



Straight Talk

Unlimited power in a united community. Indigenous women's political participation program.

2023 Evaluation

Ripples of matriarchy

The front cover image is titled 'Ripples of Matriarchy'. In her artist's statement, Amys shares how this image tells the story of the Straight Talk program.



Artist's statement

When our matriarchs are empowered, supported, and respected by peers, educators, influencers, and leaders, they create positive and far-reaching ripples of impact in our communities and in our nation. In the spaces where women are given the opportunity to collaborate, dream, learn, share, and connect, strength, capacity, and confidence grows, building resilient leaders, advocates, and change-makers. There is unlimited power in a united community of matriarchs who inspire and encourage each other to create change within their spheres of influence, which ripples beyond what we can see and far into the future for generations to come.

Artist acknowledgement

Amy Allerton is the founder and Director of Indigico Creative and a contemporary Aboriginal artist. Descended from the Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung nations, she was born and raised on Gamilaroi country in Tamworth NSW, where she is based with her husband and two children.

Amy has been providing graphic design services Australia-wide since 2014, collaborating with businesses and partnering with communities to communicate the stories that bring us together creatively. Amy is driven by her personal and professional vision that every story is given value and a voice to revitalise communities, reconnect to culture and restore identities to build a stronger future.

A natural progression from designing visual communications in the corporate market, Amy applies her skills in digital illustration to deliver a modern approach to Aboriginal storytelling. Amy's artworks are an extension of her journey of exploring her cultural identity, using her unique ability to speak in colour and imagery to create visual representations of the journeys and values of organisations and communities.

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
Background	2
About Straight Talk	2
Research and policy context	2
Methods	3
Findings	4
The way forward	5
Introduction	6
The history of Straight Talk	6
What Straight Talk does	8
What Straight Talk wants to achieve	11
Straight Talk theory of change	12
Research and policy context	13
Research	13
Policy	15
Methods	16
Data collection	16
Analysis	16
Findings	18
Outcomes – what's changed?	18
Effectiveness	25
The way forward	29
Formal and structured alumni program	29
Consider a program for younger First Nations women	30
Create a program that establishes an International connection with other Indigenous groups	30
More time for relationship building and yarning during Summits	30
Oxfam should build a program for non-Indigenous allies	30
Straight Talk to be implemented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women	31
References	32



From my point of view, the Summit acknowledged and honoured and respected my professional being, my cultural being, and my feminine being. These three aspects were honoured and privileged. The design of the activities was, was incredibly inclusive. It's always good to bring women together, but you've got to bring us together for a purpose. And I think that was part of it: at the end, we knew that we would be presenting to a member of parliament from our neck of the woods about an issue that we felt passionate about and needed to be raised.

Executive summary

Background

This document describes the rationale, process, and findings of the 2023 evaluation of the Straight Talk program. This evaluation was commissioned by the First Peoples Program at Oxfam Australia, which oversees program implementation. The program wanted to investigate and document the long-term benefits of participation in the Straight Talk program.

About Straight Talk

Straight Talk intends to contribute to a connected network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women engaged as leaders and decision-makers. This leadership may take the form of political participation but is not limited to political involvement. Women may become leaders in their families, communities, and workplaces. Their leadership and decision-making may take place in grassroots, civil society, business, and political contexts.

Straight Talk began life as a National Summit in Canberra in 2009. In 2011, the program began implementing state-based Regional Summits. Straight Talk has implemented nine National Summits in Canberra and nine Regional Summits in Cairns, Perth, two in the Torres Strait Islands Alice Springs, Victoria, Nhulunbuy, the Kimberly, and Townsville. The National Summit brings Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to Canberra for five days to participate in workshops, travel to Parliament House, meet female parliamentarians', and meet 'trailblazers' – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have made outstanding contributions in their fields. Regional Summits provide a more localised focus and are more accessible for women who may find it difficult to travel extensive distances. The Summits ordinarily last 3-5 days.

A significant amount of work goes towards ensuring that women have a smooth experience of travelling to and attending the Summit. The team providing implementation support require: outstanding cross-cultural skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives and communities (the program coordination position is an identified role); the ability to provide culturally appropriate support for Straight Talk participants in the lead-up and during the Summit; ability to project manage and arrange logistics and travel arrangements; capacity to engage with government stakeholders at the very highest levels of Government; and the ability to promote the program in mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.

Research and policy context¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have sought strength in culture and Community and continue to forge innovative, complex, and cross-culturally intertwined models that promote expression, assert identity, and instil agency. Programs that promote leadership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often focus on the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in leadership roles. But this issue of low participation in leadership would benefit from nuance that makes distinct the following: the active choice of women to participate in leadership roles that are not formally recognised as

¹ Research uses terms Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interchangeably which is reflected in this summary.

leadership roles; and the lack of recognition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience when they engage in formally recognised leadership roles.

Research on Indigenous women's' leadership has identified how Indigenous women negotiate and shape leadership identities informed by their relationship to culture, Community, and mainstream society. This negotiation space is a powerful catalyst where Indigenous women emerge as autonomous leaders across diverse contexts. They engage in grassroots community work frontline social services, become cultural and Community leaders, and work within mainstream civil society and political structures. This diversity of representations of Indigenous women's leadership negates the convention of an Indigenous community that shares a collective vision for leadership and allows for the greater nuance of how women draw on culture and identity as catalysts of expression and agency.

Indigenous women experience a particular degree of difficulty in navigating mainstream political and government spaces, attributed to the intersectional nature of their experience, where they negotiate identities as Indigenous people and as women in spaces dominated by white men.^{2 3} In these contexts, connection to other Indigenous women working in similar contexts can strengthen connection to identity and commitment to leadership, change-making, and agency.^{4 5} Attempts to address inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have focused on assimilation into Western structures rather than seeking integration which would uphold the unique cultural perspectives and contributions of Indigenous communities.⁶ There is a need for an ongoing conversation and nuanced understanding regarding what constitutes active citizenship and political participation in Indigenous communities and how this intersects with identity, Community, and culture.

Straight Talk appears to have the greatest policy alignment with Wiyi Yanu U Thangani, overseen by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Straight Talk aligns with many of the thematic areas outlined in the framework. However, its most significant alignment is to Thematic area 1 - Leadership and decision-making for self-determination, which has two major priorities: Major Priority 1: First Nations women and girls are strong in identity and empowered leaders in both worlds; and Major Priority 2: First Nations women and girls are represented and responded to across all areas of decision-making.

Methods

Data collection took place over 2022-2023. The team gathered interviews, ran focus groups, and disseminated a survey. The team spoke to 21 people: 16 Straight Talk alums, three Straight Talk alums who have also been co-facilitators, and two Straight Talk staff. The evaluation survey received six responses. Five end-of-program National and Regional Summit surveys were also reviewed with 115 responses. To engage in collaborative analysis and judgement of the evaluation findings, a sense-making workshop was held online on 3 March 2023 with four participants who were Straight Talk alumni or former Straight Talk alumni/facilitators.

