



# Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. Case Study: Employee Engagement

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February 2020

The surveys and report were written and prepared by an external consultant to ensure an unbiased review.

Board Member Margaret Mau addressing the Mura Kosker team om Day 1 training.



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## Aknowledgements

Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. recognises the Traditional Owners of the land and sea on which we operate. We acknowledge the past and present elders of all Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area. We respect the culture and lore of all Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region.

Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. also acknowledges its funding bodies and recognises their continued support and financial contributions,

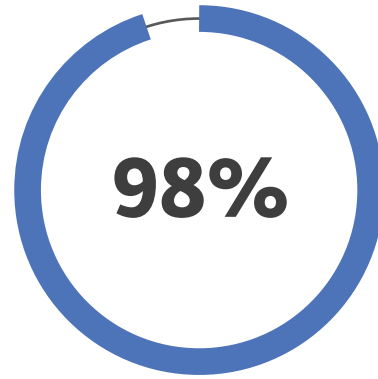
## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this document:

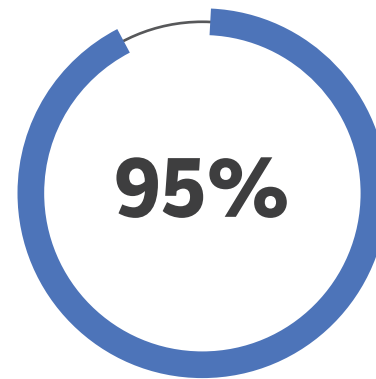
Mura Kosker Sorority Inc.	(MKS)
Torres Strait Regional Authority	(TSRA)
Queensland Human Rights Commission	(QHRC)
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak	(QATSICPP)



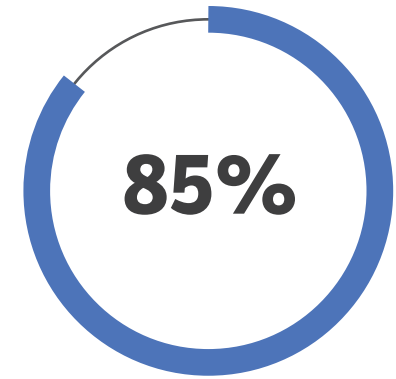
## Key Findings & Statistics



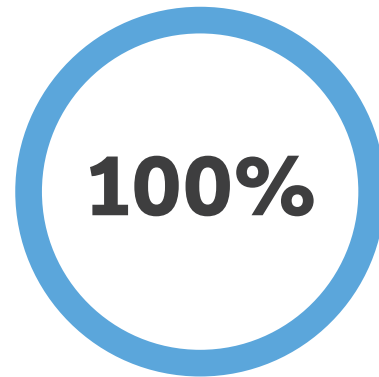
of employees were satisfied or highly satisfied with their employer; Mura Kosker Sorority Inc.



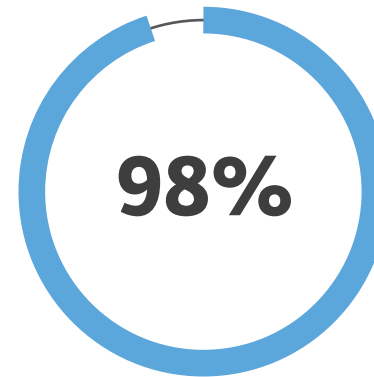
of employees were satisfied or highly satisfied with the MKS Board & strategic direction.



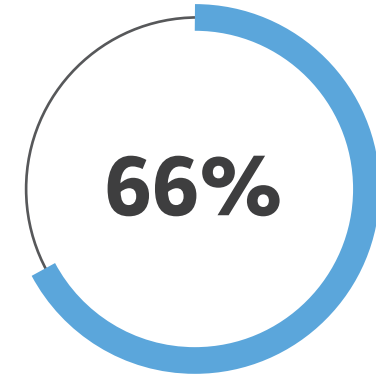
of employees highlighted lack of office space as a weakness.



female Board



Indigneous Employment



female employment (staff)

General observations identified that the Mura Kosker Sorority team were well bonded, even before attending the three-day intensive training. However, the event gave new staff the opportunity to meet existing staff. It also gave the Board an opportunity to meet and bond with the operational team.

