



STRONG COMMUNITIES STRONG KIDS

NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference 2019

Conference Report







FOREWORD

The NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference is a key event for those working with Aboriginal children and families in NSW. The conference theme was “**Strong Communities Strong Kids**”. The conference put the focus firmly on strategies for involving Aboriginal youth, families and communities in developing services and policies that lead to system change. The conference was held from 19 to 21 November 2019 on Gumbaynggirr Country, at the picturesque Opal Cove Resort Coffs Harbour.

Hosted by AbSec, the NSW Child and Family Peak Aboriginal Corporation, the conference provides participants with an opportunity to strengthen their skills and knowledge in supporting Aboriginal children, young people and families. It’s also an important time to collectively reset our compass on Aboriginal kids and what’s needed to keep them safe and healthy.

This year’s conference was the largest NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Conference to date, with over 350 delegates registered to attend from across the state and country. Though the bushfire emergency in NSW affected the attendance of delegates and keynote speakers, the conference was still a great success, providing a forum for exchanging knowledge and experiences between attendees and generating great conversations for delegates to take back to their communities and organisations. We thank all delegates, presenters and supporters for their patience and understanding of disruptions to the conference as a result of the bushfires. AbSec also acknowledges those around Australia who have been affected by the bushfires, and give special thanks to all those who are working to keep communities safe in the face of ongoing bushfire crisis.

Our 2019 conference highlighted successful strategies in developing well-integrated, holistic and culturally responsive local service systems. Moreover, it is vital that services are available and accessible from the early intervention stage. The delivery of these individualised services will help to strengthen Aboriginal children, families and communities’ connections to culture, facilitating self-determination and improving outcomes.

AbSec would like to thank all practitioners, community members, guest speakers and members of the sector who gathered to strengthen their skills and knowledge in supporting Aboriginal children, young people and families.

We look forward to meeting you again at AbSec’s next conference.

CONFERENCE ARTWORK

My name is Taya Biggs, I am a 20 year old Barkindji woman from Menindee; I am an accomplished artist. I studied art at Menindee Central School and have been supported by family, friends, school and the community to advance my passion for painting which has resulted in me continuing on with my art. My artwork has been on show at numerous exhibitions throughout the region and state.

The story of my painting here is one depicting our people spread out over Country. We come together as one to support and care for one another, and this fits perfectly with the theme of AbSec's conference and my beliefs - Strong Communities, Strong Kids.



WELCOME TO COUNTRY

As our conference theme demonstrates, we know that supporting our children to thrive means strengthening our communities. That strength is grounded in our cultures, which have been handed down over thousands of generations. Culture remains a key cornerstone of the NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference, beginning with the cultural protocols of Welcome to Country, and the involvement of local communities who share their culture and Country with us, enriching all conference delegates.

This year, we were welcomed to Gumbaynggirr Country by Uncle Alex Webb, who was joined by the Wajaar Ngaarlu Dance Group, as well as Mr Clark Webb, who shared the story of the creation of the Gumbaynggirr nation and reinforced the power of language and Country in our cultural connections.

Throughout the conference, we were also joined by local artists including Mr Tony Hart, who created work throughout the conference showcasing the conference theme *Strong Communities, Strong Kids*. The cultural performances were capped by the captivating kids of Kulai Preschool, singing in Gumbaynggirr, who inspired everyone with their spirit.

AbSec thanks the Gumbaynggirr people for hosting us on their Country, and for sharing their stories, song and dance with us throughout the conference.



OVERVIEW OF CONFERENCE

Over the three days, 26 workshops were conducted over seven concurrent sessions. These served as the highlight of the conference, presenting important work various organisations are doing on the ground with the same united goal, to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. The robust exchange of information, allowed conference delegates to take away learnings and insights to apply in their own practice.