² Australian Indigenous Governance Institute 2021

³ Deshong 2012

⁴ Ryan 2018

⁵ AIGI 2021

⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission 2021

Findings

Outcomes

The power and joy of connecting with women at the Summit. Women reported the power and joy of being in the presence of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from all over their state or country.

Learning. Women reported learning about skills for lobbying and advocacy, intersectional feminism, and improved understanding of how the political system works.

Connecting with the political world. Visiting political institutions and meeting with parliamentarians demystifies politicians and how Government works. The idea of participating in Government and political processes becomes more accessible. Women reported feeling more motivated to participate in politics and observe political processes.

Connection as a source of strength. Women reported that the personal and professional connections made with other women at Straight Talk have become a source of strength and inspiration. Women have reported continuing to stay connected and reaching out to each other for support for various personal and professional reasons.

Voice and agency. Women reported that participating in Straight Talk helped them find their voice. This was attributed to: the value of being with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; finding collective strength in their identity as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women; the skills learned during the program; and their experiences connecting with leaders and demystifying the experience of being a leader.

Making change. Women have reported being involved in various leadership activities since their time with the Straight Talk program. Women reported that their connections at Straight Talk were a source of strength, contributed to robust identity, and contributed to their confidence to use their voice. Women reported being more outspoken and practical in their approaches, using their communication skills to advocate for their and others' voices to be heard. Women reported taking on leadership roles in organisations, sitting on organisational boards and participating in governance mechanisms. They reported engaging in advocacy work and capacity building for their communities and workplaces.

Effectiveness

Program support. Women in interviews reported feeling very well supported in the lead-up to and during the Summits. Survey satisfaction on pre-Summit support and logistics varies across the Summits but was primarily positive. The Straight Talk program coordinator is critical in ensuring that participants feel supported.

Structure and order of the week. Women commented that the structure of the week focused on building participants' confidence, supporting them to participate in activities, and ensuring they felt safe during the week. Women also commented on the creation of home groups that provided women with continuing during the week and a focal point who women could contact for support as needed.

Facilitation. The Summit has a lead facilitator who works with a group of co-facilitators and mentors. The feedback on the lead facilitator, Michelle Deshong, is consistently overwhelmingly positive. Women also spoke positively of the co-facilitators overseeing small group work and workshop sessions. They reported that co-facilitators were kind and empathetic.

Cultural safety. Women have consistently reported that Straight Talk is a culturally safe space. Women reported that ground rules to promote cultural safety were communicated to the group at the very beginning of the week. Facilitating a Welcome to Country at the beginning of the week was welcomed by women and ensured they felt safe during the week. Women also attributed the cultural safety of the Summit to the facilitation, the content, the purpose of the Summit, and the exclusive space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The way forward

16 recommendations for Straight Talk were identified in the evaluation data. Participants at the sense-making workshop that took place in May 2023 were asked to vote on the three they felt were most important.

Formal and structured alumni program. Women want opportunities to stay connected and engaged as change-makers, advocates, leaders, and political actors. The most frequently mentioned suggestion for a way forward centres of resourcing and strategies for supporting Straight Talk alumni to continue in formal engagement post-Summit. Straight Talk alums would like Straight Talk to create place-based customised programs for First Nations women in their workplaces. Other women have expressed the need for a toolkit with the tools they learned at the Summit to be accessible for them to share with other women in their communities.

Consider a program for younger First Nations women. Some women desired leadership and participation opportunities for younger First Nations women at the high school level. A program like this would align with the priorities of Wiyi Yanu U Thangani, which seeks to facilitate girls' access to mechanisms to fight for their rights and interests.

Create a program that establishes an international connection with other Indigenous groups. Women reported a desire to establish a program that supports Indigenous women across countries to share and learn. Mechanisms that could support programs like this include the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the International Indigenous Women's Forum. Building the capacity of Indigenous women to participate in advocacy within international fora could contribute to improved global responses for Indigenous women.

More time for relationship building and yarning during Summits. Whilst it was recognised that time constraints impact the time for yarning and relationships, it was reported by many women and across end-of-program survey data for a desire for more time for relationship building and yarning.

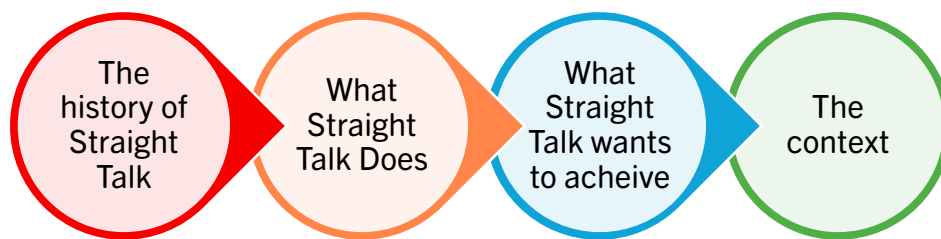
Oxfam should build a program for non-Indigenous allies. Women reported wanting to create culturally safe spaces for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to work together. This could include work on capacity building for non-Indigenous people to become influential allies, supporters, or people walking alongside in solidarity.

Straight Talk to be implemented by First Nations women. Oxfam is honouring its strategic intent to hand over the ownership of and management of Straight Talk to be led and implemented by First Nations women, and this has the broad support of the Straight Talk alumni.

Introduction

This document describes the rationale, process, and findings of the 2023 evaluation of the Straight Talk program. This evaluation was commissioned by the First Peoples Program at Oxfam Australia, which oversees program implementation. The program wanted to investigate and document the long-term benefits of participation in the Straight Talk program.

The introduction is presented in four sections:



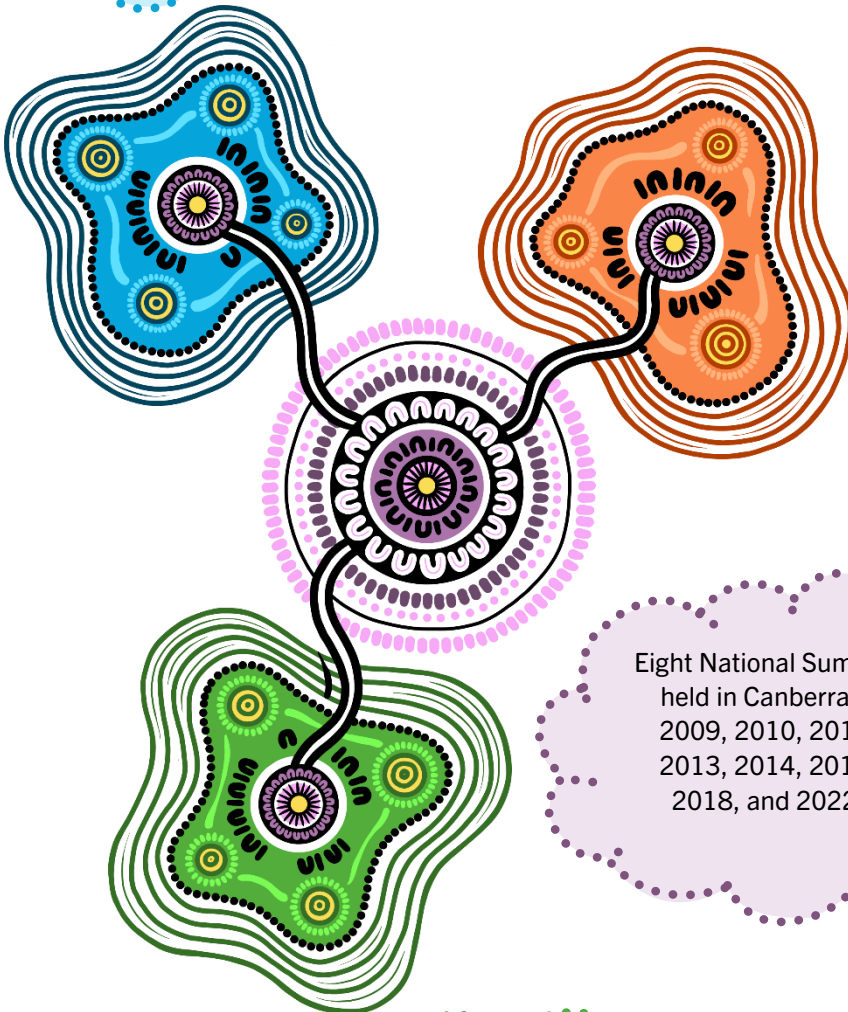
The history of Straight Talk

Straight Talk is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's political participation program. Jo Pride, then head of Policy and Advocacy and Oxfam Australia, conceived the idea for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's active citizenship program. The first Summit was held in 2009 and was led by multiple facilitators. Since 2011, Michelle Deshong has led the facilitation of Straight Talk events. Michelle is a proud Kuku Yulanji woman from northeast Australia. She has a BA Honours in Political Science and Indigenous Studies at James Cook University, where she is completing her PhD. In 2015, she was awarded NAIDOC Scholar of the Year. In 2016, she received the Australian/American Fulbright Indigenous Professional Scholarship to research First Nations Leadership and Governance, Nation Building and Self-Determination. In 2018, she received a Churchill Fellowship to continue researching Indigenous governance.

The inaugural Straight Talk National Summit was held in 2009 and the program has since delivered nine National Summits – the most recent in 2022. Post 2011- nine regional summits have been held in regional and remote areas around the nation. In 2015 Straight Talk in partnership with the Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) and Darebin City Council piloted a local council program in Melbourne.. An overview of key events and milestones in the life of Straight Talk are included on the next page.

Straight Talk timeline

Over 900
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander women
have participated.



The Trailblazers

2022

- Karen Diver
- Cherie Sibosado
- Donisha Duff

2018

- Karen Diver
- Cynthia Lui

2016

- Mera Penehira
- Nova Peris
- Elsie Seriat

2014

- Dr Jackie Huggins
- Joy Hollingsworth
- Deborah Cheetham

Eight National Summits
held in Canberra in
2009, 2010, 2011,
2013, 2014, 2016,
2018, and 2022.

Eight Regional Summits held in
Cairns and Torres Strait Islands in
2011, Perth in 2012, Alice Springs
and Melbourne in 2014, Nhulunbuy
in 2015, Broome (Kimberley) in
2017, and Townsville in 2018.

A pilot local government Summit was
hosted by Darebin City Council in
Melbourne in 2015.

What Straight Talk does

The Summit

The National Summit brings Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to Canberra for five days to participate in workshops, travel to Parliament House, meet female parliamentarians, and meet 'trailblazers' –Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have made outstanding contributions in their fields. Regional Summits provide a more localised focus and are more accessible for women who may find it difficult to travel extensive distances. The Summits ordinarily last 3-5 days.

Workshops

The Summit workshop spaces are designed exclusively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to provide a safe and culturally appropriate space to discuss issues and ideas.

Learning and skill development

At these workshops, women learn skills for systems thinking, change-making, vision-setting, Community organising, collaboration and networking, and using networks to influence change. They learn about the political and electoral systems and the history of democracy in Australia. Women engage in skill building during the week through participation in role plays, public speaking, and using tools and activities for community organising and change-making.

Facilitation

The Summit has a lead facilitator supported by a group of co-facilitators, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The lead facilitator sets the tone for the group in the early stages of facilitation by working with the group to identify what makes a space culturally safe and determining what kinds of behaviours make a space culturally unsafe. This provides women with the security that risks to cultural safety will be attended to as during the Summit.

Typically, the lead facilitator will convene large group discussions and lectures, and co-facilitators will convene smaller groups where women work on activities and tasks. Participants are allocated to a 'home group' for the week, and their co-facilitator is a focal point for support.

The lead and co-facilitators invest time in planning and assessing the facilitation of the Summit during implementation, regularly meeting to review group dynamics and identifying areas for group support. Early identification of issues and pivoting to provide support when needed contribute to the cultural safety of women in the room.

Visits and meetings

Outside of workshops, women will engage in visits to sites of significance and meet with people who are relevant in some way to the program. At the National Summit, the significant visit to Parliament House and the women meet female parliamentarians during the week.

The types of visits change from Summit to Summit. Participants will visit organisations or places of significance to the political system, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. They will have opportunities to meet

political leaders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have made significant achievements in their field, called 'Trailblazers'.

Program management

A significant amount of work goes towards ensuring that women have a smooth experience of travelling to and attending the Summit. The team providing implementation support require:

- Outstanding cross-cultural skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives and communities (The program coordination position is an identified role).
- The ability to provide culturally appropriate support for Straight Talk participants in the lead-up and during the Summit.
- The ability to project manage and arrange logistics and travel arrangements.
- capacity to engage with government stakeholders at the very highest levels of Government.
- Ability to promote the program in mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media,

Examples of the support the program team provides to ensure Straight Talk's success are listed below.

Support for Straight Talk participants	<p>The program focuses on reducing barriers to participation, and staff assist participants as needed. Type of support includes completing the application process, guidance, and material support for travelling (beyond costs of flights and accommodation), and assistance with preparing for the gathering.</p> <p>The program also supports participants during the Summit and with their travel home. Program staff and co-facilitators will liaise as support needs are identified. Program staff will rapidly and appropriately respond as required during the Summit week.</p>
Logistics	<p>The program team organise flights, venue, transport, accommodation, and catering for 30-80 participants at each Summit.</p>
Support to the facilitation team	<p>This includes support with procuring workshop materials, assistance with audio-visual equipment, and securing the workshop venue.</p>
Communications	<p>The program team develops a media and communications strategy and liaises with media during the Summit to get stories about the program into the media. The National Summit took place in August 2022. A media report between 23 February 2022 and 23 February 2023 found 201 mentions in media: 97 were online, 18 in newspapers and magazines, four on television, 49 on radio, 29 on social networks, and four blogs. The combined media over this period has a potential reach of 5.85 million.</p>
Government relations	<p>For National Summits, the program team liaises with the staff of parliamentarians to coordinate meetings between female parliamentarians and Straight Talk participants. The team also liaise</p>

	with Parliament House staff to organise a visit and tour of the building.
Connecting with local Community	Where possible, the team will engage with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to advise about the program. A suitable Elder is approached to organise a Welcome to Country.
Ongoing relationship building with organisations and leaders	The program team are, on an ongoing basis, building relationships with organisations that may be able to contribute to Straight Talk in some way. This may involve marketing the program so women apply, identifying leaders who can contribute to Straight Talk activities, identifying places for visits and identifying potential speakers.

