

# TWO WAY BENEFIT

A win for community  
and service delivery in the  
Torres Strait Islands



**The Mura Kosker & The Benevolent Society**  
PARTNERSHIP



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**We acknowledge the  
Traditional Owners and  
Tribal Clans of the  
Torres Strait Islands  
and pay our respects  
to Elders, past,  
present and future.**

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# Seu Napa Maitem

(Mabuyag Western Island dialect)

(Meriam Mer Eastern Island dialect)

Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. has been working to support and champion Torres Strait Islander women and children for over 30 years.

In January 2019, the Mura Buai Family Wellbeing Service began delivering services across the Torres Strait Islands. The establishment of Mura Buai was made possible through the policy reform of the Queensland Government, a partnership with The Benevolent Society and strong, committed leadership from Mura Kosker.

The Queensland Government’s ‘Our Way, A Generational Strategy’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children 2017-2027, was modelled on the Family Matters Building Blocks and mapped a path for transformational change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and concrete action to build the community controlled sector, in a public and principled way.

Under ‘Our Way’, \$16 million (2017-21) was committed for 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing programs to be delivered by community controlled organisations, in a co-design process between the Queensland Government and Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICCP). For the first time, the functions of the existing family support programs were combined into one community-run family wellbeing service. When the tenders went out in 2017, the opportunity was there for a Torres Strait organisation to put its hand up to deliver this new model across the islands.

Mura Kosker recognised the potential of the wellbeing service model. Whilst the tender requirements were flexible, Mura understood early that they would need a mainstream partner to assist the tender process and provide specialist services in the new model.

Negotiations on a partnership arrangement with The Benevolent Society were begun despite considerable community resistance to what many saw as the undermining of Torres Strait Islander’s self determination. Mura Kosker managed the community backlash with strength and transparency and a formal partnership with The Benevolent Society was agreed in October 2017.

The partnership was a key factor in the success of the tender for the wellbeing services. Under the agreement, Mura Kosker had responsibility for funding, management and staffing, with The Benevolent Society delivering specialist support and capacity building to the Mura Buai team.

The partnership between Mura Kosker and The Benevolent Society provides a model for other organisations seeking to grow and support the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector. In 2019, the Mura Buai team has 9 full-time employees including caseworkers, intake and referral officers and managers and includes three Benevolent Society service specialists. Mura Buai delivers services to 14 islands within five clusters throughout the Torres Strait.

In this report, the leading players tell the story and highlight the key decisions, innovations and actions taken by each party to make the partnership a reality.

Adhapadhay Eso! (Western Is dialect)  
Au Esoau! (Eastern Is dialect)

Thank you very much!

## Key Actions and Innovations

What the Government did	What Mura Kosker did	What The Benevolent Society did
<p>Adopted the four Building Blocks of the Family Matter’s Roadmap and legislated for self-determination.</p> <p>Held an industry briefing to better inform applicants of tender requirements.</p> <p>Recognised the authority and expertise of QATSICCP to design the wellbeing programs and tender.</p> <p>Undertook genuine co-design of the family wellbeing program with community controlled organisations.</p>	<p>Showed strong leadership in partnership negotiations to ensure Torres Strait self-determination.</p> <p>Led community consultations and managed community disputes.</p> <p>Delivered strong governance in the face of community pressure.</p> <p>Sought to grow the capacity of the organisation through a two way partnership and mutual benefit.</p>	<p>Completed the SNAICC partnership training and contracted a cultural broker to guide engagement.</p> <p>Negotiations were led by staff who were culturally capable and consistent in undertakings and decisions.</p> <p>Utilised cross agency government funding to enable engagement and the building of relationships.</p> <p>Made a financial commitment to service delivery in the Torres Strait islands.</p>



