

In the Eye of the Storm: Community-led Indigenous Informed Healing Responses to Disaster Recovery

By Caroline Atkinson, PhD

JINGIWULLA - YOWAN BOOGLE - welcome and good afternoon

Bugalbeh - Thank you for having me today – this is such an important conference, 2 eyed seeing provides many solutions.

My name is Carlie (Caroline) Atkinson, I am a Bundjalung /Yiman women. My grandfather on my mothers' side was born and raised on the north side of the Grafton River and travelled to Taroom in Queensland where he met my Yiman Grandmother. Yiman Country, Taroom is the Upper Dawson River. I am a mumma of 17-year-old twins a boy and a girl, the CEO of We Al-li, a culturally informed, trauma-integrated, healing organisation that was founded by my mother Judy Atkinson, and I am also an accredited Social Worker.

I am an Associate Professor with Melbourne University and have been a collaborator for many years as an investigator with the *Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future* team to develop perinatal strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents experiencing trauma and, more recently, Chief Investigator on the Replanting the Birthing Trees Project. With the onset of COVID-19, I became a Chief Investigator on an APPRISE CRE grant to develop a culturally safe, trauma-informed, public health emergency response framework for First Nations communities. This particular project has relevance to what unfolded in the Northern Rivers with the Floods. I am really excited to talk to you today about my experience and observations in relation to the 2022 Floods in the Northern Rivers, in particularly the Indigenous led responses that have been outstanding in helping our communities to hold the immense collective trauma of what has happened and come together as communities to rebuild and continue to heal. It is ongoing today and the application of an Aboriginal Led Healing Framework to Disaster Recovery has benefited whole communities.

Before I start, I would like to acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders, Peoples, and Country of each Aboriginal Nation on which you are sitting today and bring greetings from Bundjalung Yugun (Country) – the Widjabul Wiabul lands where I live and to which I am connected. I would now like to ask you to take a moment to drop into a special place on the country where you currently live, or your own country. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes.... In your mind's eye feel that special space and place, what does it smell like, what can you see, what can you hear, what can you taste, and what can you feel. Take those sensations and wrap them together, hold them, and take them into your body. Give gratitude for all those who have come before us, who have held the country in such reverence. Breath into that feeling; take a few deep breaths and as you release your breath, let your body relax, drop your shoulders, let your jaw relax, breathe, then open your eyes. Greetings from our sacred mountain, Wollumbin.

Ok, I will story you through today. When putting this presentation together I became aware, last year I was still in the story phase and not yet into the integration phase from an academic sense. I knew that would come later, but it has been helpful to reflect and start that process of integrating the experience into a more academic context. I am still integrating. Here is what we will discuss:

- Flood Story
- Circling into Safety
- Uniting Hearts and Establishing Order
- Importance of Connection and Belonging
- Communities of Care and Practice
- Self-Regulation is Co-regulation and Deep listening – Dadirri – Spaceholder qualities
- Indigenous Healing Practices (applying a Healing Framework to Disaster Recovery)
- Healing Hub Space Weaving – What we offered and why
- Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Public Health Emergency Response Framework for First Nations Families and Communities – Linking in with COVID-19 Framework
- Time for a Yarn

The Floods in the Northern Rivers in February 2022 and a second flood in March 2022 were catastrophic. They affected more than 60,000 people in the Northern Rivers, NSW, Australia, causing loss of life, housing, employment, separation and breakdown of families, and loss of physical infrastructure including clean water and sewerage. Many community and health services were also impacted, exacerbating social isolation, disconnection, and distress. We are still feeling the effects today.

According to Fontalba-Navas et al. (2017) “floods are among the most severe natural disasters because of the significant material damages endured, the extended recovery period they require, the impact on the nation’s economy, and the psychological energy required for adapting to new social circumstances such as relocating [1].” The Lismore (Northern Rivers Floods – are considered the most severe floods recorded in Australia History. We are still recovering.

The flood waters were as high as the tall MacDonald’s Sign.

Here’s what we did:

- Cut off waiting at home for Naibai (waters) to go down after the big Guuang (Rain). Set up a telehealth service with know-people that were both culturally and trauma informed.
- Once flood naibai (waters) went down, spent the first week cleaning our office, others’ offices, and friend’s houses. Our youth in this disaster have been incredible.