What Straight Talk wants to achieve

Straight Talk intends to contribute to a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women engaged as community leaders and decision-makers. This leadership may take the form of political participation but is not limited to political participation. Women may become leaders in their workplaces, leaders and community organisers in their communities and engage in advocacy and change-making from grassroots to civil society and political contexts.

The Summits provide opportunities for women to be in a space with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with similar interests, where they can share and learn with each other.

At the Summit, women learn skills in community organising, change-making, networking and collaboration, gender, equity, equality, and intersectionality from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. They apply their cultural knowledge and practice to what they learn. Women also learn about the structures and systems of mainstream political systems, the electoral system, and the history of democracy in Australia. The Summits provide opportunities for women to meet with mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and establish networks and connections.

Finally, at the National Summit, the program hopes to raise awareness and understanding of parliamentarians on the issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their communities.

The diagram over the page provides a summarised view of Straight Talk's theory of change.

Straight Talk theory of change

Indigenous women are leaders and decision-makers in their communities.

Establish connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and political representatives and other leaders.

Provide Indigenous perspectives on changemaking, gender, equity, equality, and intersectionality.

Connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women who share and learn from each other.

Build a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who exchange knowledge, resources, and support.

Strengthen women's knowledge and the structure and function of the electoral and political system and history of democracy in Australia.

Strengthen skills in community organising, changemaking, networking, and collaboration.

Research and policy context

Research⁷

Black women make the best leaders ... [Black women exhibit] three particular traits that I think are extremely important in leadership. Passion ... We are passionate about our culture, about our communities, about our families. And we are passionate about passing on knowledge to the next generation ... This passion has led to work not only individually, but for the greater good... The second is resilience. The strongest people in the world are not the ones who are most protected. They are the ones who have had to face struggles, adversity, and obstacles, surmount them, and survive. Aboriginal women have displayed a perseverance and resilience that has taken us through decades of change. We have achieved great things ...And finally, courage: the mental and moral strength to face difficulty, fear, and adversity, and to become better for it ...To me, these are the things that drive a better community.

Michelle Deshong⁸

Traditional discourses on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women routinely commence with a description of the problems and deficits this group experiences. Despite centuries of malicious and relentless colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have sought strength in culture and Community and continue to forge complex and cross-culturally intertwined paradigms that promote expression, assert identity, and instil agency.

Programs that promote leadership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women focus on the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in leadership roles. But this issue of low participation in leadership would benefit from nuance that makes distinct the following:

- The active choice of women to participate in leadership roles that are not formally recognised as leadership roles.
- The lack of recognition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience when they do engage in formally recognised leadership roles.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's roles as leaders in their communities often goes unrecognised. This lack of recognition occurs at micro, meso, and macro levels and is aligned with historical and current representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women through frames of disadvantage.^{9 10 11} These discourses do not always seek to improve women's lives but are often used to consolidate discourses that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as inherently deficient.

Despite ongoing attempts in mainstream discourse to marginalise Indigenous women's identities, research on Indigenous women's leadership has identified how Indigenous women continue to shape identities informed by their relationship to culture, Community, and mainstream society. Tess Ryan's thesis '*Deadly Women: An Analysis of Indigenous*

⁷ The change in language between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous in this section reflects the change in the use of these terms across the literature.

⁸ Deshong 2015

⁹ Ryan 2016

¹⁰ Ryan 2018

¹¹ Dudgeon and Bray 2016

*Leadership in Australia*¹² discusses how Indigenous women often find this negotiation of cultural identity a powerful catalyst towards achieving agency, autonomy, and participation in leadership. From this negotiation with identity, Indigenous women emerge as autonomous leaders across contexts as diverse as leadership in grassroots Community, working in frontline services, leadership in Community and cultural life, or engaging in Western structures as policymakers and participants in Government systems and through direct participation in political processes.

This diversity of representations of Indigenous women's leadership negates the convention of an Indigenous community that shares a collective vision for leadership and allows for the greater nuance of how women draw on culture and identity as catalysts of expression and agency.

Women who take part in mainstream political structures are asked to participate in cultures and processes that may not nurture autonomy and agency or strengthen their commitment to leadership. Men have historically dominated these structures and continue to engage in discriminatory practices.¹³

Indigenous women experience a particular degree of difficulty in navigating mainstream political and government spaces. This has been attributed to the intersectional nature of their experience, where they must negotiate an identity as an Indigenous person and as a woman in white male (and white female) dominated spaces.^{14 15}

In these contexts, connection to other Indigenous women working in similar contexts can strengthen connection to identity and commitment to leadership, change-making, and agency.^{16 17}

Ryan's research describes Indigenous women attributing their growing leadership aspirations to observing the aspirations of other Indigenous women. This aspiration increases as women are acknowledged and recognised in greater positions of influence.¹⁸ In this context, the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as leaders in their communities and public life is an injustice. It confounds the aspirations of other Indigenous women.¹⁹

Attempts to address inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have focused on assimilation into Western structures rather than focusing on integration which values the unique cultural perspectives and contributions of Indigenous communities.²⁰ Research into the attitudes of Indigenous people towards mainstream political processes highlights the necessity for broader definitions regarding what political engagement and participation in active citizenship and democracy entail.²¹ There is a need for a nuanced understanding of what constitutes active citizenship and political participation in Indigenous communities and how this intersects with identity, Community, and culture.

¹² Ryan 2018

¹³ Deshong 2012

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Australian Indigenous Governance Institute 2021

¹⁶ Ryan 2018

¹⁷ AIGI 2021

¹⁸ Ryan 2016

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission 2021

²¹ Walsh et al 2018

Policy

Straight Talk appears to have the greatest policy alignment with Wiyi Yanu U Thangani, overseen by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Wiyi Yanu U Thangani

Wiyi Yanu U Thangani is a partnership between the Australian Human Rights Commission and the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The purpose of the framework is to elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls. The Implementation Framework was developed to inform the leadership summit to be held in 2023 and will form the basis of a gender-responsive systems practice approach.

Straight Talk aligns with many of the thematic areas outlined in the framework, however its most significant alignment is to Thematic area 1 0 Leadership and decision-making for self-determination, which has two major priorities:

- Major Priority 1: First Nations women and girls are strong in identity and empowered leaders in both worlds.
 - Actions include collective leadership from the start of life and reinvigoration of cultural governance, and investment in place-based leadership.
- Major Priority 2: First Nations women and girls are represented and responded to across all areas of decision-making.
 - Actions include building mainstream readiness to become First Nations gender responsive and ensuring women and girls have access to mechanisms to fight for their rights and interests.

Methods

This section describes the data collection activities and information sources used to generate evaluation findings.