# The Leading Players



**Regina Turner**  
President  
Mura Kosker



**Robbie Corrie**  
Director  
Side by Side Consulting



**Leith Sterling**  
Director  
The Benevolent Society



**Karina Enks**  
Manager  
The Benevolent Society



**David Yorkston**  
Program Manager  
Mura Buai



**Cassy Bishop**  
Manager  
The Benevolent Society



**Tim Wilson**  
Director  
Commissioning, Child Safety



**Arna Brosnan**  
Regional Executive Director  
Child Safety, Cairns



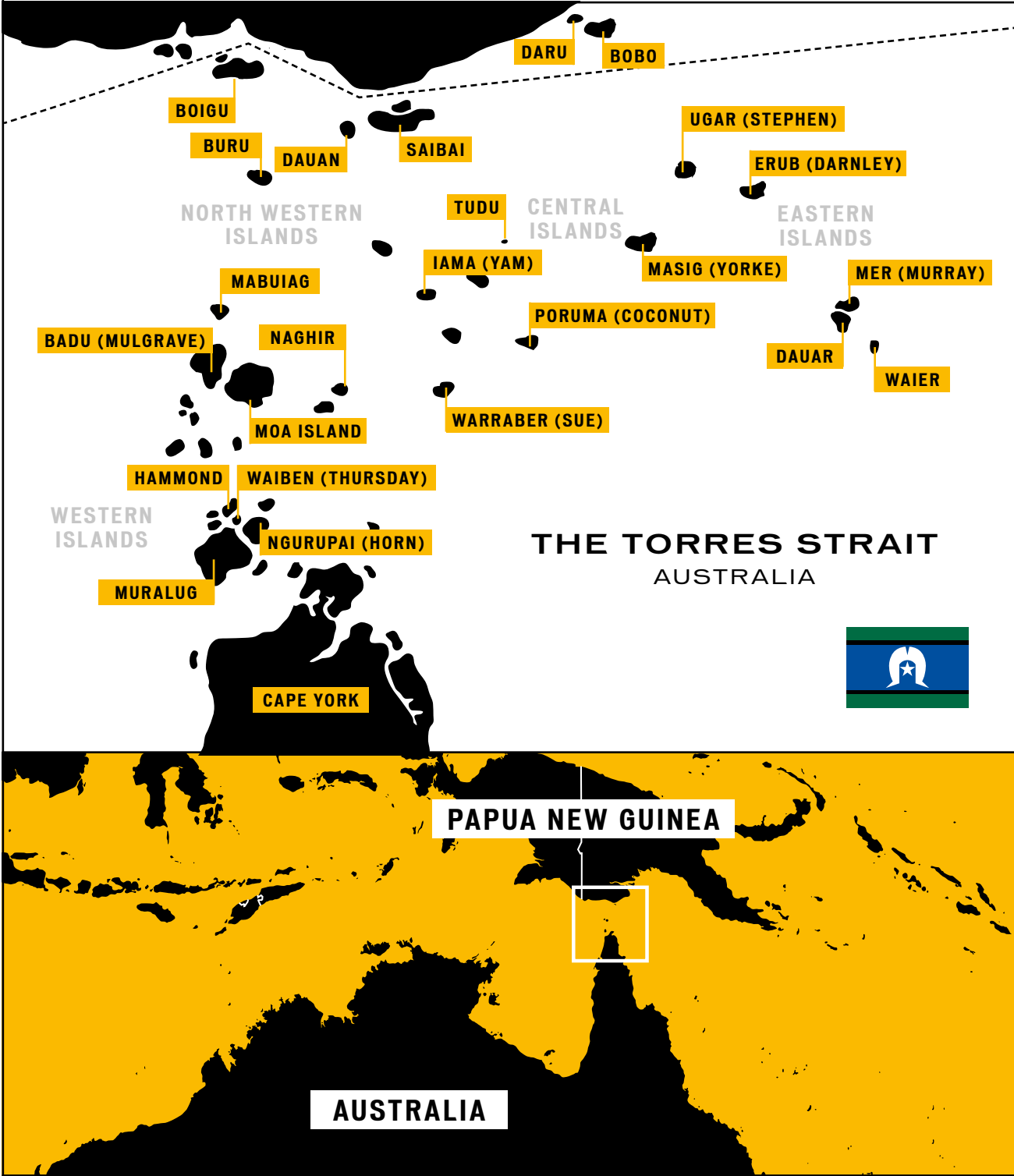
**Latoya Nakata**  
Manager  
Mura Kosker



**Natalie Lewis**  
CEO  
QATSICCP

# The Torres Strait Islands

The Torres Strait Islands are a group of at least 274 small islands which lie in Torres Strait, the waterway separating far northern continental Australia’s Cape York Peninsula and the island of New Guinea. The islands span an area of some 48,000 km². The Torres Strait Islands are made up of 18 inhabited islands, around 100 uninhabited islands and two mainland communities located off the northern tip of Australia.





# The Story

We're here to help –  
we don't want to take your kids,  
we want to help you keep your kids at home.

**Regina Turner**  
President, Mura Kosker

**Robbie Corrie**  
Director, Side by Side Consulting

**Leith Sterling**  
Director, The Benevolent Society

**Karina Enks**  
Manager, The Benevolent Society

**Cassy Bishop**  
Manager, The Benevolent Society

**Tim Wilson**  
Director, Commissioning,  
Child Safety

**David Yorkston**  
Program Manager, Mura Kosker

**Natalie Lewis**  
CEO, QATSICCP

**Arna Brosnan**  
Regional Executive Director  
Child Safety

**Regina Turner:** Well actually, we had our strategic plan and it all came from there. The Board thought yes, we need to grow the organisation and take these opportunities, develop new programs, as part of our future growth plan.

The Government tender for the new wellbeing program was coming up and we knew it was something we needed here in the Torres Strait. If Mura could win this tender it would be the first time these services have been delivered by a community controlled organisation on the islands.