- Exhausted I sat in the mud behind a friend's house, both of us overwhelmed and my friend said, "what are you doing here Carlie – you know about this stuff, collective trauma and healing, go do what you do".
- Hooked up with an Indigenous man, a friend, colleague at Griffith University – who was on the same page, and we called a meeting of services/people and another friend who had already got the Wellbeing support happening out of the Koori Mail Main Hub.
- We discussed our vision to set up a Healing Hub grounded in Indigenous Wisdom - trauma healing knowledge. I knew the mainstream services would respond, but it would be slow, and we needed something **NOW**, and I also knew the mainstream approach would be clinical. From my lived experience as an Indigenous woman who understands collective trauma and ways of working together as a community, I knew we had something to offer here, a different way of doing things.

One thing we know, which has been widely investigated, is that the most disadvantaged groups in our society often experience disproportionate exposure to flood events, often have limited resources to aid recovery, and have increased mental health problems because of flood experiences [2].

We also know from research that connection and belonging (inclusivity) are powerful mitigating factors that help to reduce the likelihood of developing PTSD.

When people are hurting, what they want is a sense of connection and belonging. They don't want the sharp edges of a formalised clinical mental health space [3].

I was deeply aware while all this was unfolding that people's adrenal systems would be on overload (mine certainly was!) and that their safety, and their safe place including the infrastructure that supports the community had been erased. People would be seeking a sense of sense of safety – a place to attempt to regulate even if it was for just a moment.

I had spent some time offering my services at the Koori Mail (an Indigenous Newspaper) Hub Wellbeing Space; however, I quickly realized that the space in the car park was very noisy, very busy, as it should be with all that was being coordinated from there, and a quieter more regulated space was needed to compliment this. I remember sitting at the Koori Mail Hub when a couple entered with their 2-year-old. The mother was on the table having a massage, dad was talking with me, and the 2-year-old was running around, while trucks backed in. Clearly mum and dad were very stressed and unable to receive any meaningful support with all that happening. That said, the Wellbeing Hub at the Koori Mail was an important service and still is. The Koori Mail and the Healing Hub have been working together to provide a coordinated approach to everyone's wellbeing needs.

So.... the next step was to find a place we could set up the Healing Hub, a place of safety, a place that was in the CBD and accessible to the community.

We put out a call via social media and was contacted by CASPA, an organisation that supports kids in out-of-Home Care and Residential care. CASPA had an Education House, and they were offering it to us for the Healing Hub. It was perfect; it was a house, it had a homely feel, there was green grass that was not flood affected - access to nature. The CASPA Education Staff were amazing, trauma-informed, culturally safe, and had a beautiful, non-hierarchical team in place.

I was reluctant at first. As CASPA is an organization that services kids in out-of-home care and residential care and the building offered was previously a kids' home, it had a dark history with our peoples. How could this be a safe place, particularly for our mob?

I checked with a couple of Elders for advice. I got the most beautiful feedback from one Elder who said, "bub, people can heal, so can spaces and places; put the healing energy back in here". The house was also on ceremonial ground, on a hill. It did not flood in the first large flood, so we also knew the location was safe on many levels. I also believe that the CASPA staff had already begun the healing process of this space with the beautiful work they were doing with their kids and the homely way they had it set up.

So, we had found a safe place.

We created a Facebook page, a web page for volunteer registrations (ensuring those volunteering were safe, culturally-aware, trauma-informed and had worked with children), developed some basic guidelines for the Hub, and engaged a local graffiti artist to create a sign for the Hub (this was done in a few days – but other than that there was not a lot of time spent on setting up organizing systems; it was organic, it needed to be, people needed this place ASAP and it didn't need to be held up in processes.)

As Aboriginal people our job is to **Unite Hearts and then Establish Order**. Usually what happens in Western approaches is the order is established first and then people wonder why it is difficult to unite hearts.

We are only now starting to add a little more order into the organic system that was created but importantly we focused on uniting hearts, between the volunteers at the HUB and CASPA staff, between all the staff at the Hub and the Community, and between and among the volunteers – it's all about the relationships. This creates safety for all of us.

Before the hub was opened, we made sure proper protocol was in place. Elders Uncle Gilbert Laurie and Uncle Roy Gordan gave a welcome to country and smoking ceremony and Jarmbi, a strong cultural Githabul man, provided a grounding to the country and each other. This brought community together and set the intention – such an important process as we circle into safety on all levels -- physical, mental, spiritual and emotional – and it demonstrates in action to the community, "hey, this is your space, it is safe and we all belong here."