368

DAY 1
DELEGATES

396

DAY 2
DELEGATES

313

DAY 3
DELEGATES

25

CONCURRENT
SESSIONS

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Ms Dana Clarke

AbSec Chair

Ms Dana Clarke, Chairperson of AbSec, welcomed delegates to the 2019 Aboriginal Child and Family Conference. She acknowledged the work of the sector, in particular, the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, who strengthen our kid's connections to culture, family and community. She also outlined the current work of AbSec, in designing and developing a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family system, informed by culturally appropriate frameworks and approaches which empower Aboriginal communities.

Dana emphasised the strength of the sector and the important work Aboriginal organisations do for Aboriginal children and families every day. She outlined key Aboriginal-led policy and program initiatives of the sector led by AbSec that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Mr Tim Ireland

AbSec CEO

Mr Tim Ireland, Chief Executive Officer of AbSec, called for systemic and structural changes in response to the recommendations made by the Family is Culture Report in his address. Tim noted that for genuine differences to be made for our kids and communities, governments must work in partnership with AbSec and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations..

Tim pointed to the Aboriginal Case Management Policy, developed by AbSec and endorsed by the Department of Communities and Justice, and the emerging Aboriginal Commissioning Framework as examples of the opportunities that lay before us to realise real and lasting change.

"Outcomes for our kids won't change until we are empowered to do it our way."

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP

Minister for Indigenous Australians

Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP sent a brief video to welcome participants to the conference. Minister Wyatt commended the role that organisations in the sector have played in providing the right environment and appropriate support for Aboriginal children, families and communities and acknowledged the work that is still required to achieve change.

Ms Simone Czech (on behalf of Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter)

Secretary, NSW Department of Communities and Justice

On behalf of Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter, Secretary of the Department of Communities and Justice, Ms Simone Czech highlighted the positive steps Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have made in reducing the number of Aboriginal children and young people entering OOHC in NSW, with a 35% decrease from 2015-16 to 2018-19. However, Aboriginal children and young people still represent 40% of the OOHC population, and the percentage of children placed in the care of extended family has decreased compared to 2016. Together, these statistics demonstrate the need for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to further advocate for Aboriginal communities to ensure the best outcomes for our kids.



Dr June Oscar AO

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner

'Co-design in essence: is nothing about us, nothing implemented, without us.'

Unfortunately, Dr June Oscar AO, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, was unable to join us in person due to the travel disruptions, however, we recorded her speech to be played for delegates on video. Commissioner Oscar delivered a powerful address emphasising the importance of listening to voices from the ground to develop community-led solutions. Drawing from the launch of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* project, she shared insight into her engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. These engagements, along with numerous previous reports and recommendations, all centre on the necessity and urgency for governments to allow our communities to lead the way in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Professor Ngiare Brown

Senior Aboriginal Clinician and Researcher, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Professor Ngiare Brown joined us via video conferencing as a result of travel disruptions. Despite the challenging circumstances, Professor Brown delivered an engaging presentation about the significant impacts of intergenerational trauma in our communities and how this contributes to increased health risks for Aboriginal children at a much younger age. Professor Brown described the clear link between colonisation, forced removed and systemic exclusion and the incidence of trauma, and that our communities and culture is key to supporting our children to thrive. This means valuing our communities' systems of care and our communities fulfilling their cultural responsibility to our kids.

Hon Linda Burney MP

Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services; Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians; Member for Barton

The Hon Linda Burney MP acknowledged the strength, resilience and knowledge within the room, and believes keeping kids safe and connected to their culture is a local, state and federal government matter. Ms Burney outlined key mechanisms that Aboriginal communities might lobby to achieve the necessary change that our children and families need and noted that communities hold the most power to effect change when they unite.

'This issue is a national shame and a national crises. It needs to be spoken about by our political leaders. It's not. It should be.'