**Leith Sterling:** We had been looking to partner with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation to deliver services in Far North Queensland but we'd been flying blind, without any real inside knowledge of who might be interested or what they would be looking for.

Staff attended a Working in True Partnership workshop presented by Robbie Corrie and it became clear that we were going to need formal guidance for any partnership we were hoping to form.

We took the decision to contract Robbie Corrie to consult, liaise and explore options for The Benevolent Society and there was an obvious increase in engagement from

If Mura could win this tender it would be the first time these services have been delivered by a community controlled organisation on the islands.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services

Under 'Our Way' the Queensland Government committed \$150 million over five years to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services across the state to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who may be experiencing vulnerability.

The aim of the Family Wellbeing Services is to make it easier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access culturally responsive support to improve their social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing, and build their capacity to safely care for and protect their children.

For the first time the functions of the existing family support programs are combined into one community-run Family Wellbeing Service. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations lead the design and delivery of these services to ensure support and responses are culturally safe and responsive, reflect community and family strengths, local needs and aspirations, leadership and cultural knowledge.

Between 2016 and 2018, 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services have been established in Queensland. Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. and The Benevolent Society are partners in delivery of the Mura Buai Family Wellbeing Service in the Torres Strait Islands.

community controlled organisations and individuals from this point on. This was a key decision that really made a partnership possible.

Robbie worked with our local Manager on a presentation to take to the Torres Strait organisations as a proposition for partnership to deliver the wellbeing services.

**Regina Turner:** Our Manager told me there was going to be a presentation from The Benevolent Society and Robbie Corrie from Side by Side Consulting on a potential partnership model that could be used to deliver the program and so went along to the presentation to see what it was all about.

**Leith Sterling:** Robbie was prepared to vouch for us and did the ground work to put together meetings with the women's services boards on Thursday Island, to put forward a partnership option. This was important because Robbie knew the communities, he knew the leaders and he knew what they would be looking for.

## There were risks for me and there are risks for other Indigenous people when they take the decision to back a non-Indigenous organisation. What if they fail to deliver?

**Regina Turner:** Other NGOs were at the presentation and in fact Mura had already made a decision to go forward with another partner, a sister Torres Strait Islander organisation. We didn't know The Benevolent Society, but we knew Robbie Corrie. His family is from here and that is very important, because they're a well-known family, we've only known good things about them and that's really important. It's where the relationship and the trust comes from. Good people, they're not going to do you over.

We have had an experience in partnership with a mainstream organisation that wasn't so good, so we were reassured that they would do what we wanted them to do.

**Robbie Corrie:** It was a cultural broker role, to make connections with Torres Strait Island organisations. In taking it on, I had to consider my own reputation and the effect this might have on my relationships on the islands.



Pictured: The Mura Buai Team

There were risks for me and there are risks for other Indigenous people when they take the decision to back a non-Indigenous organisation. What if they fail to deliver? The risk is right there, that you let someone in who shouldn't have been there.

In the end, I felt confident that The Benevolent Society had a good reputation for service delivery, they were a long standing organisation and their motives for wanting to deliver in the Torres Strait were based on outcomes for the children. They could also see that working with Mura could help them improve the cultural competency of their staff so it would be a two way benefit.

I was confident it wasn't for financial gain.

**Karina Enks:** The Benevolent Society fully supported the need for the service to be led by a Torres Strait Islander organisation. At the presentation we talked about other partnerships we had in Cairns with Indigenous community controlled organisations and the Board members were particularly interested in a partnership model where we had been involved in the set up and implementation and then had stepped away.

Apart from the formal presentation, which Robbie Corrie and I did together, it wasn't until lunch, when informal conversations could happen and the members could ask questions of us as individuals, that the interactions warmed up. This personal contact was very important to building trusting relationships.

## The Mura Buai Family Wellbeing Service

The Mura Buai service is primarily located on Thursday Island under the auspice of the Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. Mura Buai is funded for 9 full-time employees including case workers, intake and referral officers, managers and three child safety specialists provided by The Benevolent Society. Mura Buai delivers services to 14 islands within five clusters throughout the Torres Strait.

Mura Buai is currently recruiting 14 new Community Support Workers for each of the islands to provide information and referrals for additional services.



# The Department was absolutely committed to an authentic co-design process when it came to the Family Wellbeing Services

Our partnership offer was very open ended, these are the things we can do and you can pick and choose what you want from us.

**Leith Sterling:** The community engagement we were doing in the Torres Strait and in the Cape to learn and understand what partnership would look like didn't have any specific funding. Mostly we used our Early Years operations funding from Queensland Education. They were keen to see early years services developed in the Torres Strait Islands and saw the engagement we were doing as consistent with their policy aims.