All respondents were open and honest in their interviews, highlighting strengths and weaknesses for the management team and Board to consider. The most evident findings was the need to rebrand and move away from the female centric messaging and the need for office space.

Board President Regina Turner at Tjapukai Cultural Centre.



# About the report

*30 staff members were interviewed*



## Summary

Mura Kosker Sorority Inc (MKS) is the leading family-wellbeing service provider in the Torres Strait region.

The organisation's programs meet the social, emotional, educational, economical, health, cultural, spiritual and welfare needs of Indigenous women, men, children and families.

With a priority on wellbeing, Mura Kosker Sorority Inc. wanted to check in on staff (through an external consultant) to ensure that they were supportive of the recently launched Strategic and Operational Plans and the subsequent changes necessary to achieve strategic goals.

This report explores the organisation as it stands and integrates qualitative research from confidential interviews hosted with current serving MKS Board Members and employees.

This report was produced in February 2020 and is intended as a reference source for management and Board.

## Scope:

MKS is evolving and enhancing processes to better service the community.

This includes making changes at both strategic and operational levels. These changes will impact internal processes, roles and responsibilities of MKS staff.

In late 2019, MKS launched a five-year Strategic Plan and 12-month Operational Plan. In addition to these launches, MKS also hosted a three-day intensive training program in January 2020.

This event was attended by staff and the Board collectively, these sessions were hosted on Thursday Island and in Cairns.

## Report Objectives:

Interview 9 MKS Board Members and 30 employees to:

1. gauge support of the strategic and operational plans,
2. identify concerns and reservations regarding internal changes and,
3. extract honest feedback regarding the future aspirations of MKS
4. share key findings with concise recommendations and observations.

## Qualitative Research Method: Confidential Interviews

Confidential interviews were hosted with MKS Employees and Board Members. Participants were informed of the interview's intention and the report's purpose. Participants were also encouraged to respond comfortably in either Torres Strait Creole or English.

Questions:

- How long have you worked with Mura Kosker Sorority?
- How are you finding the planning sessions?
- What do you want to gain from the planning sessions?
- How effective do you believe Mura Kosker Sorority Inc is within the Torres Strait? Why?
- In your opinion, what will MKS look like in 5 years?
- In your opinion, what do you think are Mura Kosker's strengths?
- In your opinion, what do you think are Mura Kosker's weaknesses?
- Have you read the Strategic Plan?
  - How did it make you feel?
  - Did anything stand out to you? Why?
  - Do you support your new Strategic Plan?

Open-ended questions encouraged conversation and deeper responses. Direct questions required yes and no responses. Hard questions that required further thought were discussed and simplified, allowing respondents time to gather thoughts and respond openly. Interviews were hosted in a private and safe space, d other staff members.

# About the organisation

*Mura Kosker Sorority has serviced the region for over thirty years.*



## Organisation History

[Mura Kosker is an incorporated community organisation with a Board comprising Inner Island and Island Cluster Representatives, appointed for a period of two years.

Mura Kosker was founded over 32 years ago, as a direct result of identified needs for specific education and health issues that affect the lives of women and their families.

Mura Kosker has provided a range of programs and services over that time to meet the social, emotional, educational, economic, health, cultural, spiritual and welfare needs of women, children and families.

These programs have always been premised on respecting human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.

Mura Kosker has worked to reverse the levels of disadvantage for women, children and their families living in the Torres Strait region, by empowering families and strengthening communities.]