Data collection

Interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

Data collection took place over 2022-2023. Carla McGrath and Lauren Siegmann conducted interviews and focus groups. The First Peoples program at Oxfam Australia disseminated a survey. The team spoke to 21 people: 16 Straight Talk alums, three Straight Talk alums who have also been co-facilitators, and two Straight Talk staff. The evaluation survey received six responses.

The following interviews and focus groups took place:

- Three focus groups were facilitated in July 2023 with six participants. (One of the participants was also a co-facilitator)
- Ten individual interviews with Straight Talk alumni
- Three individual interviews with Straight Talk alums and former co-facilitators.
- Interview with two Straight Talk program staff

Review of end-of-program surveys

The following end-of-program survey data was included in the evaluation data.

Year	Program	Responses
2017	Kimberley Regional Summit	23
2019	Townsville Regional Summit	5
2018	National Summit	40
2018	National Summit – Facilitator Survey	4
2022	National Summit	43

Desktop review

A desktop review to examine academic and programmatic knowledge on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's political participation was undertaken. This review aimed to understand the context informing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's political engagement and use this information to explore the position of Straight Talk in the program environment and the extent to which the program aligns with priorities recognised in policy and research.

Analysis

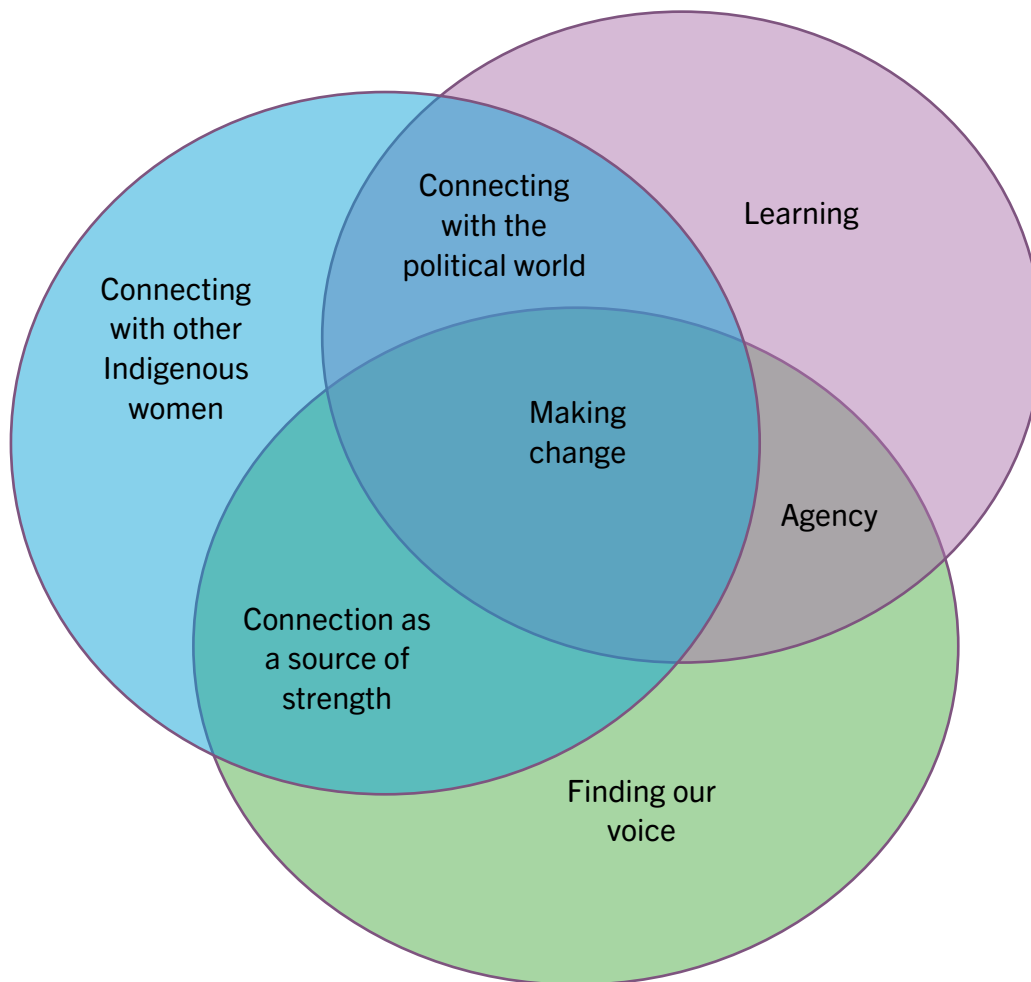
To engage in collaborative analysis and judgement of the evaluation findings, a sense-making workshop was held online on 3 March 2023 and was facilitated by Carla McGrath with four participants who were Straight Talk alumni or former Straight Talk alumni/facilitators.

Women reviewed small vignettes drawn from the evaluation interviews and chose a vignette that stood out to them as a particularly significant example of impact. The facilitators then

documented this discussion to highlight the participant's interpretation of the most significant changes experienced by women who have attended the Straight Talk program.

The key themes from the workshop are outlined in the Venn diagram below and inform how outcomes findings are structured in this report. Women were also asked to provide feedback and prioritise new directions for the Straight Talk program and their work is included in the 'future directions' section.

The report was developed by Lauren Siegmans of String Theory with the support of the First Peoples Program at Oxfam Australia.

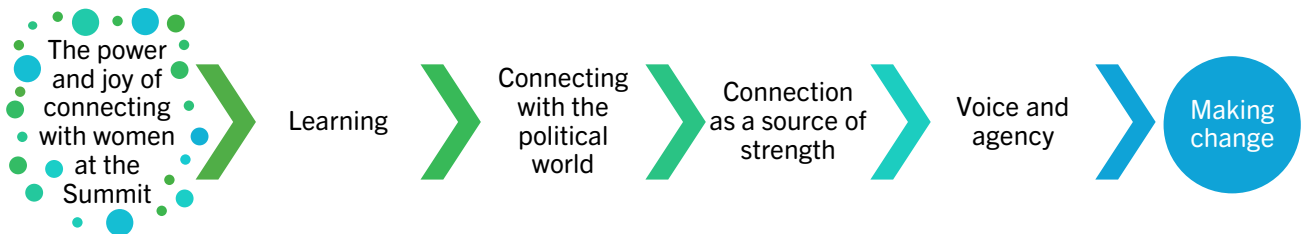


Findings

The findings are presented in two sections: outcomes, effectiveness,



Outcomes – what's changed?



The power and joy of connecting with women at the Summit.

Women reported the power and joy of being in the presence of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from all over their state or country. Women enjoyed the unique opportunity to be surrounded by women with similar experiences of and understandings of identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, relationship to culture and Community, and identity within mainstream society. They valued opportunities to learn more about the lives of Aboriginal women from other communities. They also appreciated opportunities to better understand the similarities and diversities of women's experiences.

Sometimes you feel isolated and alone and deal with these things. And then there is this forum where you feel the sisterhood coming together and connecting and relating. Hearing from different women and what they've done in their Community and learning from each other.