This flexibility from Queensland Education was crucial. The wellbeing service is under Child Safety, a different department, different policy. This flexibility from one department to let us use their funding to support us to be able to be able to build relationships and possibly deliver services under another, different government agency, was really crucial. Working across government policy is sometimes really hard to do or hard to get government approval for.

**Tim Wilson:** The Queensland Government worked on the development and design of the wellbeing programs and the tender with QATSICCP so it would be owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at both a system and family level and consistent with our policy aims.

**Natalie Lewis:** Our previous experience had been of the community controlled sector trying to be shaped by government around the gaps that they observed in the system or the gaps the government thought were in the system. So the community controlled sector, and the previous service types that were being funded, were oriented towards meeting the needs of the system, as opposed to families' needs. We wanted to make it clear that we needed a departure from that thinking in the family wellbeing approach.

The Department was absolutely committed to an authentic co-design process when it came to the Family Wellbeing Services. We certainly saw a significant shift, even in the development of the Statement of Program Intent. What would normally be a very insular approach and an overly prescriptive series of program-related documents, shifted to one which centred purely on the intent of improvement in the safety and wellbeing of children and families, embedding the flexibility for localised and dynamic program responses to emerge.

This created the type of model that allows every community to shape the services it delivers, directly in response to the needs and issues impacting upon children and families in their respective community.





**Tim Wilson:** We held an industry briefing for the tender applicants to give them a deeper understanding of the sector, its priorities and what the successful tender would need to demonstrate. We wanted to make sure community controlled organisations understood what was needed so they could prepare a successful tender.

**Karina Enks:** The Boards asked us to come back for a second meeting so we could provide more detail on what we could offer and the participants could move the pieces around and work out what was needed and what wasn't. The industry briefing put on by the Department had given them a clearer picture of what would be needed to win the tender and run the services and now they started to really negotiate what was going to be in this partnership and what was out.

**Regina Turner:** The specialist services that The Benevolent Society could provide, particularly the skilled workforce that they could recruit was a big factor for us in going in as partners with them. A three way partnership between Mura, our sister organisation and the Benevolent Society, with Mura as the lead partner and the holder of the funding.

There was always resistance from some sections of both our Boards and the community. But there was good, positive feedback from the Manager and the Department on the joint presentation we made to the tender panel.

**Tim Wilson:** The presentation to the tender panel by both Mura Kosker and The Benevolent Society was strong. The fact that both partners co-presented impressed the panel as a model of true partnership. I mean they didn't just show up with a letter of support which is often the way things happen.

**Regina Turner:** We got told we'd won the tender in December, so then we had to get down to business and that was hard. The tender had created bad blood with our sister organisation, and it became very difficult. There were complaints and it just became impossible to work with. It was a horrible experience.

There was a good side and a bad side. The good side was we realised who we were dealing with. The learning experience was to really question and understand what your partners were bringing to the table.

It did bring in some bad relations for a time, but we all live here, and these are just the bumps that come along the way. In a small community, the lines blur, and people from our organisation were also on the board of our sister organisation. So it can be like you're trying to paddle forward, and someone is putting a hole in the boat.

**Arna Brosnan:** Competition between communities, between islands, between organisations and families and community members for government contracts is disruptive and potentially very damaging for communities. Government doesn't always understand the disputes and often has a limited capacity to try and help solve them.

## You have to have strong governance and everyone needs to understand that it must run this way to be fair and to have confidence.

The release of a significant amount of money into small communities can unleash all sorts of complexities that Government cannot forecast or intervene in.

**Regina Turner:** The real issue was the money that Mura would get. There was some jealousy but that was around the money too. Instead of women supporting women it did become a jealousy thing. We were seen as growing and developing and it became very political.

## The Policy Setting

In 2013, the Carmody Commission of Inquiry into the Child Protection System handed down 121 recommendations for reform of the system for protecting Queensland's children. In response, the Queensland Government developed a wide-ranging reform program, Supporting Families Changing Futures to deliver legislative, policy and system change.

'Our Way, A Generational Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children 2017-2027' was developed with Family Matters as a shared strategy to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland grow up safe and cared for in family. It outlines a framework for transformational change that will occur over the next 20 years and works to get the policy settings right so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect them. 'Our Way' aims to build and transfer capacity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations so they can provide the services their communities need.

'Changing Tracks (2017-2019)', the first action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families:

- invested \$150 million over five years in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family wellbeing
- set foundations for individual and systemic self-determination

In 2018, the Queensland Government amended the Child Protection Act to give effect to:

- self-determination,
- family decision making; and
- recognition in legislation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles.

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These changes underpin the Queensland Government's contracting and service delivery policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and are demonstrated through leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in service delivery partnerships.

## Family Matters

Queensland was the first state government to work in partnership with Family Matters on a dedicated target and strategy to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in statutory child protection systems.

'Our Way' and 'Changing Tracks' are modelled on the Family Matters Building Blocks and provide concrete action and momentum to build an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector, in a public and principled way.