We also understood: “Trauma is familiar to our mob across this country, particularly collective trauma, community trauma. And the most powerful thing that can happen when there's been a collective traumatic event is to bring community together to provide a sense of connection and belonging [4].”

Looking at research conducted after some earlier floods in Lismore in 2017, and as mentioned earlier, it was very clear that connection and belonging (inclusivity) were mitigating factors relating to the potential to develop post-flood PTSD:

As James Bennant Levy and others found in their research post-2017 floods, “Aboriginal respondents were like other groups, in that individuals with greater feelings of belonging [and connectedness] were less likely to experience post-flood PTSD [5].”

We needed to create a safe community of care. This is the centerpiece of all Indigenous healing approaches. Drawing on the skills and lived experience from WITHIN the community as a self-organizing organism that knows what the community needs and how to proceed, it is place-based, strengths-based, and community-based.

Communities of Care is the name given to groups of people who live together in small communities, who care for each other, who work together to meet their own needs, and who change their own circumstances.

We also framed the Healing Hub with Principles of Participation to hold the safety of the Hub, focusing on the 7R's – Respect, Responsibility, Relatedness, Resilience, Resonance, Rights and Reciprocity. These values guided everything we did, alongside each other, with the people with whom we worked, with the organisations with which we engaged, and with the community with which we linked. These 7 R's were developed by my mother, Judy Atkinson, and hold the foundation of all the work we do at We Al-li.

Another core element of the approach is developing communities of practice.

Communities of Practice are the collection of people who engage in an ongoing basis in some common endeavour generally through professional practice. In this case we are referring to the group of professionals that already exist in the community who are employed to deliver services to our communities. They may be Doctors, Health Workers, Mental Health Workers, Teachers, Kids Play Therapists, Creative Art Therapists, Body Workers etc. They may be non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people.

With the floods many of these professionals were also affected – their own homes and their places of work - so the Healing Hub was set up as both a place for regulation and healing for EVERYONE. Volunteers came from everywhere and from existing organization such as Social Futures who provided a whole team of Child and Family Play Therapists to work based in the Hub. Social Workers from the Women's Resource Centre also contributed. These organizations volunteered their staff as part of their core duties. Other Practitioners volunteered their time for free to help rebuild our community. A potent community of Care and Community of Practice formed. The once

siloed organizations were now working together side by side and in that there was a depth of shared practice and learning for all.

Hub Volunteers were given an informal induction – we were doing this stuff on the run however I took the time with each volunteer to personally induct them into the Hub. We are currently putting together a more formal induction process with Professor Lisa Gibbs, Academic Lead, Community Resilience Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety, Melbourne University who is getting her team including Phoenix Australia and Red Cross First Nations Team to put together a webinar.

Volunteers are introduced to the general flow of the Hub, which is to assist people to regulate, have a *cuppa*, offer a body work session, yarning session, group yarning session, or activity.

Volunteers understand that self-regulation contributes to co-regulation, that listening deeply to what people are saying both in their words and their bodies is very important. It is important to **wear your expertise as an invisible garment**. A regulated environment is crucial -- for example, soft, gentle music, yummy smells from the oil burner, warm drinks, and food, and importantly, attentively aware, intuitive space holders.

Inclusivity to the highest degree is a strong value at the Hub. Awareness of trauma; healthy, non-violent communication; and compassionate care is important for a community in crisis.

Our Aim at the Healing Hub was to provide a space in which to regulate people's nervous systems – more than Psychological First Aid, a whole body, mind, and spirit approach.

The Hub was designed as a place where the mind, body, and spirit could have a short space to regulate and regenerate, to connect and be heard. It is a beautiful example of the community of care and practice coming together to support each other and is guided by a First Nations Framework for trauma recovery and healing.

As Bruce Perry articulates:

“Examination of the known beliefs, rituals, and healing practices for loss and trauma [by Indigenous peoples]...reveal some remarkable principles.

- Healing rituals converge into a set of core elements related to adaption and healing following trauma. ...
- These core elements include an overarching belief system; a rationale; a reason for the pain, injury, or loss; a retelling or re-enactment of the trauma in words, dance, or song – all provided in intensely relational and participatory experiences with family and clan [6].

Indigenous Healing Practices Work. Perry continues to write that we need to:

- retell the story,
- hold each other,
- massage,
- dance,
- sing,
- creating images of the battle in literature, sculpture, and drama,
- reconnect to loved ones, to community, to celebrate, eat, and share together.