DAY 1 AT A GLANCE

8:30AM		REGISTRATIONS OPEN	
Opening Plenary Day 1 9:15AM – 11:30AM	<p>Smoking ceremony</p> <p>Welcome Day 1</p> <p>Welcome to Country: Alex Webb</p> <p>Opening dance performance: Wajaar Ngaarlu Dance Group</p> <p>Welcome: AbSec Chairperson Dana Clarke</p> <p>Welcome: AbSec CEO Tim Ireland</p> <p>Video message: Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, Minister of Indigenous Australians</p> <p>Performance: Wajaar Ngaarlu Dance Group</p> <p>Guest speaker: Mr Michael Coultts-Trotter, Secretary – NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)</p> <p>Story telling: Creation of the Gumbaynggirr nation – Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation</p>		Ballroom
	11:30AM – 11:45AM		MORNING TEA
Concurrent Session 1 11:45AM-12:45PM	1	Connecting culture to Aboriginal children in OOHC – Jo-Anne Kelly, Burrun Dalai & Trish Moore, DCJ	Osprey
	2	Working together to build strong self-governing, culturally independent & confident Aboriginal organisations – Wayne Griffiths, Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child & Family Centre	Currawong
	3	Human services agencies in Western Sydney working to support families – Greg Skelly, WSNBM DCJ, Kylie Hughes, WSNBM DCJ, Gillian Astbury, WSLHD DCJ and Brett Thomas, DCJ	Opals
12:45PM – 1:30PM		LUNCH	
Concurrent Session 2 1:30PM-2:30PM	5	Creating stronger pathways – Maree Bisby, Northcott	Shearwater
	6	Nabu: Strong Families, Strong Community, Strong Culture – Tina Dixon, Amelia Harrison and Cleone Wellington, Waminda	Osprey
	7	Strengthening Practice in ACCO – Allison Prior, NSW Children's Guardian	Opals
	8	Aboriginal Case Management Policy – David Batchelor, AbSec & Michelle Smith, DCJ	Currawong
	9	Permanency Planning Consultation – Janelle Young, SNAICC & Dylan Booth and Joe Hedger, Ernst & Young	Sandpiper/ Kestral
Concurrent Session 3 2:30PM – 3:30PM	10	NSW Practice Framework – Justice Doing, Dignity Giving, Family Seeing – Kate Alexander, DCJ	Opals
	11	Connecting the dots: Building resilient & connected families for the long-term through a 'placed-based ecological' approach – Renee Chalmers and Julie Bertram, Bankstown Community Resource Group	Shearwater
	12	Strengthening the Aboriginal Child and family Sector – Annie Kelly, AbSec	Osprey
3:30PM – 3:45PM		AFTERNOON TEA	
END OF DAY ONE			
<p>CONFERENCE DINNER AT 6:30PM</p> <p>The Inaugural NSW Aboriginal Child & Family Awards</p> <p>Special Guest – Hon Linda Burney MP • MC Dane Simpson • DJ Tikelz</p>			

Day 1

1 Connecting culture to Aboriginal children in OOHC

Jo-Anne Kelly, Burrun Dalai & Trish Moore, DCJ

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is a child-centred tool utilising information collected by caseworkers and other sources of data from the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ – formerly Family and Community Services (FACS) to inform case planning and review over time. The QAF, which started in 2016, sees the child as a whole, with the framework focusing on safety, permanency, wellbeing, and cultural outcomes.

The Aboriginal Cultural Connections Questionnaire (ACCO) was developed to be evidence-based, with the goal of assisting transferring Aboriginal children to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs). Questions in the ACCO are based around individual identity and the young person's understanding of culture, spirituality and language. Every three months, the data is collated and fed back to caseworkers to improve the child's time in OOHC.

The tool is currently active in trial sites and will be stepping into the implementation phase moving forward. This will then be followed by a state-wide rollout, involving the validation of the tool as well as redesigning the website. The rollout to non-government organisations is expected to occur about early- to mid-2020.