Family Matters Queensland and its member organisation QATSICCP are the lead partner to the strategy, driving the policy and program response.

In designing the new Family Wellbeing Program QATSICCP led a comprehensive consultation across the state, holding knowledge circles with leaders, providers, family support services and communities asking them to be the architects of that new model.

QATSICCP continues to play a lead role in advising Government on the development of the sector, and to hold the Government to account for its commitments made under the strategy and action plan.

Even for our partner The Benevolent Society and our consultant Robbie Corrie, it became political and it was demanded they attend meetings and the questions were why are The Benevolent Society coming in here when we have people who could do this work?

The partnership language was confusing for our sister partner. Although Mura was the lead they didn't respect that and they didn't understand what that meant for their role, and the funding was not clear.

Some of these people were cousins, relatives, its complicated but we stayed professional. In the end we're all family. The relationship with our sister organisation has now repaired, we're talking to one another as community organisations but we are not partners.

**Leith Sterling:** The Partnership Agreement developed between Mura and The Benevolent Society was clear about what was required of us, what our role was and what we would and wouldn't be expected to do. It is holding up well as we have implemented and started delivering the services.

Governments and mainstream service providers have to understand the uniqueness of each First Nations community. In the Torres case, there were long standing community structures in place that could support the innovation of these types of partnership models but there were still difficulties.

**Regina Turner:** The teething issues we had in setting up a new partnership meant there was then delays with the consultation with the community. At the last minute, Government said we had to consult with community on what the needs were. Community didn't know about our project, these wellbeing services. So its hop on the plane, quick one, get out there. Saibai, Masig, Mer, Badu, all those communities.

**Robbie Corrie:** Community had been consulted about what they had already, a roadmap of what services are already in community. Not this new one. This wellbeing one.

**Karina Enks:** Government added another step to the tender being granted – they released the bulk of the funding to Mura, but the specialised services funding, which was supposed to go to The Benevolent Society, was withheld. They wanted a community consultation on the new specialised services.

We agreed to it and Robbie Corrie and I had two weeks to do it, charters and helicopters and what else. We had to do it even though it cost more than we could budget for. It was just the way it was.

**Our partnership  
offer was very  
open ended,  
these are the  
things we can  
do and you can  
pick and choose  
what you want  
from us**



Timeline

- July 2012

The Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (the Carmody Inquiry) was established to conduct a far reaching review of Queensland's child protection system; to find out if the system was failing children and, if so, why and what should be done to fix it.
- July 2013

The Commission presented its final report - Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection-to the Queensland Government in July 2013.
- Dec 2013

The Queensland Government released its response and committed to reducing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- 2015

The Benevolent Society began discussions with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream organisations on partnership strategies to deliver new community based family services (Family and Child Connect)in the Cape York and Torres Strait Regions.
- 2016

A multi partner proposal was submitted but the Government suspended the tender due to community feedback about funding and the program model.
- 2017

The Benevolent Society contacted Robbie Corrie, Side By Side Consulting to guide engagement and partnership development with the Torres Strait Island Community.
- Aug, Oct, Nov 2017

The Benevolent Society and Side By Side met with the Mura Kosker Board to present options for partnership.

These last minute requirements from governments are hard on any organisation but out here, its very hard to organise, logistically, for the community and its very expensive. There were many issues that impacted on the consultation that were outside the scope of the tender – the lack of jobs, water, education and health, government policies on border protection, climate change.

The key take away for me from the consultation was the range of the tough issues that Torres Strait Islanders face.

**Robbie Corrie:** So we did a specialist services report to look at case management and we took that back to Government to show them what we were looking to do, what we could provide, how we were going to engage someone at the local level and this is what we'll deliver and what the services would look like. Tailor the need of the community to the specialist services.

They were happy with that, with the report and the model and so we were in business to deliver these services.

**Arna Brosnan:** It was agreed that the contract with Mura would also include additional establishment and implementation plans. We all thought it would be useful for the Torres Strait. These plans would support the new service by setting goals and time-frames for milestones. I think this was important, it helped Mura understand and get the systems in place to deliver what is required by Government and to meet community expectations and accountability.

**Natalie Lewis:** We got agreement that for the first 12 months there would be no enforcement of targets for new wellbeing services. No one could explain to me where the targets came from, how the hours were calculated, the formula remains a mystery. Removing the focus on targets from the performance reporting, created the space for organisations to engage in quality community development processes, so that what was offered was what the community wanted. They were able to focus on building awareness of the services and community confidence in the organisation.

We are now almost 2 years into implementation and when I look at the success of the services across the state, I am convinced that this approach to implementation has been a significant factor.

**Robbie Corrie:** There was flexibility in the guidelines so that services could work differently in different communities and to support community controlled organisations to take these contracts on and that has been really helpful.