It was an eye-opener for me to meet all different types of women from different regions, hear their experiences, and think, 'Wait a minute, that's sort of similar to what's happening with us.' Learning that we are dealing with similar situations and scenarios. I really enjoyed that, coming together and sharing.

Learning

Women reported learning about skills for lobbying and advocacy, including tools for building approaches and strategies, speaking confidently, building an evidence base to back up your points, and learning how to communicate and get your point across.

I've never been one not to open my mouth, but I've learned that there's a time and a place. Then it's about looking at it in different ways and maybe planting that seed for them to be able to look at it in another way.

It was an eye-opening experience that helped me hone many of my skills to be more outspoken and more practical around my approaches professionally. It also helped me to identify and be more accessible to women in the Community, and I was able to use the skills that I gathered to ensure that their voices were being heard.

Lobbying isn't about making noise. Be prepared, have statistics, have case studies. Be so prepared that polities won't have a choice. If you get denied, come back stronger.

Women also reported benefiting from learning about intersectional feminism. Some women had reported not considering that feminism was a topic that privileged white and middle-class voices. They could make sense of why they had not felt that feminist discourse included them. After learning about intersectional feminism, they were able to learn more and use this framework to make sense of their experiences as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman.

I already understood elements of feminism, but Straight Talk really put it all together for me. And I went back to my job and became a really staunch advocate; I just started to see the tokenism. I was the only Aboriginal woman in the organisation, on the lowest pay, and had huge responsibilities. I guess I was growing as a person.

Women reported learning more about the political system and an improved understanding of how the political system works. Women learned about the functions of political parties, government levels, and government machinery. Women reported learning how to engage with politicians and how to communicate effectively.

Women also reported benefiting from participation in practical activities such as providing written submissions and performing role-play at the mock debate.

Connecting with the political world

Visiting political institutions and meeting with parliamentarians demystifies politicians, how Government works, and makes the idea of participating in Government accessible.

You know how when you see on TV, you see them all shouting at each other in bloody the House of Representatives, or the Senate or whatever – I had no idea which one was which. Now I understand that between those sittings, those Senators particularly do a lot of work on committees. There's a lot of work that goes on that made me think, " Oh, ok, they do a lot of work.

The whole part of the Straight Talk program around being able to go and talk to female politicians, having the mock Senate inquiry, just even going into the House of Representatives during the peak hours. It demystifies things for people. And that's important, especially when you never thought you would have that opportunity ever.

Women also reported feeling more motivated to participate in politics and observe political processes.

I walked away from Straight Talk with a renewed sense of the importance and the responsibility of voting and paying attention to what candidates are saying what they're gonna do.

Women reported that meeting politicians demystified what a politician was, with women reporting that politicians were now perceived to be more accessible. They were able to relate to politicians as human beings.

We got an opportunity to go into places that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to do because. Because Sue Lines gets this amazing office behind the Senate. And we could all walk into the Senate, and she took us all into her office. At one point, I looked around and there was about 20 Torres Strait Islander women looking in her drawers and she was so welcoming and open. It was hilarious because she'd only been in the office for about three weeks because the Government had just changed.

I think it was just the opportunity to talk to women like Dorinda Cox, and women who you kind of put up on a bit of a pedestal and you think you're nothing like them. But they were just so normal and so down to earth. It was really refreshing.

Some women valued the opportunity to meet politicians to advocate for causes they are passionate about.

The greatest thing I remember was the morning we all got allocated a minister to talk to. The women I spoke with was very senior and very different from me politically. When I went in to meet with her, I was really nervous. I rang someone and asked, 'How will I speak to this woman and approach her?' And that person said to me 'don't forget, you've got something really great in common, you're both mothers'. When I walked into the room, I sat down, and we had a cup of tea, and I mentioned her children. And she relaxed, I saw her whole body relax. And then of course, I then went straight for the jugular, and started talking about the policies she was pushing and their impact on people with disability and talking as a mother of a child with a

disability. At the end she just said 'well, let us choose to say that we have different opinions.' I would not have done it if I didn't realise that we were both mothers. All women can be great leaders, because if they can lead a household, prepare a family meal, and support their children to grow strong, they can be the greatest voices for a whole community. It gave me confidence in my own ability to speak. Before that point, I thought politicians were in a whole basket of their own. But then I realised it was just another mother. It was valuing my own contribution as an individual that took me to a different space.

Connection as a source of strength

Women reported that the personal and professional connections made with other women at Straight Talk have become a source of strength and inspiration. Women have reported continuing to stay connected and reaching out to each other for support for various personal and professional reasons.

As women, it's an opportunity for us to grow stronger as a collective and continue supporting each other to build each other up. You might be having a yarn to someone and say 'I know, this woman up in Broome, or I know this woman over in Queensland why don't you get in contact? There's so much when you can get from each other. Everyone becomes friends on Facebook, and people are posting regularly, there is that ongoing friendship and support.

When I think about the program, I think about those young ones who didn't feel competent but helping them find their voice and then at the end of the program seeing them speaking up and grow. There is the power of just being in the presence of other women that you can't even articulate. Just being in the power or presence of that cohort, not only for young women but all women.

Growing up in a quiet regional area, it was always difficult for me to find people that thought on that same level as me, like in that big picture. The support that the network of Straight Talk brings about is, is really great, because the skills and the knowledge that you learned through the program, you can take that back to your Community, but the friendships that are formed...I've got some really close friends of mine from that National Summit, and I rely on them and lean on them and get support and solutions.

I was working on a project on a national level, and I started in New South Wales and then went to Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. In Western Australia I contacted people from Straight Talk and asked, 'can I come catch up with you'. One Straight Talker invited me into a service where she worked. I was able to share information and resources at her workplace. I was doing workshops all over New South Wales, and Victoria and I would always be able to contact someone and come and visit workplaces. I mean, if I walked into different communities, no one will talk to me, but when I know someone that's local, it's just a better outcome. I was having

conversations with Straight Talk women over the phone, and they were able to orchestrate bringing key stakeholders together for me to sit down and have conversations. It made my job easier because I didn't have to spend lots of time speaking to bureaucrats and getting connected to people. I'm ever thankful that I was part of the Straight Talk program.

Finding voice and agency

Voice is the processes of working out what you want to say. Agency is the capacity to express yourself and be heard.

Women reported that participating in Straight Talk helped them find their voice. This was attributed to the benefits of being with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, finding strength in their identity as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, the skills learned during the program, and their experiences connecting with leaders and demystifying the experience of being a leader.

Women also enjoyed using their voice to make decisions about their pathways, determining their journey, and feeling supported to do that. Women talked about feeling free to decide how they engage with systems as advocates.

I think what it also talked about was that we all have a role. Like some of us might be heading down that pathway of becoming a senator, but others do the work behind the scenes. Some people obviously going to be more comfortable in certain places. I think that really reinforced that we're all valued. We're all worthwhile. We've all got something to offer. We might not necessarily want to stand up the front of the room. But there are other things that we can we're doing. And often, it's the one so you don't see standing up at the front of the room who are doing the really the hard yards in Community for mob.