2 Working together to build strong self-governing, culturally independent and confident Aboriginal organisations

Wayne Griffiths, Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child & Family Centre

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child & Family Centre has utilised a partnerships-focused business model to work on initiatives and services collaboratively to better meet community needs and issues. The centre was able to meet accreditation and compliance requirements through responding to community needs and achieved growth and independence through establishing successful strategic partnerships, which include links with various organisations including Big Sis, Lil Sis and Ability Links. At the same time, it is essential that Aboriginal organisations recognise when to strengthen partnerships and when to 'walk away' – a decision that can be facilitated by Partnerships Analysis Tools, such as the one made available by VicHealth.

Additionally, the importance of recognising and acknowledging staff experience and abilities was highlighted, as was support for the development of new skills in staff to enhance the organisation and its direction. Currently, Winanga-Li is working on developing training and education to address issues within OOHC organisations in innovative ways.

3 Human services agencies in Western Sydney working to support families

Greg Skelly, Western Sydney/ Nepean Blue Mountains (WSNBM) DCJ, Kylie Hughes, WSNBM DCJ, Gillian Ashbury, Western Sydney Local Health District (WSLHD) DCJ & Brett Thomas, DCJ

The workshop discussed various multi-agency partnerships focusing on prevention and early intervention for vulnerable families, with the ultimate goal to empower families in making and sustaining positive change.

One such initiative, the Making a Safe Home Program (MaSH), provides intensive practical support to families with complex issues and longstanding contact with DCJ by identifying shared goals and plans for action toward preservation and restoration. The program is trauma-informed, supports families that don't 'fit' into the current service system and provides clients with priority access to linked services which are in place for long enough to sustain change. The specific supports delivered to families can vary and are individualised. These multi-agency partnerships aim, by expanding the program state-wide, to support Aboriginal families to break the cycle now.

5 Creating stronger pathways

Maree Bisby, Northcott

Northcott aims to create stronger pathways and understanding of the NDIS early childhood and early intervention (ECEI) approach by identifying and linking with the right supports to meet the unique goals of the Aboriginal child and family. This may include providing information to Aboriginal families who are looking to access support services for their children aged 0-6, implementing early childhood intervention supports and strategies and building on the family's strengths to support their child's development.

Under this pathway, children under the age of 6 are eligible to apply for ECEI if the child has diagnostic evidence from a paediatrician or clinical psychologist, or a developmental delay in more than two developmental areas. Families who have concerns about their children's development but have not received a diagnosis or assessment can thus access Northcott's services, which will look to link them with local services, and, if applicable, apply for a NDIS plan.

6 Nabu: Strong Families, Strong Community, Strong Culture

Tina Dixon, Amelia Harrison and Cleone Wellington, Waminda

The Nabu Program – Community-led Family Preservation and Restoration Program is a service led by women in the Shoalhaven area. The service provides a holistic approach to support Aboriginal women, children and families through a range of wellbeing, health and safety support services utilising the Waminda model of care with two aims; to ensure that Aboriginal children and young people remain safe and well cared for within their family (Preservation) and that Aboriginal children and young people in the care of the Minister return safely home wherever possible (Restoration).

The program was developed under the Promising Practice Framework in collaboration with the Burbangana Group, who developed the client-centred, multi-agency approach. The structure of the wrap around services are in place, and staff within the program have taken up advocacy roles regarding care and support. It has also invested long term efforts in building relationships with DCJ, collaborating on cases regarding protection, court support, decisions, and family involvement in cases. Together, this has led to a successful implementation of the Nabu approach. Through collecting evidence of its successes, such as documenting case studies on women's journeys and successes, Nabu also advocates to support agency to families and enhance connections to community and culture.

7 Strengthening Practice in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

Allison Prior, NSW Children's Guardian

The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) has developed and implemented Capacity Workshop aiming to identify areas of need and consult with ACCOs in developing capacity and improving collaboration. By working differently with ACCOs, the organisation can explore existing supports already

present in their area of practice, barriers to implementing their practice, and risks brought about by continued non-compliant practice. These barriers may be logistical or governance-related, and the Workshop serves as a blueprint allowing for these challenges to be unpacked and reflected upon, and for remedial processes to be developed.

