Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation

The Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation was founded in 2013 by a courageous group of Coota Girls, former residents of the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls (1912–1969).

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation aims to address the complex healing needs of Stolen Generations survivors, their families and descendants impacted by forced removals. They work to meet social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing needs in a practical and holistic way that is survivor-led to address Stolen Generations and intergenerational trauma. This includes truth-telling and education activities, advocacy, projects and events.

How the Collective Healing Grants have been used

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation has received Collective Healing Grants over multiple years and used them to host a major in-person Sorry Day event for survivors on Gadigal land in Sydney, as well as other healing gatherings. The grant flexibility means they can support survivors with expenses related to travel and accommodation that meets their needs, and to bring a carer (often a family member) to the events.

With the most recent grant round funding, Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation hosted a 2026 fundraising gala dinner event around Sorry Day for survivors to attend, along with other community gatherings. The gala aimed to raise funds to directly support survivors through a brokerage healing fund.

Without the grant funding the healing events would have to be restricted or scaled back. Finding alternative funding would be challenging. The Corporation values the flexibility of the Collective Healing Grants which supports them to undertake such meaningful in-person activities.

Impact of the Collective Healing Grants

Survivors are spread regionally and over different states. Some connect and talk on the phone, but many only see each other at the events arranged by the Corporation. Bringing them together in a safe space is a healing experience with genuine connection, reflection and conversation about their shared experience. For many, the Sorry Day event is the highlight of their year. Meagan Gerrard, Acting CEO of Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation acknowledges the importance of gathering face-to-face:

> *'Watching the connection, laughter, dancing and storytelling is something truly special. It can't be replicated any other way. Bringing survivors together provides a safe space for healing, reflection and connection through their shared experiences. One of the most moving moments I witnessed was seeing two Aunties reconnect for the first time since they were children in the Home. They embraced each other, both in tears, as memories and emotions resurfaced. They had shared a traumatic experience, and seeing them come together after so many years was incredibly powerful. After that emotional reunion, they were able to laugh together, reminisce and share some of their happier memories. Moments like these remind us why connection is such an important part of healing.'*

Collective Healing Grants have been distributed by The Healing Foundation to Stolen Generations Organisations on behalf of the National Indigenous Australians Agency since 2012.

The Collective Healing Grants support Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants through initiatives that promote healing, strengthen community connections, and enhance wellbeing for Stolen Generations survivors and their communities. These initiatives are delivered by dedicated and committed organisations working to create lasting and positive change across Australia.

The grants program emphasises the importance of intergenerational connections, cultural preservation, and capacity building within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Coota Girls
Aboriginal Corporation

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Ensuring survivors have comfortable travel and accommodation is an important part of what the Collective Healing Grant funds. Alex McWhirter, Project Officer, reflects:

> *'Being able to physically get the survivors together is so much of what's impactful. Being able to do that comfortably, especially as the survivors age – providing good, comfortable accommodation, the types of transport and travel they prefer, and not having to be too restricted on what that looks like is really good. It means that more and more survivors feel comfortable engaging in the events, knowing they'll be well supported and looked after. And it builds that trust between the Corporation and the survivors.'*

At the events survivors can connect with Culture and speak language, which many didn't get to do when they were younger. The events also allow Corporation staff to have group yarns and one-on-one conversations with survivors to identify services they may benefit from, and what their changing needs are.

There are positive impacts for the families and descendants of survivors too. Beyond a carer/family member, the events are often attended by children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Family members can make new connections, experience Culture and gain greater understanding of their related survivor's past. According to Meagan:

> *'Some survivors haven't shared their stories with family before. They are able to share and answer questions in that environment. It's a safe, supportive space for sharing and connection, supporting intergenerational healing.'*

Public events hosted by the Corporation have education and truth-telling aspects, through survivor stories, mini-exhibitions and resources. Survivor voices are heard, and members of the broader community benefit from meeting survivors and gaining a better understanding of Stolen Generations history. Alex explains:

> *'It bridges that gap between just hearing about the history of Stolen Generations and connecting it to real people.'*

Being with survivors in person has supported Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation to gain a deeper understanding what survivors need so they can tailor their services and support. The events and media coverage have raised the profile of the organisation, spreading the word about their services to more survivors and supporting sponsorships and funding opportunities, which increases capacity.

Future plans

The Corporation hopes the first Sorry Day Gala Dinner fundraising event will build on the success of previous years events, and would like it to continue as the centrepiece of Sorry Day commemoration in future years. They plan to continue to evolve, innovate and ensure the sustainability of healing events for survivors, their families and descendants

About the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls (1912–1969)

Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls was operated by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and later the Aborigines Welfare Board, from 1912 to 1969. Aboriginal girls, from as young as 3–4 years old, who had been forcibly removed from their families under government assimilation policies, were institutionalised at the home.

The purpose of the institution was to train Aboriginal girls for domestic slavery/service and prepare them for placement in non-Aboriginal households. On average, approximately 40 girls lived at the institution at any one time. According to the Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation, girls were institutionalised and subjected to policies designed to sever their connections to family, culture, Country and community.

Many girls experienced physical, psychological and sexual abuse while at the institution and while out on placement. They were not protected from harm. Their wages were controlled by government authorities and paid into trust accounts that many were unable to access.

The Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls was identified in the *Bringing them home* report (1997) as a significant institution involved in the removal of Aboriginal children and the implementation of policies that contributed to what is now known as the Stolen Generations. Former residents shared their experiences through the Bringing them home oral history project, documenting the lasting impacts of removal, institutionalisation and forced assimilation.

Children were often removed from their families at a very young age and first placed at the Bomaderry Children's Home. As they grew older, many girls were transferred to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, while boys were commonly transferred to the Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home from around six years of age.

Source: Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation