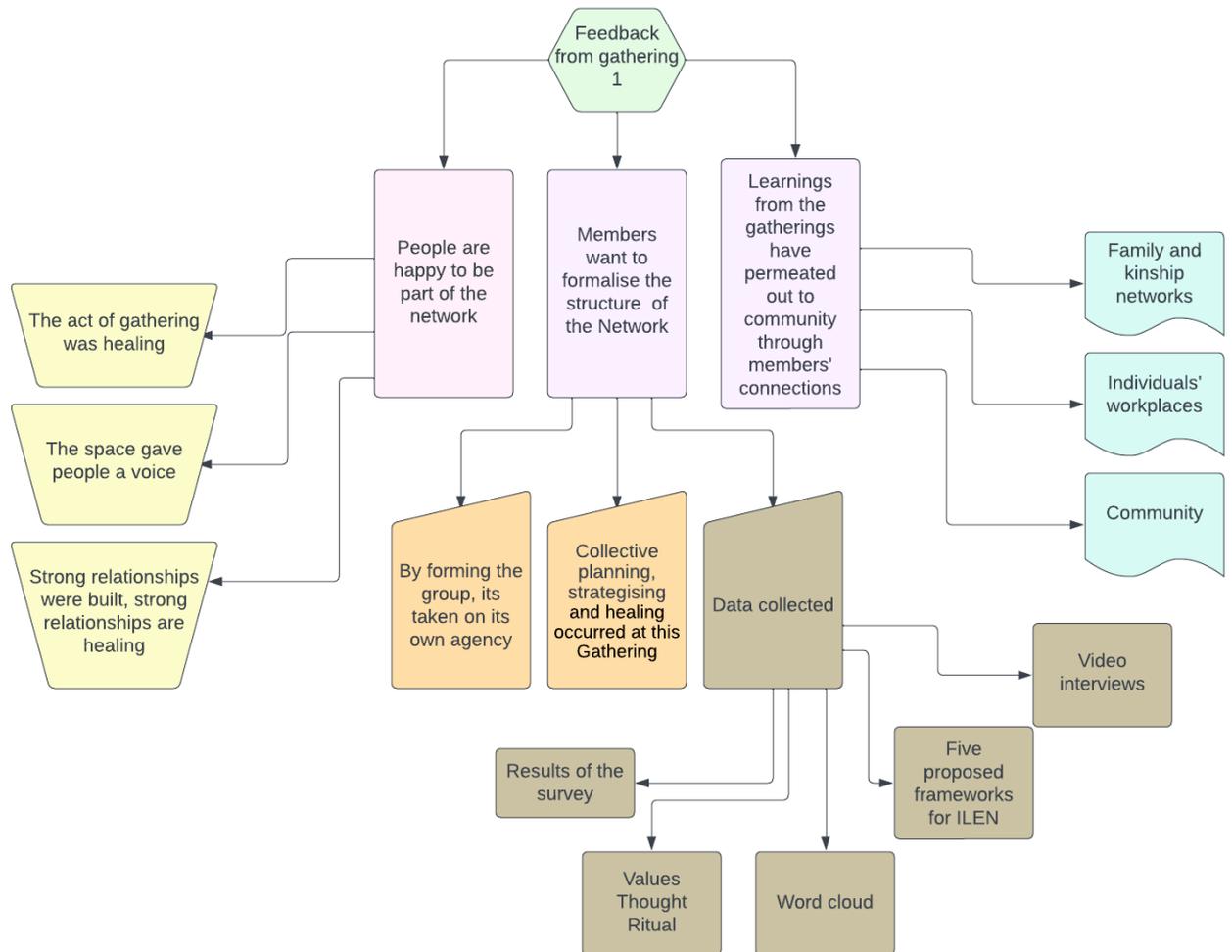
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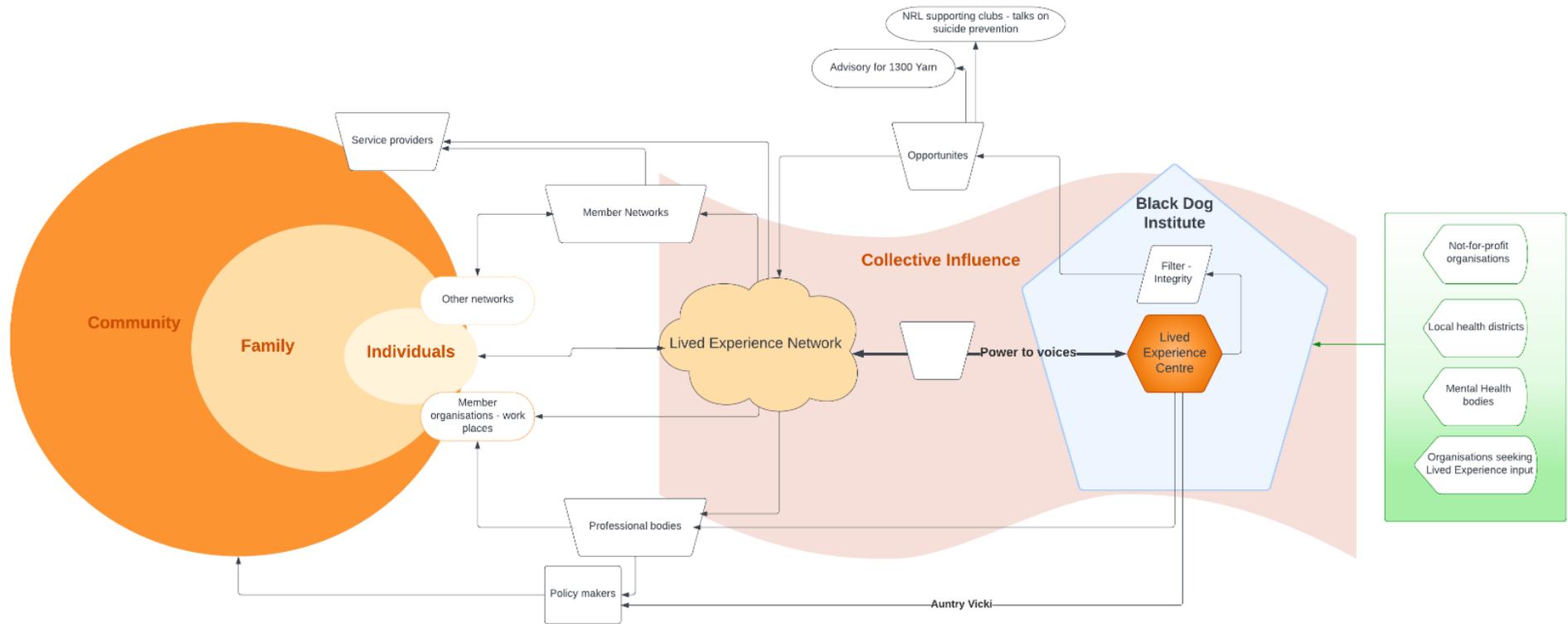
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Thought Rituals for Gatherings 1-4