**Cassy Bishop:** Having that breathing space around targets is helpful for getting the service set up and running and shaping what it looks like for the Torres Strait. Its a brand new service in a place where this type of model hasn't been delivered by anybody before.

**Regina Turner:** One thing I've learned is that you must get the governance right and then you can run things for the community and for the funder. You have to have strong governance and everyone needs to understand that it must run this way to be fair and to have confidence.

**Cassy Bishop:** The consistency of the contract manager, we've had the same Child Safety contract manager working with Mura and The Benevolent Society to make the plans and put them to action and this has helped build a good working relationship between the service and the funder. This has been really helpful.

**Robbie Corrie:** You had to be really tough at times – Regina was very strong, standing her ground. It was a tough process, but the outcome was good and at the end we could see it was really well handled. We all knew each others' roles, in the partnership and we did them.

**Regina Turner:** Leadership is important. I come from a very strong mother who was part of this organisation, who little did we know was planting that seed and dragged us along to all these things and I think that where I started to care and take notice. I started sitting on boards, offering volunteering. I was nominated for President of Mura Kosker and I took it and then I was nominated for this national Australian Rural Leadership Program and went with it, to develop my skills, to be a bit more confident.

What I learnt from there, it took me a while to process what I was learning, but then I learnt, process, key learnings, relationships, negotiation skills. Come this tender I was like, thank you, I was ready for it. I think if I hadn't done it, I would have been hell no and put in my resignation.

I think that was the turning point.

**Robbie Corrie:** So Mura have been really flexible in how we can do that engagement and service delivery. If we're going into a community, we'd usually bring some catering in. But what Mura's doing is asking the community to go and get the traditional food, paying for fuel, investing in the community. That's a really good vehicle for engagement, because they have helpers and community people to help prepare the way and it means you can have that small yarn 'hey brother you good?'

...Timeline Continued

- Dec 2016

Tenders for the Family Wellbeing Services began rolling out across Queensland.
- July 2017

Launch of 'Our Way' and Changing Tracks, the first 20-year strategy to end over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. This included \$16 million over four years (2017-21) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing programs to be delivered by community controlled organisations.
- Oct 2017

'Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017' was passed to progress priority changes to the Child Protection Act.

Request for Quote opened in to deliver Family Wellbeing Services in the Torres Strait. The Torres Strait was separated into a separate region in recognition of its unique cultural identity.

Final partnership proposal submitted to Torres Strait organisations' Boards and in principle agreement reached for a three organisation partnership with Mura Kosker as lead.
- Nov 2017

Request for Tender submitted and shortlisted.
- Nov 2017

Industry briefing for shortlisted tender applicants and presentation to tender panel.

➡ continued...



...Timeline Continued

- Dec 2017 Advised of successful tender.
- Aug 2018 Partnership formalised.
- Sep 2018 Staff recruitment commenced.
- Oct 2018 Amendment to the Child Protection Act to give effect to self-determination.
- Jan 2019 Service commenced.

It brings back that community ownership. We're the visitors coming in and they're going to help us do what we're going to do in community and also be part of contributing to it.

**Regina Turner:** It's a little avenue. Its so hard to go into communities, its an opportunity to do a little bit of community development. Once everyone is cooking and involved we can be yarning to that mob.

Its not as formal, its loose. Its not like sitting around the table. You feel good about the conversation, its not about a signature on a paper, its not too straight up and down, our people aren't like that.

**David Yorkston:** Governance of your organisation, once government feels comfortable with your governance, then it gets easier. And we need to explain it to staff and community. This is why we have to do this, this is what it's telling. This is what the funding body wants.

And we want to have that evidence to show that culture does work, that kinship does work. I want to have these experts in culture, these experts to sit with us to build this evidence. We need to collect that evidence.

**Robbie Corrie:** So now we're saying to community this is what we can do, this is who we are, we're not Child Safety, we want to keep your kids at home, that's what we want to do. We're a support service, we're not Child Safety.

The community support officers are like the conduit between what's happening on the ground in community and they're the ones who will be providing the information

...family is just not women's business.

and education on what's available for community. We would like to see them do more events in community to build that understanding of what we do, that's how you bring people in.

Any little things that the support person picks up we can go in there, soft touch and try and say you alright?

The specialist services are the pointy end, to deliver the specific services families need.

**Regina Turner:** Until they get the training and decide that's what they want to do, our mob are a bit transient up here, they're here and then they take off. These are the challenges for us up here. We might get this one here on

Masig island and then they get another opportunity or there are family issues.

The staff are mainly female but we've got four men working now and that's good. It shows it's not just women's business, family is just not women's business. So when we're doing the engagement for recruitment and awareness we're encouraging men to apply.

Mura has also understood that we might need to change the name so that men don't think it's only for women. Just the conversations and feedback we've had.