Bruce Perry confirms what we already knew -- that the Lifestyle Practices of our mob were healing, they mitigated trauma.

With this knowledge grounded in solid trauma theory and culturally responsive approaches which are holistically framed, we **“read the field”** and organically developed a flowing process at the Hub that responded to the needs of people seeking support and the volunteers and workers. We were ALL both supporters and people needing support – true reciprocity. We looked for repetitive, rhythmic, relevant, relational, respectful, and rewarding processes in which kids, youth, and adults could participate.

These Indigenous healing practices work because they are:

‘Repetitive, rhythmic, relevant, relational, respectful and rewarding [6].’

“While these therapeutic practices may not at first seem “biological,” be assured that they are not only likely to change the brain, but they will assuredly provide the patterned, repetitive stimuli required to specifically influence and modify the impact of trauma, neglect, and maltreatment on key neural systems [6].”

Drawing on Indigenous Healing Practices, knowledge, and trauma theory, we weaved a space that included food and hot drinks, essential and comfort items that had been donated, bodyworkers, massage therapists, reiki practitioners, osteopaths, acupuncturists, people who could provide somatic support, one-on-one trauma counsellors, yarning circles, group activities and workshops, and a *Jarjums* (kids) Therapeutic Art and Play space.

It is a safe place that provides an informal deconstruction of the clinical setting, provides a regulating homely environment out of the mud with places to fall and rest on soft cushions and beanbags, while listening to calming music and smelling beautiful Australian bush scented oils (the smells outside were horrendous). These may seem like little things, but they are big things in the trauma space.

Even when we got cut off by flood waters for a second time and the Hub closed for a week, workers from the Healing Hub focused on developing grounding and self-regulating resources and sharing these via our Facebook page. They offered on-line *Wayapa* and Yarning Circles to support the community.

Sometimes all we need is a *cuppa*, a bite to eat, and a yarn. The flow of the Hub generally starts when someone enters. Often people don’t know what they want; they

are shell shocked. Friendly Space holders guide them gently to sit down, have a *cuppa*, have a feed, and start an informal yarn, listening, and then suggesting some of the services we offer like bodywork, one-on-one counselling, or to sit in the yarning circles or participate in some of group activities like weaving.

Basic needs must be met. People were offered essential items like food, toiletries, toys for the kids, gum boots, blankets, clothes, shoes. If we didn't have what they needed, we would source it. That component is no longer needed, so we are no longer offering it, but basic needs must be met first following a natural disaster.

The issues are in our tissues. Each week at the Hub there is a range of modalities such as osteopathy, reiki, acupuncture, and somatic therapies or similar bodywork modalities specifically designed to release stored trauma in the body. We know that the benefits a trauma survivor receives from massage, for example, can be extremely helpful in their healing process. Massage can decrease stress hormones, provide comfort, boost mood, increase circulation, relieve pain, and release tense muscles.

Bodyworkers are key to this approach. Apart from the knowledge that with trauma, **the issues are in our tissues**, people's bodies were sore and exhausted from the clean-up of the floods.

However, as Volunteers drop off, we are finding it harder to fill these shifts. Our hope is that we will receive funding from a recent grant application to ensure that this very important part of the trauma healing puzzle is supported.

To make sense of our stories, we create spaces to retell our story, make sense of our story, recreate images of the battle, to hold each other, to dance, to sing whilst at the same time engaging in activities that softened the noise from the lizard brain and bring our thoughts into the frontal lobe – the executive control center. This can bring our bodies into a state of rest along with group activities that nurture connection and belonging.

It was a safe place for everyone as demonstrated by this testimonial. **“The Healing Hub has been a safe place for my daughter-in-law who has ASD, ADHD, and Anxiety to feel safe and get back into her body, and for my daughter to draw her overwhelm in colour and for my heart to stop and rest in the clay. Thank you”**

“The person's trauma story becomes and remains the centre piece of the healing process [7].” Stories were honored in the yarning circles/weaving circles. We laughed, cried, drank warm cups of tea, and ate healthy nurturing food cooked and donated to us by the Koori Mail Kitchen and Trees Not Bombs Recovery Café. There was no hierarchy in the circle. We were all both the teacher and the taught – as mum (Judy Atkinson) calls it, Educare.

