

Friday 1 October 2021

TRANSCRIPT

The Healing Foundation CEO Fiona Cornforth with Adam Stephen, ABC Radio Queensland Drive

Topics: Healing, Torres Strait Islands, intergenerational trauma, First Nations culture

ADAM STEPHEN: We do know that intergenerational trauma is a massive problem for our First Nations people. There are efforts being made, though, to heal that trauma so that people living today can actually move on with their lives without being anchored to the horrors of the past. And three Torres Strait Island communities have actually taken some really significant steps in regard to this.

Dauan, Saibai, and Kerriri islands have all been involved in conversations around healing with The Healing Foundation to try and create a roadmap towards improvement in their health. I had a chat to The Healing Foundation CEO, Fiona Cornforth, about the journey that these islands have taken, and their residents, and what this roadmap will actually look like and what it might achieve for those that have been hurt.

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FIONA CORNFORTH: The document, the outcomes of the healing forums that we've held in the three communities; Kerriri, Dauan, and Saibai islands in the Torres Strait.

ADAM STEPHEN: So, tell us a little bit about the forums that you held on those islands and the importance of them.

FIONA CORNFORTH: We were asked by the communities to come along and host with our partners in the Torres Strait, Mura Kosker Sorority, a forum to bring the community together and for everyone to get on the same page about how the community feels things aren't working and are working, and then to put some healing priorities together and action.

ADAM STEPHEN: So what were some of the things identified by these three island communities as being priorities for action?

FIONA CORNFORTH: There were a range of things that came out of the forums. Some of them are basic needs that are unmet. We're talking about facilities that we take for granted on the mainland. So, some of those came out. Fears about COVID and protecting our elders and the old people. The climate crisis, rising sea tides. And then just general well-being. And Islanders feel that their ways are the better ways, and sometimes, they just need that backed by some of the evidence we have on intergenerational healing.

ADAM STEPHEN: Intergenerational healing sounds like such a big topic for discussion. When you go to a Torres Strait island and you sit down with the community, and your intention is to find out what their priorities are for healing, how easy or difficult is that task?

FIONA CORNFORTH: We've built fantastic relationships over time, and through working alongside Mura Kosker Sorority. They've got representatives in each community that work alongside families

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and the leadership, and so to be invited is an honour, but as a Torres Strait Islander myself, I think that helps as well. The idea is that there's a sharing of information all the way to national discourses and forums about healing, so that it's informed by the Torres Strait Islander communities, and then I get to bring that evidence and what we know on the larger scale back to reaffirm some of their actions and priorities as well.

ADAM STEPHEN: When you talk about healing, for the broader audience, what are you talking about here? What does it mean?

FIONA CORNFORTH: The term means a lot of things to a lot of different people. What we talk about with healing is making it so our people who have suffered trauma have a chance for it to be addressed and resolved. And so, healing really is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being in a place of strength more often than they are in a place of distress. And that means reforming systems, workforces, and sectors, and making sure every space we're interacting with is trauma-aware and healing-informed.

ADAM STEPHEN: The reports have come out about the negotiations, the consultations that were held last year. Can you run us through some of the key findings of the reports?

FIONA CORNFORTH: Key findings ranged across the three islands, and we've done eight (island communities) now and so they are always different. But there are very similar and common things, and they are about restoring culture, and ways of our cultures that have always kept us safe and well. They're about prioritising those things that have worked for us for millennia. And for the wider community, the service providers, and policymakers to understand how important those things are to our safety and well-being; and to work alongside, sharing that power in decision making, framing issues in the community as they really are, and not as people, usually outsiders, think that they are. But what's important is there are priorities that the communities themselves have set and so now we all get to understand how we contribute to healing on those islands.

ADAM STEPHEN: Do you think this can create meaningful change in overcoming intergenerational trauma?

FIONA CORNFORTH: Look, it absolutely can. And for some of the Islanders, particularly on the outer islands, there's a sense of feeling out of sight and out of mind. Their ownership of the reports and the actions and the priorities within the report means that they can feel our support on the mainland and as a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with evidence to support their testimony and their solutions. They can, you know, make these things come to fruition despite feeling isolated from time to time. The important thing is that trauma is a human experience. The origins of our trauma are through colonisation and being considered a less than race, and that's all First Nations peoples. But the good thing is that trauma can be managed and resolved, and we can learn to heal, but we have to be seen and we have to be heard for that to happen. We have to feel safe in these settings.

[End of excerpt]

ADAM STEPHEN: That is Fiona Cornforth and she's with The Healing Foundation. We're learning a little bit about three roadmaps that have been now put in train for three different Torres

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Straight Islands, Kerriri, Dauan, and Saibai. They are on the path to healing as a result of some forums held last year.

To raise awareness about intergenerational trauma, The Healing Foundation is sharing this animation: <https://youtu.be/Y-RaB19D13E>

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to heal trauma caused by the widespread and deliberate disruption of populations, cultures and languages over 230 years. This includes specific actions like the forced removal of children from their families.

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