One woman described using her voice and agency in her workplace not long after her time at Straight Talk because of the strength she had gained during her week:

I think one situation at work was kind of the final straw for me. I had been invited to participate as an Aboriginal leader in the sector to contribute to a workshop around criminal justice. And all my fellow First Nations, women, and men and whoever are involved in criminal justice. Rather than my office finding a non-Aboriginal worker to be the scribe, I was asked to be the scribe, but I was also participating, and it was an important topic, and I brought a lot to the discussion. But one of my white colleagues from my office was sick. I got the Director to text my manager to tell them I was not scribing. I then got a text message from my white manager telling me off but not being willing to speak to me face-to-face. It was then that I thought that my value of me wasn't about what I could contribute to or my expertise. The feminists in my office did not value my role as a black woman at an important meeting. I see many white feminists talk about allyship and being allies. However, why is it that I can't tell that person that they are not viewed as allies? Straight Talk helped me see that I am a black woman first, allowing me to hone in on and pay attention to those

microaggressions. It's all about strength, and that's knowing that even though those Straight Talk women were no longer around me physically, we shared a collective power. It gave me a different view of my value in the workplace. And I knew I was not going to tolerate it.

Making change

Women have reported being involved in various leadership activities since their time with the Straight Talk program. Women reported that their connections at Straight Talk were a source of strength, contributed to a robust identity, and improved their confidence to use their voice. Women reported being more outspoken and practical in their approaches, using their communication skills to advocate for their and others' voices to be heard. Women reported taking on leadership roles in organisations, sitting on organisational boards and participating in governance mechanisms. They reported engaging in advocacy work and capacity building for their communities and workplaces.

I do advocacy work in my Community and that is my passion. I am working in child protection, getting up in court, and serving as a social worker for Aboriginal women.

I'm the local women's organisation chair and have been sitting there for over ten years. What I was able to do, because of the skill set and the confidence from Straight Talk, was then lobby the federal government and the Governor at the time and have her come to our Community. Because we have so many women murdered and missing in our Community. I wanted then to come and sit with the families that have been severely impacted by the loss of their mothers, of their sisters. That was really great. That came down to the language I was using and knowing how to get attention for them to come to the Community and sit with the women. I really think, you know, I would have just continued and continued until someone came to the Community. But I think knowing how to approach people made that sort of progress quicker than it would if I was just annoying the shit out of them. So, from that aspect, I think that was really important. And I really hold on to that because it was definitely a big learning curve.

A small number of women expressed a desire to enter politics:

I don't want to just run – I need to build a reputation. We heard from a woman about the cost of being in politics. It helped me understand the system a bit more. I've been thinking about running for a while. I need to build a reputation in Community. I have a lot to do with my mob, and I am doing capacity building, going out to the Aboriginal Corp and training. I am building reputation with my mob. If I have them on my side then other people will follow.

I remember thinking finally there is something there for us black women in these spaces that are leading those grassroots projects and campaigns and all of that. Black women all wear so many different hats within our Community, regardless of

whether we are in a professional space or not. That's just who we are as black women. So, I think politics is definitely the next step for me. I think I've always felt that politics would always be my space. But I wasn't sure of what it looked like. But now I am more aware that yep, this is the next step...and these are my pathways sort of forward.

Effectiveness



Program support

Women in interviews reported feeling very well supported in the lead-up to and during the Summits. Survey satisfaction on pre-Summit support and logistics varies across the Summits but was primarily positive.

The Straight Talk program coordinator is critical in ensuring that participants feel supported. Their work is essential in ensuring women arrive at the Summit ready to participate and with few distractions. The program coordination role is and should be an identified position. At the most recent National Summit in 2022, a non-Indigenous woman, Rebecca Harnett, filled the role, and she has had experience in coordinating a number of national and regional summits. Women have consistently spoken very positively of Rebecca and her efforts to support women in the Summit's lead-up. They reported that she was efficient and effective in providing information and was warm and responsive. Whilst this evaluation maintains that the program coordinator role should be an identified role, the quote from a woman below highlights what is required of the person in the coordination position.

The pre-program support was super organised, even down to the thinking that I was living in remote WA, and a flight now flies from my town to Melbourne. We usually all have to drive to Perth. But Bec (Rebecca) flew me from Busselton to Melbourne and I stayed in Melbourne, and then I went to Canberra from there. And that was such a small thing, but it was really cool. I didn't have to think about the extra five hours of travel. Bec is just a machine. I don't know how she already does it. She is so thoughtful. And I think she did that for a lot of people. I get it [that it needs to be Indigenous women doing this work], but when they replace her, they need someone like her who has many networks, knows many people, and is so good at the relationship stuff. I think that is one of the reasons why it is so organised and successful, in addition to the amazing facilitators involved.

Women who had participated in previous summits had communicated a wish for a pre-Zoom meeting so that women could connect with others before the workshops. The 2022 National Summit also hosted a pre-Zoom catch-up for women to meet online, which some of the women appreciated.

Structure and order of the week

Women spoke positively regarding the structure of the week and the creation of home groups which provide women a place with a small group of participants and a co-facilitator.

Women commented on the order and progression of learning during the Summit week.

Women commented that the week's structure focused on building participants' confidence, supporting them to participate in activities, and ensuring they felt safe during the week. The learning in the Summit is scaffolded. Participants are led on a pathway and challenged but never put in a position where they feel unable to participate in what is being asked of them.

Women also commented on the creation of home groups that provided women with continuing during the week and a focal point who women could contact for support as needed. Some women reported experiencing lifelong bonds with their home groups, and others said how home group members would support each other.

We had a great range. I love that we had elders and really young bubs as well. One of our youngest bubs, I think she was on a journey. She was extremely distraught at times because it was just so overwhelmingly positive for her. So, I don't know whether they deliberately grouped such diverse people and women together or whether it was just luck. But we had just a beautiful range of people that we could wrap around for the little one, who we called our bub, and then we had elders, which was lovely.

Once we found our home group, we were almost inseparable. And I remember the sheer grief at the end. Like we were just in tears because it was such a beautiful week, we've learned and grown and shared so much that we just shared immense grief of having over being over and having to go back to our state then and be really far away from one another.

Facilitation

The Summits have a lead facilitator who works with a group of co-facilitators and mentors.

The feedback on the lead facilitator, Michelle Deshong, is consistently overwhelmingly positive. Women reported that she is a powerful, inviting, and welcoming facilitator. This feedback is consistent across interviews and end-of-program surveys.

She's funny. she's quite clever as well. So, you have that humour, that black female humour. But then she could also stand on her professional experience and knowledge.

Lead facilitator was great at navigating different personalities and opinions. The no tolerance for lateral violence and identity discussions upfront set a good scene for a safe space.

Women also spoke positively of the co-facilitators overseeing small group work and workshop sessions. They reported that co-facilitators were kind and empathetic.

Co-facilitators worked well to make everyone welcome. They shared their knowledge and skills and support freely. I saw them giving really good support and feedback and encouragement. They were very responsive, kind, solid and powerful.