*- extract from 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.*

During the interviews, a respondent recounted their memory of the organisation's history and they emphasised the resilience of the women who founded MKS. This respondent was moved to tears when speaking about the growth of the organisation and its importance in the community today:

*“Some of our founding members are still here and still in their communities. And, we need to do another membership drive. We need to get our numbers up both on TI and on outer islands. And, we need to do more things for our members and do it more often because people are getting old and soon, they won't be able to travel.”*

*“The organisation has grown significantly from what it started as back then. At the start it was driven by very*

*powerful women who were strong, both in their words and their actions.*

The emotional investment displayed by the respondent proved that the connection some employees had with the organisation was deep-rooted and driven by personal factors. The respondent spoke about the organisation as if it were a close friend or relative:

*“Mura Kosker is a ‘she’ you know. And, she’s mina powerful.”*

The Torres Strait region is small, close-knit with family ties spanning across all 18 inhabited islands. In such circumstances, a community organisation such as MKS, can quickly become a household name that services generations. Therefore, maintaining a positive reputation is crucial.

One respondent explained that they were a client of Mura Kosker's prior to gaining employment in the organisation:

*“Back in the 90's Mura Kosker helped me with what I needed, and they provided me with support. And, today I can see a big improvement, especially in management. Now that I work with Mura Kosker, I can see how far its come and how much more support Mura Kosker gives people.*

To employees like the above respondent, MKS has had a positive impact on their life, either directly or indirectly. This has influenced their desire to work within the organisation.

*“You come to work every day and you feel safe and supported. We practice what we preach here and create our own safe work environments at Mura Kosker. That's what I like about coming to work every day. Even though we have challenges from time to time, we face them together.”*

# About the organisation

*Keeping our families and communities safe and strong.*

## Mura Kosker Vision

[Women and men working together to keep our families and communities safe and strong.] - *extract from 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.*

In the interviews, it was evident that staff could recite the vision, with some wording variations. However, throughout discussions there was consistent use of the words; communities, safe and strong.

“We are here for our communities.”

“We provide the means and necessities to help our families feel safe.”

“To me, Mura Kosker represents strength and resilience.”

For employees to have adopted the organisation’s vision and purpose into their everyday conversations, it would have had to be a result of good governance and management.

After interviewing the Board, it became clear that the language used was consistent. Both levels of the organisation (Board and operations) spoke similarly about the organisation.

One respondent touched on their personal history as a perpetrator of Domestic Violence. Now a changed person, they explained how their past was a driving reason for choosing to work with MKS:

“It’s important that we bring our men on the journey too. Mura Kosker started as a women’s thing, but it’s good to see that we can bring our men in because they need guidance and direction too.”

“My personal DV issues in my past was because I didn’t know who I was, I had to find my identity. I think helping men find their identity is important and it will help them to heal themselves.”

In observations of the MKS team, especially interactions with each other, it was evident that the team practiced their vision daily. MKS is an organisation that’s leading by example. In fact, the most common strength identified was the MKS team and the strong bond between colleagues:

“Everyone supports each other and is encouraging...”

“The team is definitely Mura Kosker’s strength...”

“The organisation wouldn’t be where it is today without the staff...”

MKS has held a reputation for being focussed on women and advocating for women’s rights and wellbeing. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan has expanded the service model to include men and non-identifiers (LGBTIQ). Hence, the update of the MKS vision to encourage men to work with the organisation as well.

A respondent highlighted that they were proud of the Board for recognising the need to include men in MKS planning and programming:

“Our boys and men are important too. And, we must not forget that. I’m happy that we have Mura Buai. I hope that Mura Buai becomes the name of the organisation and then maybe Mura Kosker can be a program underneath that umbrella. We are here for families.”





# TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

*Josephine David,  
Outreach Worker - Iama*

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“This was the first trip ever! For all Mura Kosker Staff and Board to get off the island and do something together. The best part was that we travelled together, Staff and Board. We didn’t travel separately.”



# Mura Kosker employee satisfaction

## *Staff responses about the three-day training*

In December 2019, an MKS staff member suggested that the organisation provide a formal recognition or celebration of the organisation's year and their achievements. Staff agreed that a team bonding activity or team excursion would enhance internal relationships.

