

# Keriba Dhoenidhan Bi "Our Healing Light"



"The Village Model"

Torres Strait Regional Healing Service

# The Village Model

- Philosophy of the Village Model
- Changing Society
- Geographical Layout of the Region
- The Concept of the Village Model
- Definition of Healing



# 1. Philosophy of the Village Model

For years we have struggled to provide adequate services to the children, men and women from communities of the Torres Straits. These services were often times inadequately funded, not taking into consideration the high cost of living in this region, the issues of isolation and remoteness of some of the communities, lack of adequate and housing for large families, were 90% of the people are recipients of Centrelink and employed under the CDEP Program. Poor standards of education, that have the worst health problems in the country and don't have access to equitable services provide an ideal environment for violence to fester. In an article entitled “Don't dwell on violence in our Island Paradise” written by Mr Terry Waia, Chairman of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

With what limited resources we had, we set out to establish the services that unbeknown to us at the time were in line with what we now call today “The Village Model”, utilising the human resources (people) from these communities, using education as a tool to empower them so that they can take their place in the communities and participate in a more pro-active manner.

The Village Model will enable us to

- i. Revive tradition and customs.
- ii. Revive traditional practices of resolving conflicts
- iii. Revive traditional decision making processors




## 2. Changing Society

### The Impact of Political, Social and Economics

- **POLITICAL** Changes on Torres Strait Islanders

The winds of political, economics and social changes that have swept across the Torres Strait began with the political changes of the 1970's and 1980's with the removal of the remaining statutory blockages, thus allowing Torres Strait Islanders to fully participate in Australian society since the Referendum of 1967. The 1990's brought even more change with all the Torres Strait Islands accessing air transport services, advance communication technology through to the use of computerised systems, more or less connected the Torres Strait to the mainland, Australia. In the midst of all the these changes, the cultural life of Torres Strait continued to adapt to accommodate these changes as well as maintaining it's cultural identity.



- **Social & Economic** Changes from self-sufficiency to welfare dependency brought it's own social problems. Torres Strait Islanders moved from self-sufficiency, where they grew their own fruit and vegetables and hunted for meat in which the roles of men and women were clearly defined, based on the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. The monetary system replaced the concept of self-efficiency. When changes occurred, problems began to appear in the village communities and within family groups. Local grocery stores replaced gardening and hunting. Unbeknown to us, that 30 years down the track that this changes would have major health implications for them. Families were forced to re-examine their cultural values.




As a form of survival, families had to choose to forego their cultural values and beliefs in order to survive in this new society. Others were able to maintain the cultural values and beliefs and still adopt the new way of living and thinking.

The primary roles & responsibility of men and women became interwoven, thus creating an environment where people lost the value of respect for each other such as

- Beating of family member and community member
- Elder abuse
- Suicide
- Rape
- Child abuse and
- Sexual abuse

This incest as well as emotional, spiritual, physiological abuse and economic deprivation began to rise at an incredible pace.



This report was published by the Crime and Misconduct Commission on the inquiry into abuse children in Foster Care stipulates:

*“Disproportionately high levels of alcohol consumption and violence in these communities markedly compounds child protection issues.*

*The issues of alcohol and violence is extremely prevalent in some of the communities, and the impact on the community and children is profound.... Some of these communities have among the highest rates of foetal alcohol syndrome in the world. The tragedy is downstream effects in terms of damaging education opportunities for those kids who would otherwise have potential and implications for the whole country”*



In spite of all this, the Torres Strait Island culture, traditional languages have survived, but not without a fight from our leaders.



