In Australia, there have been several approaches to healing adapted to suit the diversity of needs within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These programs aim to strengthen the various social units that exist in these communities and are vital in addressing the traumatic legacy of child removal. The manner in which these initiatives work varies from place to place but most of these have common features such as “an emphasis on restoring, reaffirming and renewing a sense of pride in cultural identity, connection to country, and participation in and contribution to community.” (Healing Foundation, 2012). A key ingredient in most healing programs are processes of cultural renewal and incorporating “strong Indigenous cultural themes” (Blignault and Williams, 2017, p. 6). Recent initiatives have seen an increase in the funding of healing programs directly managed by Indigenous-controlled agencies to create and deliver their own healing projects (Atkinson, 2013).
This proposal supports the acknowledgement of the indigenous communities' role in deciding what elements are to be researched and what procedures will be utilised during this process, as outlined in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC 2018, 2). Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) levels in Aboriginal communities are an essential aspect of Aboriginal health. Holistic understandings of Aboriginal health based on SEWB measures captured in this project include: connection to land and Aboriginal identity; cultural and familial ties; and the impact of child removals. Curtin University has been working with community organisations to reclaim selected former mission sites as healing places to heal the trauma of Stolen Generations Survivors. However, these sites are deteriorating and difficult to access. Virtual environments provide alternate means of access and potentially offer an approach to healing that has not yet been tested.

Virtual Reality (VR) offers a unique platform to substitute for physical access to the former mission sites. VR mission environments can be accessed globally and provide a safe environment enhanced by the shared experience of communally generated content. This enables a scaffolded approach to healing for the Aboriginal community through learning about their families, their communities and the forces that have shaped their lives.

This proposed project will test the completed VR environments for the Mogumber Native Mission (1951-74), already developed by the researchers, as places of healing for Survivors and their families. The effectiveness of the VR environment as a healing tool will be evaluated and the virtual tool will be refined as required based on the results. The ongoing support of the Aboriginal communities for this project and beyond will be maintained with the guidance of the Aboriginal partner organisations, in particular Bringing Them Home WA (BTHWA).

A PhD student is sought to work in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to:

Aims

In collaboration with Aboriginal communities, this research will:

1. Establish a healing framework to test the already developed Mogumber Mission VR environment with members of the Stolen Generations and their families.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the VR environments as a tool for Aboriginal healing.
3. Refine the VR tool based on the above findings.

Research methods

Culturally appropriate methodologies are central to the project’s approach. The VR environments will be tested with the guidance of BTHWA.

The VR environments will be evaluated for effectiveness by tracking the ‘before’ and ‘after’ experiences of the VR tool. Participants will be supported in the process by counselling support arranged from Bringing Them Home WA who are main partners in this project.

The research will be further guided by the Aboriginal participants themselves through collaborative workshops and the open transference of knowledge.

By analysing the healing capacity of VR environments in Aboriginal communities, this research has the potential to have a positive impact on the physical and emotional health of Aboriginal people.
FEASIBILITY AND RESOURCING – DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT THIS PROJECT WILL RECEIVE:

BTHWA will be the partner investigator. They will be responsible for ensuring that all research as well as applications and evaluations of that research are done with the full collaboration of Aboriginal communities across the gamut of methods for gathering and interpreting the stories, operational uptake of the findings and community utilisation.

BTHWA had funded ($75,000.00) the completion of Mogumber VR

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT/ PROGRAM FOR THE ENROLLING SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION:

Curtin University is among a handful in Australia that have achieved ‘Elevate’ status for their Reconciliation Action Plans, and both are deeply committed to facilitating real and lasting change for future generations of all Australians. The proposed project will deliver real and tangible benefits to Indigenous communities, in particular to Stolen Generations survivors, through the healing and truth-telling opportunities that are central elements of this project. It will increase employment opportunities for the prospective PhD student by exposure in the areas of Architecture, Aboriginal Cultural Studies and Visualization.
Students must express interest in this scholarship opportunity by emailing the Project Lead listed below. Please provide a copy of your current curriculum vitae and detail your suitability to be involved in this strategic project.

**PROJECT LEAD CONTACT:**

Name: Reena Tiwari  
School: School of Design and the Built Environment  
Faculty: Humanities  
Email: R.tiwari@curtin.edu.au  
Contact Number: 08 9266 4730