We've had the domestic violence perpetrator position and been advertising for a year, absolutely no applications, flogging that horse, we've tried different strategies, and finally after 12 months, we've got three candidates and I think it's because they've seen males working here now. So we're learning and being flexible and trying new ways and new things too.

After working with The Benevolent Society, we want to go out and develop more partnerships. The Healing Foundation are our other partner. They have put out an EOI offering healing workshops for three communities, and we've joined with them. A healing session in community. This is what is going on in community, this is what we need to fix. Offering them the opportunity to work with a national Indigenous body, invested back in community, these are the sort of things that are running along beside The Benevolent Society and we've had nothing but positive feedback. People feel good that they were able to get things off their chest. Without backlash.

I'm really proud to say that the feedback we get from the elders is that they're really proud to see the young women pick up the baton, after 30 years and they're happy to see it is still locally controlled 100%.

**Natalie Lewis:** There are 33 family wellbeing services across Queensland and they're seen as a starting point, not an end point, and that is significant. They are the beginning of building a community controlled infrastructure across the state that isn't exclusively about child protection or involvement in the statutory system,







its about the broader concept of child and family wellbeing. We've been clear that the intent is to introduce service specialisation, based on need. The approach is about acknowledging the existing strength and knowledge of local services and increasing service capacity through targeted investment. An example of this is the recent investment in 31 new youth engagement positions, and specialist domestic and family violence prevention positions. We're using the wellbeing services as the core infrastructure to build and grow from, to respond in purposeful ways, to real need.

**Regina Turner:** We had the right people from the get go.

Thank god they came up and did the presentation to the board. We were going to go ahead, but who would do the tender? We needed someone from the social service sector. When we saw The Benevolent Society presentation we thought, yep they're the ones, that's our ticket.

The Benevolent Society gave added value – they asked what can we do, the in kind support that we can do to make this work better. Most of the pitch was we're not worried about the money, the money needed to come to the Torres Strait. Instrumental in what can we bring. That's The Benevolent Society model. Added value.

**David Yorkston:** And this partnership is a two way benefit. The Benevolent Society is providing those specialist skills and that capacity building and we're giving them cultural advice from our staff, they're learning every day. And they're taking that advice.

**Regina Turner:** The Benevolent Society came in with the right attitude. In kind support around writing the tender, supporting the organisation. That's the reason The Benevolent Society is still here – because it wasn't about the money.

**And this partnership is a two way benefit. The Benevolent Society is providing those specialist skills and that capacity building and we're giving them cultural advice from our staff, they're learning every day. And they're taking that advice.**



# Back home

As told by  
David Yorkston

**A child, 11, from Western Australia, whose mum and dad were incarcerated, had been placed in care through a family arrangement.**

The boy was experiencing abuse in care and opened up about it. Child Safety Western Australia could not find another family placement for him in Western Australia and so contacted the boy's paternal grandmother on Thursday Island to see if she would take her grandson.

The placement was only to be short term until the father was released from prison as he was previously in his care, but Child Safety WA did not make any arrangement with Child Safety, QLD. They just got agreement from the grandmother and flew the boy from Western Australia to Cairns and left him. He was basically dumped with the grandmother in Queensland and there was no further communication from them.

So from WA to Thursday Island, this was a big change for the poor little boy. He did not know his grandmother and this was totally different culture to how he grew up. Different food, different language, different country, from the land not the sea.

This boy was misbehaving, he wouldn't go to school, and he wouldn't listen to his grandmother. She called Mura and made arrangements to talk to Child Safety and Queensland Health to work out what support could be given to the boy. Initially, the grandmother did not want to deal with us,

but that didn't stop us from trying. We kept trying over two months and the boy was still playing up, he wasn't enrolled or attending school, he was showing up late at night, knocking on the police door looking for a lift home, and all that sort of stuff. He'd suffered a lot of trauma from WA, and so the grandmother ended up calling a meeting and our team leader went down, the police were there, education, Child Safety, the grandmother had organised this. She still wasn't convinced we could help her but after talking to our worker, she ended up consenting to the program.

So they did up a case plan to assist with enrolments. So we took him to school, the transport, getting his school stuff for him, a school starter kit and even in that small time he built up a bond with our team leader, he was attending school for half a day. We were picking him up and dropping him off. Because of our capacity we couldn't do it all the time but we did what we could. The grandmother wasn't always happy but, we continued. We had our child specialist and we continued meeting with education and Child Safety, Health to put support around the boy and the grandmother. We offered for her to attend programs as well.

All the child wanted was to go home.



**So we took him to school, the transport, getting his school stuff for him, a school starter kit, and even in that small time he built up a bond with our team leader...**

It was about three months working with this family and WA Child Safety notified us that the mother was going to come out of jail and they were making a safety plan around the other children in the family with the mother. The grandmother acknowledged it was all too much for her, she was a chronic diabetic, she had another son she was caring for, but with the work between us and Child Safety, once we heard the mother was coming out, and WA Child Safety were doing a safety plan around the kids, we were pushing Queensland Child safety to let this boy to go home. It was good that Queensland Child Safety agreed to this and also pushed for this family to be included in the Safety Plan in WA with his other siblings and his mother.