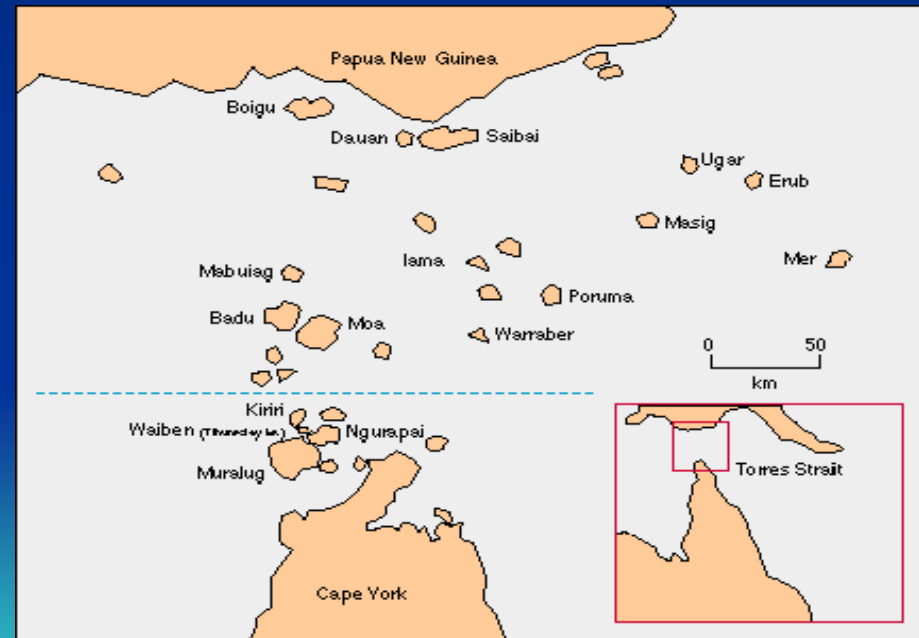
# 3. Geographical Layout of the Region

## Profile of the Region

- The Torres Strait is a unique cultural, historical and geographical region of Australia. The straits consists of 100 islands of which 15 are inhabited and administrated by Community Councils.
- It is made up of 10% landmass and 90% water. It occupies a unique position as an ethnological link between Australia, Papua New Guinea and other pacific Islands countries.
- The Torres Straits also unique in that it is the only place in Australia that has a boarder with another country. A treaty that allows free movements for traditional visits and trade.

The Administrative and commercial centre of the region is Thursday Island. It is home for 35 Government Departments (State & Commonwealth)

## TORRES STRAIT MAP



As we can see from the map it is imperative that we acknowledge the isolation of these communities. The report on the inquiry into abuse of children in foster care points out that:

“The culture of Cape York, and Gulf of Carpentaria and Torres Strait Regions is especially characterised by isolation and remoteness. Living in these areas presents very particular challenges in terms of access to services and facilities for children and families.”



## 4. The Concept of the Village Model

- Service Delivery Model

Taking all of this into consideration, the Village Model consistent with the way of life of the people of Torres Strait, draws its strengths the culture and traditions so that Keriba Dhoenidhan Bi “Our Healing Light”, will be able to respond more effectively to the social needs of the people of the Torres Straits.



- The Village Model will provide a service that will be culturally appropriate and sensitive to the needs of the whole Torres Straits.
- The people who have been involved with the department of this model are not only live and practice these traditions, customs, beliefs and values in their day to day lives, they also have a history of working with the people (children of the “welfare systems” who are finding it difficult to basically survive in today’s society).

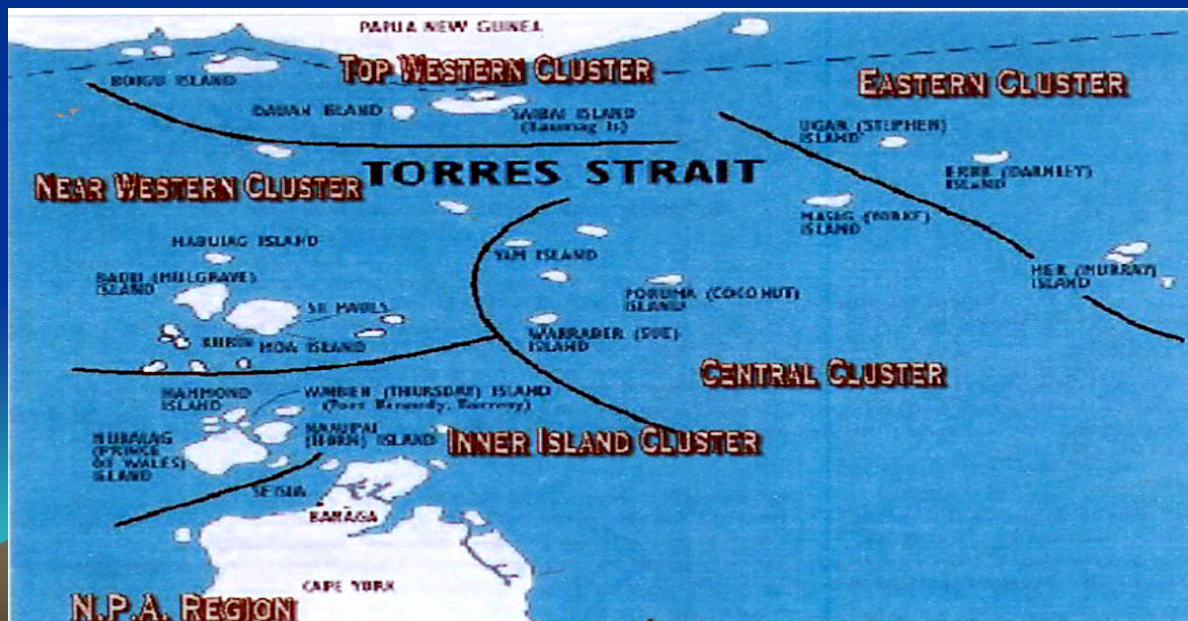


- These people have worked in organisations whose budget does not accommodate the changes in the current economic climate.
- With declining budgets, Services of Care to the Community in the widest possible sense, the Keriba Dhoenidhan Bi “Our Healing Light” is designed to meet particular and unique requirements of the Community.