Both volunteers and those seeking support benefited. ***“The hub has been somewhere for me to be me. When I'm in the community, I have to be strong and supportive, but the hub has allowed me a space to break down and BE supported”.***

The power of story. “We live storied lives. We organise experience into stories as we share life interactively with others. The plot, characters, and morals of the stories we hear influence our synaptic connections; they change our brains. Stories also live through us. We are born into stories, those of our families, nations, religions and cultures [8] (p. 180).”

We understood the power of story but not an extraction of the story from a person or the need for it to be verbal (creative expression through art and clay work is also a way to tell story or process story) or even that it needed to be our own story. Sometimes in the listening to others’ stories, we can make sense of our own.

Jarjums (kids) Therapeutic Art and Play Space. The Kids Therapeutic Art and Play Space was an essential element in the Healing Hub Model, providing our *Jarjums* a space and place to process what had happened, providing their caregivers an opportunity to get some support, have a massage, or just BE for a moment in time. It is also an excellent example of the Community of Practice which supported the Hub and the Hub supported them – two-way relationships. The *Mijung Jarjums* Workers from Social Futures lost their therapeutic space in the floods. The Healing Hub provided a space for them to keep practicing, supporting community, gain support for themselves and as it was part of their core duties. They were paid to offer these services which made it sustainable. The CASPA kids were also able to access these activities, so it was a win-win all round.

“The Healing Hub is part of a collective of trauma-informed practitioners, full of heart and responsiveness to children and their parents in the moment, playing, listening, being, and responding to each child’s needs as they arrived, whilst also being held by other practitioners as it was a collective trauma and we were all holding space for each other. It was a privilege, and I learned so much about the beauty of humanity through participating in this model of community care” (Mijung Jarjums Worker).

Some of the activities that were provide included:

- Nature Mandalas
- Clay and Rock Painting: connecting with nature to ground ourselves
- Kite making, Origami boats, hearts
- Book Making: Telling our stories through words and art
- Drumming Circles
- One-one-one therapeutic support; and
- Family support

Developing a culturally responsive, trauma-informed public health emergency response framework for First Nations families and communities during COVID-19. I want to acknowledge Catherine Chamberlain from Melbourne University and her amazing team. When I contacted Cath to say I was going to drop into my community in my full capacity for flood recovery first for a month, then when the second flood hit an

additional months (2 months overall), and I would put my CI and Associate Professor obligations on hold, she was not only fully supportive but used her incredible brain (mine was not working so well at the time) and her creative approach to everything. She was able to see that this was an opportunity for me to write a real life, in action response to a disaster which was framed by Indigenous knowledge and processes.

She could see that the community response in setting up the Healing Hub applied many of the core principles of the Framework that was developed as part of a project to develop a culturally responsive, trauma-informed public health emergency response framework for First Nations families and communities during COVID-19.

Although I took copious notes while I was at the Healing Hub every day for 2 months, I did not think to look at the framework. I just continued to show up and do what felt natural with an overall understanding of collective, community, and complex trauma, and knowing that people with pre-existing trauma – complex trauma were likely to be significantly impacted by the Floods.

It has only been in putting this presentation together that I started to look more carefully at the Framework. Each of the levels identified in the Framework are relevant to the Healing Hub. These principles not only work for Indigenous Peoples but for All peoples and particularly people with pre-existing complex trauma.

Here is a very brief snapshot on how it is potentially aligned.

Level 1: The Central Goals of the Healing Hub align with the Central Goals of the Framework:

A Sense of Security - as discussed early, was provided by circling into safety, ensuring the physical environment was safe. It was not in a flood zone, was calming, but also a spiritual environment through the ceremony of opening the place through the Elders' Blessings.

Healing from grief and loss – was a key discussion in yarning circles. There was much collective loss and grief at the community level which bound us all in empathetic engagement. We also had specific loss and grief circles to provide space for people to acknowledge these feelings.

Hope is another central goal – hope is essential in ALL healing process. The healing hub instilled hope through its actions, through the self-regulated Space holders, through the support provided in one-one-one counselling, group yarning circles, and activities that helped make sense of what had happened. The Healing Hub instilled hope through bringing community together, connecting with each other, and providing a space where everyone belonged.

Resilience – was also demonstrated in all of us getting up, standing up, and showing up. We all built on each other's resilience as we nurtured one another within a community setting.

Self and collective efficacy was demonstrated by the capacity to respond immediately to the community needs and therefore individual needs, self, and collective efficacy in action.