The challenges inherent in facilitating a group of 50 people were mentioned. Many people commented on the presence of participants who came into workshops with strong opinions and a tendency to dominate the discussion. It was noted that the lead facilitator often managed these situations well. Some participants reported that the co-facilitators did at times, experience challenges in managing dynamics within small groups when dominant voices were at play. But mostly it was reported that the staff were able to respond to issues sympathetically and discreetly.

I can think of the difficult people. They just weren't conscious of their social space. They would get spoken to, and then we would put in strategies as co-facilitators to mitigate any issues.

Some women definitely take the floor and don't allow everyone to have a say. Some are much louder and more outspoken, which deters other women from speaking up.

The consensus across the evaluation data was that the lead and co-facilitators do an outstanding job of creating a warm and safe space for women across the life of the Summit.

I think this like a standout thing was I remember the last closing circle that we did and how it was so powerful. The emotion in that room and all the robust conversations in that space you never have anywhere else. We didn't always agree with each other, and there were women with strong opinions, but there was no fighting. Everyone had different perspectives, and there was space to hold all those perspectives. It was incredible.

Cultural safety

Through interviews and end-of-program surveys, women have consistently reported that Straight Talk is a culturally safe space. Women reported that ground rules to promote cultural safety were communicated to the group at the very beginning of the week.

Michelle ran a tight ship. She's got really high expectations about how people should behave and what's okay and what's not. One of the first things I remember her saying is that we are not the identity police. They laid the ground rules so everyone knew what to expect.

Facilitating a Welcome to Country at the beginning of the week was welcomed by women and ensured they felt safe during the week.

Women also attributed the cultural safety of the Summit to the facilitation, content, purpose, and exclusive space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

From my point of view, the Summit acknowledged and honoured and respected my professional being, my cultural being, and my feminine being. These three aspects were honoured and privileged. The design of the activities was, was incredibly inclusive. It's always good to bring women together, but you've got to bring us together for a purpose. And I think that was part of it: at the end, we knew that we would be presenting to a member of parliament from our neck of the woods about an issue that we felt passionate about and needed to be raised with them.

The way forward

16 recommendations for Straight Talk were identified in the evaluation data. Participants at the sense-making workshop in May 2023 were asked to vote on the three they felt were most important.

The voting results were:

Hold alum reunions and facilitate connections after the program	4 votes
Consider running a program for younger First Nations women	3 votes
Create a program that establishes an international connection with other Indigenous groups	3 votes
More time for relationships and yarning during Summits	2 votes
Oxfam should run a program for building up non-Indigenous allies	1 vote
Oxfam should honour its commitment to handing over the program to be led by First Nations women	1 vote

Formal and structured alumni program

Women want opportunities to stay connected and engaged as change-makers, advocates, leaders, and political actors. The most frequently mentioned suggestion for a way forward centres of resourcing and strategies for supporting Straight Talk alumni to continue in some type of formal engagement post-Summit. Many women have expressed interest in some resourced and supported alum programs. Ideas for activities included online video catchups, five-year Summit reunions, ongoing support for skill development, workshops and training sessions, and resources for alums that they can use in their leadership roles.

The incumbent Program Coordinator reported that they had had numerous discussions with Straight Talk alums who would like Straight Talk to create place-based customised programs for First Nations women in their workplaces. One woman said that these skills are critical to women in leadership positions being able to advocate their programs through the political system further, and she would like to see an organisational approach to empowering women by learning and sharing tools and skills.

Other women have expressed the need for a toolkit with the tools they learned at the Summit to be accessible for them to share with other women in their communities.

There are a lot of white women's spaces with big professional networking opportunities. Like Emily's list, philanthropy has opportunities to support women's leadership. But when they think about black women, they think about mentors and dealing with our problems instead of asking us what we want to do. I think there is an opportunity for Straight Talk alum to come together once every five years.

Most professional development that I go on isn't built for Blak women and doesn't provide the level of pastoral care or support we can find in each other. It's such a unique space, the kind of networking that you do. There's lots of crossover within workspaces and that sort of stuff. [...] When you're looking for people to collaborate with, you have this reflexive like: 'These types of women do these things' so you can reach out. 'Hey, what are you doing now? Can you help with this?'

Consider a program for younger First Nations women

Some women desired leadership and participation for younger First Nations women at the high school level. The focus should be not on young girls who are already excelling but on providing opportunities for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to connect with and be inspired by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. A program like this would align with the priorities of Wiyi Yanu U Thangani, which seeks to facilitate girls' access to mechanisms to fight for their rights and interests.

Create a program that establishes an International connection with other Indigenous groups

Women reported a desire to establish a program that supports Indigenous women across countries to share and learn. Mechanisms that could support programs like this include the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the International Indigenous Women's Forum. Building the capacity of Indigenous women to participate in advocacy within international fora could contribute to improved global responses for Indigenous women.

More time for relationship building and yarning during Summits

Whilst it was recognised that time constraints impact the time for yarning and relationships, which were noted by some participants as cultural ways of working. It was reported by many women and across end-of-program survey data for a desire for more time for relationship building and yarning. The Summit workshop schedule is full; some women wish for more time to connect with others.

Oxfam should build a program for non-Indigenous allies

Women reported wanting to create culturally safe spaces for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to work together. This could include work on capacity building for non-Indigenous people to become influential allies, supporters, or people walking alongside in solidarity.

How do we facilitate and networking or have some face-to-face or online whatever it is where we can, you know, bring those allies, or help shape allies for us because there's a power, you know, we can't just do it by ourselves we need to have allies.

Straight Talk to be implemented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Oxfam has communicated a strategic intent to hand over the ownership of and management of Straight Talk to be led and implemented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and this has the broad support of Straight Talk alumni.

References

- Australian Human Rights Commission (2020) *Wiyi Yani U Thangani. Women's Voices. Securing Our Rights. Securing Our Future.*
- Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (2021) *Women in Governance. Factsheet 3.* Retrieved from: <https://indigenousgovernance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IGP-Factsheet-3-Women-in-Governance.pdf>
- Deshong, M (2012) *Our Seat at the Top: Institutional Challenges to Inclusion for Aboriginal Women in Federal Parliament.* Indigenous Law Bulletin. Volume 8, Issue1, pp3-6.
- Deshong, M (2015). *Black Women: Tipping the Balance.* Ted x JCU Cairns
- Dugeon and Ray (2016) *Women's and Feminist Activism in Aboriginal Australia and Torres Strait Islands.* The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies. John Wiley and Sons.
- Ryan (2016), *Seen but unseen: Missing visible Indigenous women in the media and what it means for leadership in Indigenous Australia.* Platform: Journal of Media and Communications. Vol. 7 ANZCA Special Issue 26-34
- Ryan (2018), *Deadly Women: An Analysis of Indigenous Women's Leadership in Australia.* Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Canberra.
- Walsh et al (2018), *Engaged but Ambivalent: A Study of Young Indigenous Australians and Democratic Citizenship.* The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education. Vol 28, No 2, pp193-205