- The Village Model provides opportunity for each community to develop preventative and intervention strategies to address the devastating effects of violence in their communities.

MAP – of Torres Strait clusters (Village committees)



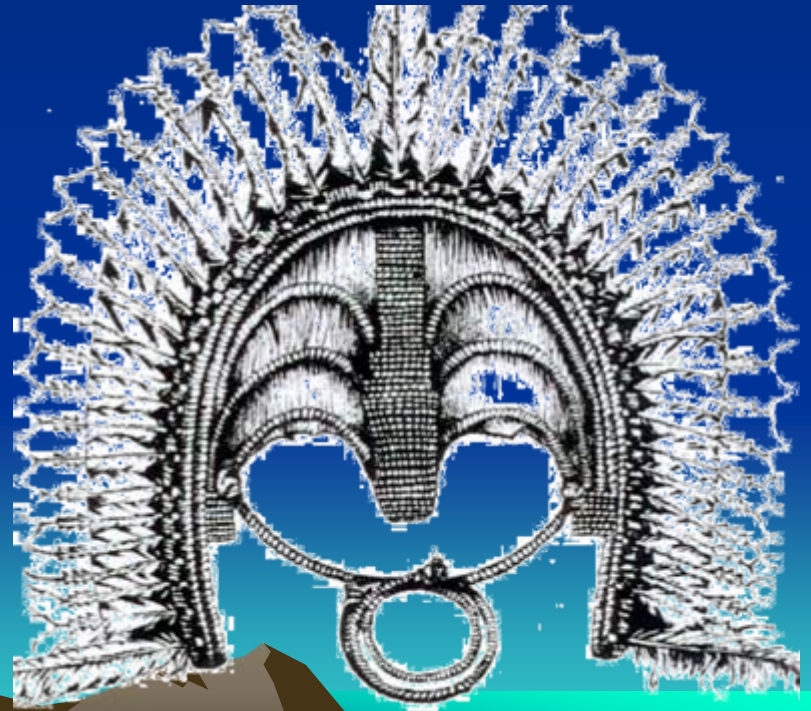
- From top to bottom
- Top Western
  - Eastern Cluster
  - Near Western Cluster
  - Central Cluster
  - Inner Island Cluster
  - N.P.A Region

- The Village Model addresses critical issues and challenges relevant to implementation of the traditional healing practices.

These include:

- a) The role of a Torres Strait Islander Community.
- b) The role of tribal custom and tradition in addressing the issue of violence.

The Village Model brings together community-based healing resources, using a team approach to achieve the physical and spiritual healing participants and as well being of the community as a whole.



The Village Model brings back together organisations, (Government and Non-Government) to work collectively to develop and implement a holistic approach to the physical and spiritual healing of individuals, families and community as a whole.



The Village Model supports views and perceptions of people in the community/or the region as a whole. As Mr Getano Lui (AM), Chairperson of Island Coordinating Council (I.C.C) pointed out in the forward of “Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun: Proper Communication with Torres Strait Islander People”:

“For many years non-islanders have worked with islanders to resolve issues of social disadvantages, and improve the level of services and the standard of living in this distinctive part of Australia”.



In implementing this model, we will:

- i. Produce better outcomes for the people of Torres Strait.
- ii. Produce better outcomes for the communities in the Torres Strait.
- iii. Meet our outcomes through culturally appropriate process.
- iv. Be responsive and accountable to the People of Torres Strait and funding agency



## 5. Definition of Healing

- Under the Village Model “healing” is based on the total wellbeing of a person, family, families or community, (children, men, women).
- Healing is recovery from social illnesses which involves a process of identifying different social needs of a person, family, families and the community. It involves putting in place mechanism that will prevent any reoccurrences of the social illness.
- Healing is also the collective acceptance of change and breaking the mindsets of dependency. It must allow the community to build resistance through long-lasting practices The changes must happen from the group up.
- The solution to healing in the Torres Strait communities is about breaking the cycle of violence and cycle of welfare dependency. It is about encouraging individuals, family, families and communities to accepting the responsibilities for social healing and reform. The people themselves must be a part of the process in managing their social woes with sense of ownership of these responsibilities.