Through the creation of a safe learning space, the Capacity Workshops also encourage team building by facilitating acknowledgement of staff's individual expertise, reconnecting with their expertise as a team, and helping managers identify training needs.

8 Aboriginal Case Management Policy

David Batchelor, AbSec & Michelle Smith, DCJ

Following an intensive consultation process, the Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP) was developed by AbSec in partnership with DCJ and is endorsed as DCJ policy, with the main goal of better protecting Aboriginal children. The key elements of the policy include Aboriginal-led family decision making and assessments, proactive efforts to strengthen families and minimise disruption as a result of statutory intervention and engaging with Aboriginal community-controlled mechanisms to oversee compliance with the policy.

Following the development of the ACMP, AbSec is looking to speak to communities to establish an implementation committee, develop a quick reference guide, identify local champions, map current service systems and draw up district implementation plans. There is a particular need to identify the key stakeholders concerning local district planning discussions and determining the best methods to map communities and plan for input.

9 Permanency Planning Consultation

Janelle Young, SNAICC & Dylan Booth and Joe Hedger, Ernst & Young

The Children and Families Secretaries have commissioned a national reform process to develop a nationwide approach to timely and consistent permanency decision making. Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost nine times more likely to be on a permanent care order than non-indigenous children. Whilst permanency is intended to bring about cultural belonging, there are concerns that permanency orders also lack critical safeguards to support the indigenous child or young person's ongoing connection to family, community and culture. Though permanency planning involves a broader concept than a placement, the five core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – prevention, partnership, placement, participation, connection – should still be adhered to.

10 NSW Practice Framework – Justice Doing, Dignity Giving, Family Seeing

Simone Czech and Daniel Barakate, DCJ

The five principles of the NSW Practice Framework are key in creating valuable relationships with children, families and communities. As culture and language have major impacts on practice, practitioners should respect all culture and ensure respectful language is used through avoiding language that may minimise the Aboriginal person. Saying sorry helps commence the processes of building relationships that will achieve outcomes, acknowledges past injustices and helps establish better support and respect to achieve keeping kids safe and not repeating past injustices. Moreover, transparency and feedback are

pivotal in bettering support, services, relationships and outcomes and to assess what practical supports are needed, since relationships, not tools or evidence, are the key to leading practice and work that achieves better outcomes.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that further work is required with practitioners in changing language, understanding culture and putting kids and families at the centre of protection. It is also important for practitioners to receive criticism from various sources to improve awareness and understanding of the ethics and values of decision making around keeping kids safe.

11 Connecting the dots: Building resilient and connected families for the long-term through the 'place-based ecological' approach

Renee Chalmers and Julie Bertram, Bankstown Community Resource Group

A place-based approach places emphasis on more accessible and integrated services rather than individual, case-based services by addressing the social and physical environment of communities. By designing programs catering to the needs of clients and their communities, social connections are built and leadership is fostered. The resulting integrated service systems are also flexible and culturally safe and sensitive because they acknowledge the impacts that wider social systems have on local families. Ultimately, this leads to a positive cycle of growth where families will involve other members in their community.

In designing these programs, it is important that activities are designed to be family and community centred, transport options are provided and information is clearly identifiable as an Aboriginal program. The program implementation must also be adaptive to allow for growth and change in response to feedback from the community.

12 Strengthening the Aboriginal Child and Family Sector

Annie Kelly and Paul Gray, AbSec

In response to the NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy, DCJ commissioned AbSec over 2018-2020 to implement four of the twenty initiatives highlighted. One of these initiatives was to define the approach, roles and responsibilities of AbSec, DCJ, OCG and the Ombudsman in capacity building with Aboriginal organisations. Workshops will be held in early 2020 following the outcomes of this initiative.