"We took this feedback on and believed we needed to not only offer training, but also treat our team for all the hard work they do. We decided on combining training for our new recruits with team bonding activities. It was a big event and our Board and funding bodies were very supportive of the idea."

"After sourcing quotes, we identified that it was more affordable to fly everyone to Cairns for two nights rather than host our team bonding activities in the Torres Strait. We also discussed the options of hosting our event on Cape York, but these were also costly seeing as it was wet season and most resorts were closed."

"This was the first trip ever! For all Mura Kosker Staff and Board to get off the island and do something together. The best part was that we travelled together, Staff and Board. We didn't travel separately."

Once the travel quotes were finalised and budgeted, the MKS Management Team planned the itinerary and the administration team provided support in arranging travel, accommodation and other bookings.

### **Wednesday 22nd January Day 1 of Training:**

All new MKS staff and Board members based in outer-island communities travelled to Thursday Island. A team meet & greet was hosted at the Mura Buai office space in TRAWQ. This session including internal training on MKS systems and processes.

"It was great to put names to faces. We communicate by email a lot, but now we know what all our team members and Board members looks like."

"I was really shocked that our Board wasn't more known in our organisation and our region actually. I think it would be best if our Board visited our office spaces from time-to-time and had conversations with our team members. But I think this is the start of that happening and it's great to see."

### **Thursday 23rd January Day 2 of Training:**

MKS organised a private session with Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC). A QHRC representative facilitated the in-depth training with MKS Board and Staff where the team learnt more about the QHRC services and how to advocate for Human Rights in the region.

After QHRC session, all MKS travelled to Cairns in time for a team bonding evening at Tjapukai.

"That was a huge day for us. Early start and then one time travel again."

"I really enjoyed the Human Rights session. It was eye opening for me and good information for both personally and if I need to help others."

"I have really liked the training so far. The team are very helpful and organised everything for us. I'm very grateful to be part of this team."

"I'm making sure that I'm paying attention because I'm new to the role and what I learn here, I'll take back into my community when I work as an Outreach Worker."



**Friday 24th January**  
**Day 3 of Training:**

MKS and funding bodies hosted training workshops at Tjapukai Cultural Centre. Infusing culture into the learning atmosphere, created a safe and inclusive environment where the team were able to share ideas, ask questions and network with each other and the Benevolent Society and Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP).

“To me, it was very important that I attended this training, especially the workshops today. I am a new staff member of Mura Buai and coming here has given me information around the structure and system of Mura Buai.”

“Hearing QATSICPP talk about case management really had me thinking about my role. The workshops made me realise why our reports are so crucial and why we sometimes, we have to add more to them.”

“The QATSICPP workshop was very interesting. I’m only in admin but being in that workshop made me understand what my colleagues do on a daily basis. It was good to learn about case management and what is involved because you never know, I might move into that area one day.”



# OBJECTIVES

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“Mura Kosker is going to be BIG. Bigger than many organisations on Tl. It’ll become the key stakeholder that works in partnership with smaller service providers in the region.”

*Lisa Eaton,  
Finance Manager*



# Gauge support of the Strategic and Operational Plans

## Objective One



Although some team members (approx. 30%) honestly said that they had only skimmed the Strategic Plan, all reported to have read the Operational Plan.

All Board members interviewed also confirmed that they had read the Strategic Plan and were very supportive of its contents.

“The best part of the process was that we sat within our teams and talked. That information was then formalised into these documents and presented back to our team and you could see that they were shocked that this was their words on paper.”

“Now that we have targets and goals, it's really clear to see where the organisation is headed and what we have to do to reach our targets and goals.”

“It is a must to have a strategic plan in place so that we can fulfill the requirements of our funding bodies and to also do the right thing by community to ensure that we practice standards because we work with the lives of families.”