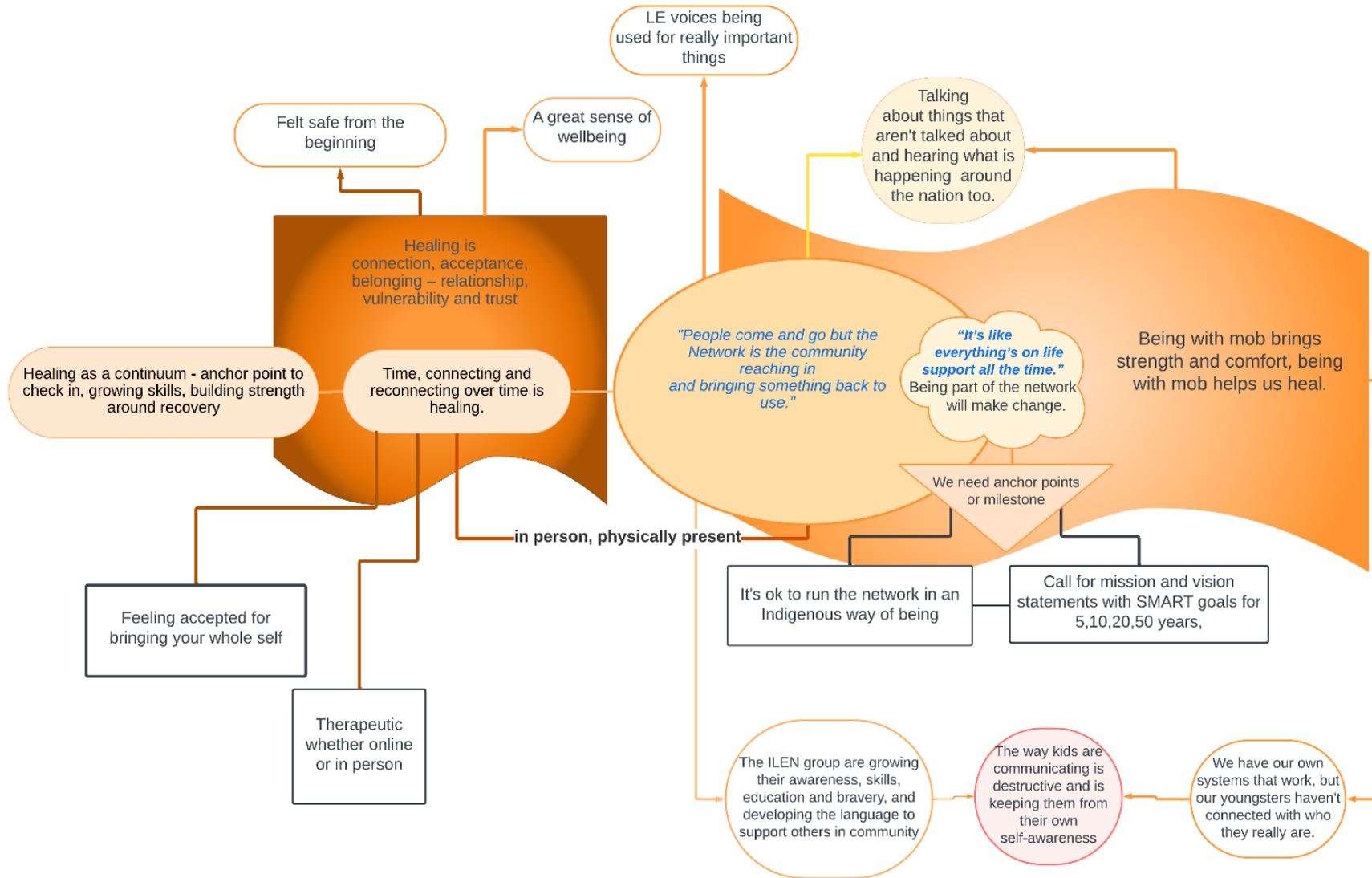
Gathering 1



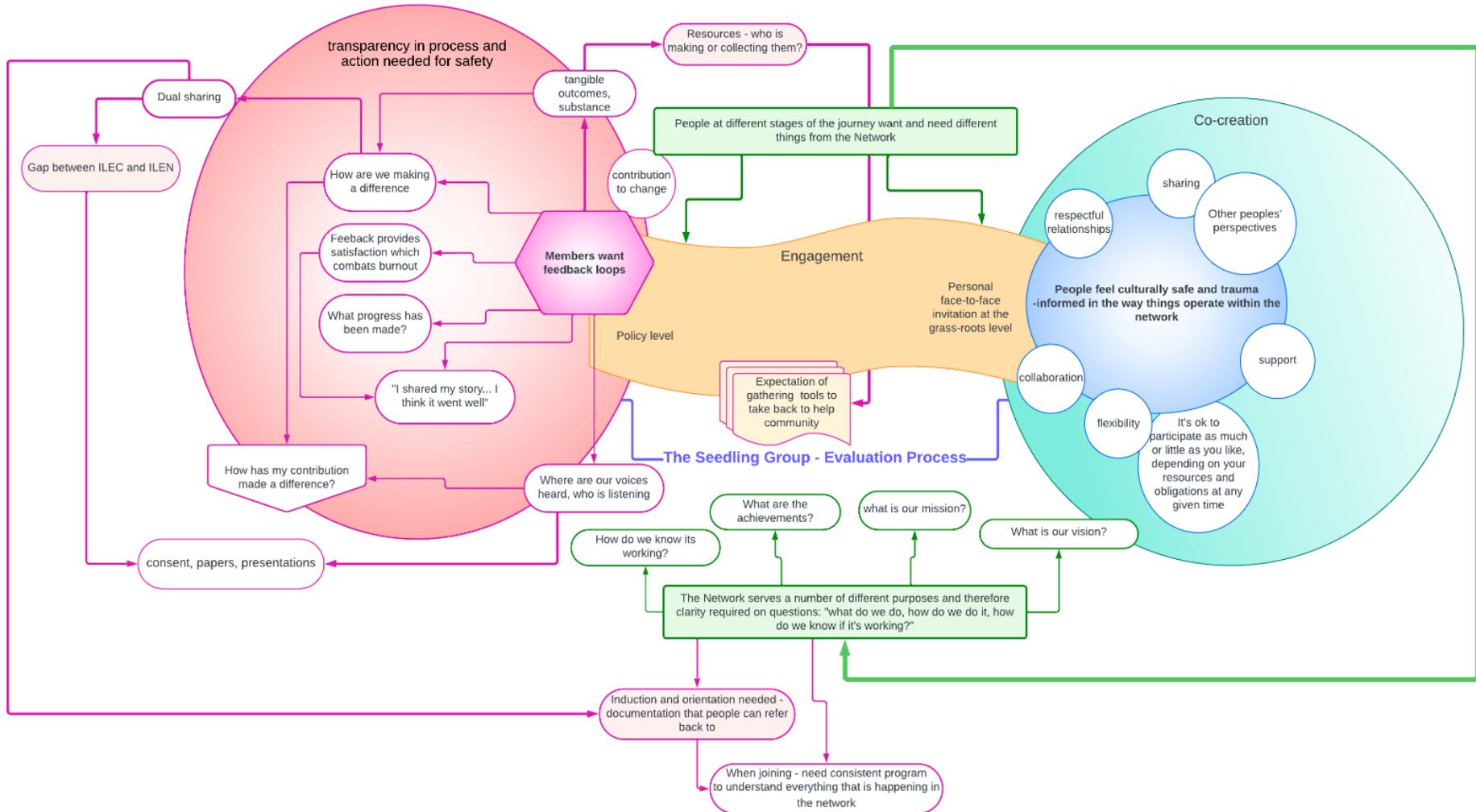
Gathering 2



Gathering 3



Gathering 4



Appendix 6 Considerations for Organisational Readiness



Considerations for Organisation Readiness: Is your organisation ready to meaningfully engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network?

First-of-its-kind in Australia and an International example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre seeks to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voices in Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Set up with cultural safety front of mind and with paid participation for all activities, we recognise the significant contribution Lived Experience from First Nations people has in mental health and suicide prevention.

Key Considerations:

Adequate Remuneration and Resourcing

- Will you commit to paying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience appropriately in your activities?
- Do you have scope in your budget for adequate planning and psychological support?
- Have you allowed for reasonable time frames within your proposal?

Safety of Participants

- Will you commit to having at least 1 (recommended 2) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience representative/s on your opportunity?
- How will you, to the best of your ability, ensure cultural safety and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are weaved into the conversations meaningfully?
- How do you plan to minimise harm and maximise benefits for First Nations people engaging in this project and with your organisation?
- What psychological support will be available when engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience? Does your budget allow for this?

Recognition and Respect for Expertise

- How will Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input be integrated into the work that you are doing?
- Will there be co-authorship on any publications that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience?
- What opportunities will be available beyond the life of the project for any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Input? e.g., Presenting at conferences, ongoing opportunities
- Is there scope for additional individuals beyond the initial plan? We may receive more interest than expected.

Organisational Indicators for Safety:

- Is your organisation connected into the Centre's online Portal and engaging in available resources?
- What is your organisational commitment to First Nations Peoples? (e.g., Funding of identified positions, having a RAP or strategic document, Acknowledgement of Country practices etc)
- How many First Nations People are in your organisation, and in leadership? What are their experiences?
- In what ways does your organisation engage with the members and issues of your local First Nations community?
- How do you recognise First Nations voices on dates of significance e.g., 26/01, NAIDOC week, Reconciliation Week, Anniversary of the Apology or during political movements etc.

Appendix 7

Example of ILEC Supported Community Event

In 2023 Black Dog Institute (BDI) Lived Experience Centre sponsored and helped to organise the annual Island of Origin Rugby tournament, which was held on Badu Island. The Lived Experience Network messaging aimed at raising awareness of mental health and suicide prevention through the sponsorship notices which was embedded into all coverage and broadcasting at the event and on other media. Messaging was also transmitted through workshops held at throughout the tournament, and on merchandising distributed over the three days at the event.

This event attracted more than 1500 people from across the Torres Strait Islands and across the region and was live streamed to more than 1,500 viewers with over 115,000 views from the Torres Strait to Western Australia. It was also covered by radio throughout the Islands.

Event Summary

The Island of Origin Carnival ran over the 16th, 17th and 18th of June 2023. There were 399 registrations from players and volunteers. With a total prize money of \$20,000 for the men's draw, 9 teams registered. This was also the first year that women's teams had entered the competition. Three women's teams registered, competing for a first prize of \$5000.

Engagement with officials and teams through Microsoft teams emphasising the importance of registering players and volunteers supporting communications and sharing of a code of conduct for the carnival helped support the success of the event.

Local businesses benefitted greatly from the event and all guests at the carnival stayed with families at no cost with the main goal is for guests to enjoy themselves, build relationships and connect with family and friends.

Wellbeing Promotions

Sponsorship announcements were broadcast at the grounds, on live radio, and live video throughout the tournament potentially reaching everyone who attended, listened, viewed, or accessed recording of the event at the time or since.

There were workshops being run by Koko with ladies and men's teams about suicide prevention and mental health. Koko distributed the BDI merchandise throughout the workshops before and during the carnival.

There was a strong presence of culture throughout the carnival with dances from different teams and sharing of culture between communities.

Impact on Community

Community members enjoyed themselves and expressed that their experiences have been positive and are looking to come back next year due to being able to the additional accommodation provided.

The community was looked after as there were opportunities for communities to connect with one another through a welcome barbeque and constant opportunities throughout the carnival to be with others through the support of their local teams.

Evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre and National Network
Interim Report November 2023

Koko's workshops had a significant positive impact on the wellbeing of community and players. This was the first time this was offered for this carnival as we know that mental health has a strong connection with sport.

Videos of all the Island of Origin games -

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLNvKfClegd3F1uv2gKieDrBUpkGpc_X4