Trust is another important goal – The Hub focused on uniting hearts first and foremost, by being a reliable and predictable place of refuge. This created trust within the community, which is crucial in times of crisis, particularly when the community feels they have been abandoned by formal services.

Wellbeing is another key goal within the Healing Hub Model. In fact, the whole approach at the Healing Hub was centred on individual and collective wellbeing -- physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as demonstrated previously when I went through the Healing Hub Offerings.

Level 2: The Central goals were reliant on the Interdependent core concepts of providing the Healing Hub service based upon the empathetic connection volunteers had with the community. Significant for example was:

- Compassion, protection and caring
- Connectedness and collaboration
- Growth and empowerment
- Holistic support
- And Transparency – were all key concepts in our approach.

Level 3: Strategies to support these goals and Independent Core Concepts included: Ensuring **basic needs and resources** were met through donations in the form of food, drink, toiletries, cleaning gear and products, protective gear including masks, gloves and gum boots, clothes, and shoes, sleeping gear, and comfort items like toys for kids and hand knitted blankets.

Human rights, dignity, choice, justice, and ethics were also crucial elements that were highly valued at the Healing Hub. For example, within a Trauma Informed Framework, choice is paramount. No one should be forced to do anything they are not comfortable with.

Multi-level responses in terms of addressing immediate needs and longer-term needs for example assisting with grant application was a priority.

Mutuality and collective responsibility resonated amongst everyone. There was a shared understanding of the enormity of the disaster, a shared understanding that it was going to take us all to get back up. We focused on **strengthen and revitalising the existing systems** within our community, through bringing in services and volunteers from within the local community and drawing on **well-functioning social systems**.

Level 4: There were several Key Enablers within this process such as the ones formed between CASPA, Social Futures, Koori Mail, Resilient Lismore, Rekindling the

Spirit, and other key organisations, but importantly between our community members who guided all we did.

Equity was demonstrated by ensuring that everyone was treated the same with respect, compassion, and kindness. The Hub became a place that Neurodiverse individuals felt comfortable attending, because this was such a strong value in the Hub.

Local leadership and eldership – were strongly demonstrated by people like Naomi Moran from the Koori Mail, and Elly Bird from Resilient Lismore, and me at the Healing Hub – all local people. I spent every day at the Healing Hub for the first 2 months giving people a sense of leadership and, more importantly, gentle Eldership – people needed to know someone was steering the ship. I also attended the Community/Services/Government Stakeholder Meetings to ensure the voice of the Hub and pressing issues in the community were heard at the higher levels.

Strengths-based, culturally informed communication was incredibly important – all the communication, at the ground level, within meetings and talking with the media was intentionally strength-based and demonstrated cultural knowledge of what we were doing and how we were doing it including bringing focus to some of our communities that were being overlooked.

Level 5: The outer circle and overarching philosophy of the Framework embraces and holds all the inner elements. All that we have done has been held within a strong sense of **cultural humility, safety, and responsiveness**.

The responsive approach by Catherine Chamberlain to my putting my other duties on hold was a great example of this and created a sense of safety, knowing that what I was doing was supported as was the evolution of the Hub responding to the needs of the community as they arose. Trauma-informed principles acknowledging the individual trauma stories, the overall collective, community trauma story including the historical trauma stories of all the individuals indirectly or directly affected by the floods, also provided a theoretical context to how we respond to people knowing the likelihood of old trauma, complex trauma being triggered within the current crisis is significant.

What I would add which would hold the whole circle, model together is our connection to Country, Culture, Spirit, and relationships. This provides a full recovery model, one which acknowledges the need to rebuild and repair our relationship to Country.

Our Weaving Circles became a safe place for everyone to come together and make sense of what happened. It provided a sense of connection and belonging for many. These circles continue today.

As we weaved (or did other group activities including the kids' activities), a little bit of normalcy, whatever that is, crept in and therefore hope or even just the energy to get back up and keep going or get a grant application complete just seemed that bit more possible.

Weaving Stories Healing Stories

"An Indigenous Framework, vast,
For healing wounds of seasons past.
In disaster's wake, we seek to find,
A roadmap born from ancient mind.

Culture knows, and culture heals,
Culture's fire, forever feels.
Culture leads, we say it loud,
A mantra shared, a promise vowed" [9]

Closure: Recharging our batteries is vital. You can't continue this work unless you look after yourself. *Bugalbeh* Thank you.

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