# Identify concerns and reservations regarding internal changes

## Objective Two

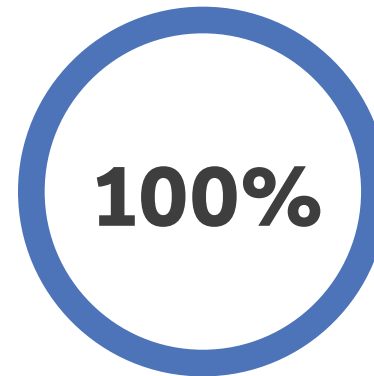


All respondents were either supportive or felt indifferent about the foreseeable internal changes.

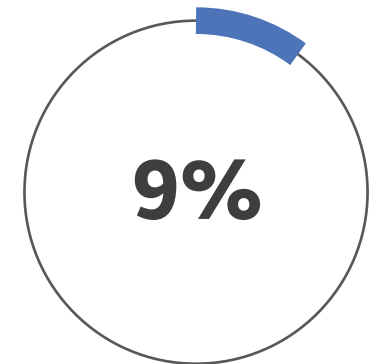
“Change is good, it’ll shake things up, make things better and improve what we do in our communities.”

“From a leadership position, it looks like we’re now a well-oiled engine with all parts working together, top down.”

“My only concern is about being overworked. We will need more staff, especially on outer island communities.”



of employees supported or felt indifferent about internal changes



of employees raised concerns about the need for more staff



## Extract honest feedback regarding the future aspirations of MKS

### *Objective Three*

All MKS staff and Board Members interviewed provided honest feedback regarding the future aspirations of MKS. In particular, everyone supported the change in priority from women to families, including men.

“We have a direction forward. That’s what we’ve always wanted”

“Mura Kosker is going to be BIG. Bigger than many organisations on TI. It’ll become the key stakeholder that works in partnership with smaller service providers in the region.”

“In the next five years, I think Mura Kosker will double in size. We will have offices if not on every island, there’ll be one in each cluster group.”

“Growth is good. We will continue to see growth in our communities which means a growth in our service and programs too.”

“I hope that we stick to what we’ve planned because the plan looks really good.”

# STRENGTHS

*Lama Trinkaon,  
Outreach Worker - Kubin*

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“You come to work every day and you feel safe and supported. We practice what we preach here and create our own safe work environments at Mura Kosker. That’s what I like about coming to work every day. Even though we have challenges from time to time, we face them together.”



# Mura Kosker strengths

*Mura Kosker's strength is its staff and people*



## Reputation & Credibility

“Most of our staff are Indigenous and we’re from these communities. We can speak the language and understand our people. We all grew up in these communities and have seen some of the struggles firsthand. This is a strength, because we can relate and be able to provide help and support.”

“I think our staff forget that they are building their own reputations. All the good work that they do, especially our DV team, in outer island communities is building their personal career reputations. People trust them because they go above and beyond in what they do.”

## Accreditations

“Mura Kosker has been around for over 30 years. We have the qualifications and licenses.”

We’re endorsed by government and other funding bodies. We’re doing the right thing by our people and doing them things the right way, in respect for mepla culture.”

## Partners & Referrers

“We have good relationships with referral partners like social justice and police. We work closely with other organisations in the region as well because we all want the same thing; to ensure our families are protected and safe.”

## Driven Board

“Our board are deadly. They are deadly women.”

“I trust the board’s decisions and believe that they are leading us in the right direction.”

## Qualified & Bonded Team

“We have qualified social workers in our team, we have people in our team who have been here for many years and who knows the ins and outs of the business.”

“We’re a close group of people. We are bonded in so many ways. Some through family connections and others just through our working history. Some days we can get frustrated, but everyone will offer support and encouragement.”

## Passionate Team

“I love my job because every afternoon I can walk away from this office feeling satisfied that I helped somebody today.”

“We do see the people we help in our communities, day to day. But we are professionals and we don’t bring anything up with them outside of these walls. We keep things confidential because we want people to trust that we are here to help them.”

## Strong History

“Mura Kosker has a strong history of resilience and female empowerment.”

## Community Engagement

“We travel to communities often. Its’s usually for case work or to see clients blo we, but we travel often. And, people know when we in community. All hello mepla and make mepla feel welcome.”