It was hard work. Once Child Safety Queensland informed us of a date when the child was going back, we had a meeting with services involved and managed to get someone from here, to escort him back to WA.

His escort home told us that as soon as he flew over his country, the smile came on his face, and he said, 'this is my land, this is my country.' And we've heard, it seems like he's going ok. He's back home with his mum and his siblings and he's very happy.

So, that's the type of work we do here. For the kids and for their families.



# What the Government did

Adopted all 121 recommendations of the Carmody Special Inquiry into the Queensland Child Protection System.	Adopted the four Building Blocks of the Family Matter's Roadmap as the basis for the new state wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy.	Was explicit in its legislation and policy reform that self determination, family led decision making and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle would guide all decisions in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.	Recognised the expertise of QATSICCP to guide the development of the family wellbeing program so it was owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at both a system and family level.	Accepted that program design needed to be broad, flexible and not overly prescriptive to ensure service supports were culturally safe and responsive, reflected community and family strengths, local needs and aspirations, leadership and cultural knowledge.	Held an industry briefing for short-listed tender applicants to provide them with a deeper understanding of the sector and its priorities, to better inform their tender application and provide clarity around expectations.	Convened a state wide implementation group made up of representatives of the successful tenderers, QATSICCP and the Department to support the new services. The group meets every two months to discuss issues, problem solve and learn from each other. This provides ongoing and real time capacity development for the new services. An evaluation template for the wellbeing programs will be developed by this group.	Early Childhood Development Coordinators have been placed within Family Wellbeing Services across eight regions to increase the capacity of the workforce to address early learning needs and engage directly with families to assist with access to early learning services.
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Key Actions:	Commitment to implement the recommendations from the Carmody Inquiry	Legislated for self determination	Leadership from Government, Minister and Secretary to meaningful change	Worked with SNAICC on design of 'Our Way'	Commitment of \$150 million for fundamental policy and program reform through action plan	Recognised the authority and expertise of QATSICCP to design the wellbeing programs and tender documents	Redesigned the tender guidelines to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities	Held the industry briefing to better inform applicants of requirements	Established the state wide implementation group to support and share key successes and identify and mitigate problems
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# What The Benevolent Society did

Committed to the principles of self determination for First Nations people as the key to effective service delivery and partnership.	Completed the SNAICC partnership training which provided guidance on best practice for partnership's with First Nation community controlled organisations.	Contracted an expert cultural broker to guide The Benevolent Society's approach to partnership, introductions to community organisations and provide expert advice on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Gained support from the Queensland Department of Education to allow flexible use of early years development funding to support consultation in the Torres Strait.	Used its own resources to building relationships in the Torres Strait, demonstrating a commitment beyond winning contracts and funding.	Co-developed an open ended partnership proposal with our cultural broker enabling our community controlled partner to decide which services they wanted.	Understood from the beginning and committed to a time limited partnership with the recognised goal of a stand alone community controlled service in the Torres Strait.	Was guided at all times by the organisation's commitment to improving outcomes for children and families.
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Key Actions:	Completed the SNAICC partnership training	Engaged the cultural broker	Engagement and negotiations were led by staff who were culturally capable and consistent in undertakings and negotiations	Utilised cross agency funding to enable engagement and the building of relationships	Made a financial commitment to service delivery in the Torres Strait islands
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# What Mura Kosker did

Developed and articulated a vision for growth and development for community controlled services on the islands that was supported by the community.	Identified the need for specialist skills to deliver the services and sought a partnership agreement to deliver those aspects of the service.	Led the development of the partnership through early engagement and ongoing negotiations with The Benevolent Society and the Government .	Led the consultation with community to explain the new service and the partnership arrangements.	Negotiated a partnership agreement with the Benevolent Society that reflected the principles of self determination, positioned Mura Kosker as the lead partner, clearly established the partnership roles and identified a pathway to an independent stand alone Torres Strait Islander service.	Established accountable and transparent governance arrangements for the service and the partnership that could be explained and accepted by both the community and the funder.	Made a commitment and argued strongly for the recruitment and development and training of a local Torres Strait workforce to deliver services now and into the future.	Agreed to develop and provide ongoing cultural capacity training to The Benevolent Society staff working in the Torres Strait and beyond.
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Key Actions:	Showed strong leadership in partnership negotiations to ensure Torres Strait self determination	Led community consultations and managed community disputes	Delivered transparent governance, in the face of community pressure	Sought to grow capacity of the organisation through a two way partnership and mutual benefit.
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If you would like further information  
or advice on a potential partnership  
arrangement please contact:



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