## Cultural Safety & Sensitivity

“We sabe cultural protocols blo we.”

# WEAKNESSES

Ivy Faid,  
Outreach Worker - Poruma

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“We do hear that community still sees us as a women’s sorority. We’re trying to break that stigma, but its hard to break a reputation built over 30 years.”



# Mura Kosker weaknesses

*Mura Kosker's common weakness identified by respondents is the lack of office space.*



## **Strong association to women, through history**

When interviewing the team, almost everyone highlighted the struggle of breaking away from the community perspective of MKS only being available to women.

“Well, you look the name there. It says it’s a women’s sorority. It would make men not feel welcomed.”

“In my community, men nor want to contact MKS because they think it’s only for women.”

“Maybe we should change the name?”

“Yes, we do hear that community still sees us as a women’s sorority. We’re trying to break that stigma, but its hard to break a reputation built over 30 years.”

“I think it should change to Mura Buai and then Mura Kosker will be a program underneath.”

## **Recently, inconsistent leadership**

“Well, we were without a manager for a little while there. So, I think we need a manager.”

“We finally have a strategic plan, something that we can be proud of and move forward with.”

“We have a direction and a goal. We didn’t have something so concrete before.”

## **Human Resource, demands sometimes overwhelms staff**

“Good to see that we have outreach workers on outer islands. But, one might not be enough. Especially when there are issues or crisis happening.”

“Gosh, we get busy sometimes. And, it’s hard to juggle. Sometimes I think I need to clone myself [laughs].”

“I think a weakness is the fact that we need more staff. Our services are growing and I think we need more people to help clients.”

## **Limited office space which in turn, divides the team**

“The main office on TI should all be under one roof. Right now, we are separated three ways. I think this will create silos between the organisation.”

“On TI, we should have one space, big enough for mepla everyone and then space for families to use or facilities like washing machine themkind thing right ya for families to access.”

“It’s hard when we work in separate offices, but we make it work.”

“I’m not sure if this is a weakness, but the Mura Kosker office is small. We need something bigger, especially because we’re only going to get bigger.”

“We are spending money on three different offices. If we had one central location that can house the entire team, even when our Outreach Workers visit, that’d be great.”

# OPPORTUNITIES

*Daniel Atkin  
Child & Family Support*

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“Let’s run more fun days and family days to try and promote Mura Kosker as a family service and say this is us, we are here, we can help you.”



# Mura Kosker opportunities

*A common opportunity highlighted by respondents is an organisational rebrand.*



## Rebranding or make Mura Buai the parent brand

“Let’s run more fun days and family days to try and promote Mura Kosker as a family service and say this is us, we are here, we can help you.”

“I think we lack in our promotional side of things... We have reps on each island, so they can help us with putting our name out there. When we did a recruitment drive, many people didn’t know that they had a board member in their community. We need to do more promoting and marketing.”

## More Partnerships

“I don’t know what else we can do to improve. Maybe more partnerships with organisations and funding bodies.”

## New Leadership & direction creates excitement

“I’m excited to see how the next five years go, especially with our new Strategic Plan.”



# THREATS

A portrait of Bethalia Bann, a woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black polo shirt and a gold chain necklace. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green foliage.

*Bethalia Bann,  
Admin Support*

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Post interviews, this report analysed the organisation, the responses from staff and general observations to identify three impeding threats.

# Mura Kosker threats

*The report analysed responses and observations to identify threats.*



Post interviews, this report analysed the organisation, the responses from staff and general observations to identify two impending threats.

## **Change in Government**

A change in Government will have an effect on the organisation and its operations.

## **Change in Leadership**

If the wrong manager comes into the organisation, it could disrupt the staff. The team are very productive in their daily tasks. If there is a

change in leadership and a manager comes in who isn't the right fit, it could have a negative effect on the staff.

## **Funding Cessation**

It's obvious that if the funding ceases, the organisation will struggle. Therefore, there was a common thread throughout the interviews about funding and the importance of funding being continued.



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