AbSec was also involved in implementing a Workforce Development Project with the goal of building and sustaining a robust Aboriginal workforce to ensure Aboriginal children and families remain connected to their culture and community. After consultations with members of the community, domains were identified for success in working towards local workforce planning and development to enhance workforce capabilities and promote employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The two other initiatives currently underway are the Skills Fill Support Program which is looking to provide ACCOs state-wide with short term access to skilled resources, and the development of a Performance Framework for the sector to allow for the measurement of desired outcomes and for the building of an evidence base.

AbSec has also introduced the Step Up and Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Grants to support existing service providers and supply targeted supports to foster sustainable growth, as well as assisting ACCOs in aligning their service delivery with the future of TEI service provision.

DAY 2 AT A GLANCE

8:30AM		REGISTRATIONS OPEN	
Plenary Day 2 9:00AM – 11:00AM	Welcome Day 2 Didgeridoo performance Kristian Benton		Ballroom
	Guest speaker: Hon Linda Burney MP , Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services; Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians; Member for Barton Guest speaker: Professor Ngiare Brown , Senior Aboriginal Clinician and Researcher, NACCHO Guest speaker: Dr June Oscar AO , Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner		
11:00AM – 11:15AM		MORNING TEA	
Concurrent Session 1 11:15AM-12:15PM	13	Unravelling the layers to create safe homes for children-examining the success of Social Work intervention with vulnerable Aboriginal Families in SWSLHD Kate O'Connor and Alyssa Alliston, South West Sydney Local Health District	Opals
	14	Aboriginal Go4Fun - A Community based healthy lifestyle programs for Aboriginal Families Jaimee Vandermade, Stephanie Rennie and Bill Webb, NSW Ministry of Health	Shearwater
	15	Embedding Cultural Safety in health professional & Child Protection responses to Aboriginal families in NSW hospital settings Dr Tara Flemington, Ms Joanne Shipp and Ms Jessica Morris, Mid North Coast Local Health District, Dr Mark Lock, Committix Pty Ltd & A/Prof Jennifer Fraser, The University of Sydney	Osprey
	16	Orienting the system to the aspirations of Aboriginal People Lakkari Pitt, AbSec	Currawong
12:15PM – 1:00PM		LUNCH	
Concurrent Session 2 1:00PM-2:00PM	17	Walawin (strong & healthy) in Aboriginal OOHC – Karen Kime, Anglicare	Currawong
	18	A Road to Trauma Recovery & Healing Pathways: A Journey to Building Stronger Communities Dana Clarke and Dr Natalie Green, Burrun Dalai	Osprey
	19	What are the unique experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW OOHC system – James Beaufils, University of Technology Sydney	Shearwater
	20	With & because of each other we get things done: programs & community ecologies – Chris Krogh, University of Newcastle & Alison Preece, Regional Youth Support Services	Shearwater
	21	Your Next Step: Leaving & Aftercare – Daniel Barakate and Melissa Pearce, DCJ	Opals
Concurrent Session 3 2:00PM – 3:00PM	22	Working to avoid mental health – Steve Cochrane and Andrew Rowe, Safe Work NSW	Sandpiper/ Kestral
	23	Holistic support & strengthening of family wellbeing – Christine Walters, Aboriginal Housing Office	Osprey
	24	WWCC + Carers Register Compliance Projects – Stella Cue and Janet Burke, NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG)	Opals
	25	Bunyarabugalma - Therapeutic Family & Community Program – Lara Bennett, Deidre Currie, Janette Saunders and Rackell Sussyer, Guyahyn Playgroup	Shearwater
3:00PM – 3:15PM		AFTERNOON TEA	
Concurrent Session 4 3:15PM – 4:30PM	Tackling Local Issues:	Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW – Chair: Tina McGhie	Currawong
		Murrumbidgee, Far West and Western NSW – Chair: Tangerene Ingram	Sandpiper/Kestral
		Sydney, South East Sydney, Northern Sydney and Western Sydney/ Nepean Blue Mountains – Chair: Robert Skeen	Osprey
		Mid North Coast – Chair: Garry Matthews	Opals
		Hunter/Central Coast – Chair: Petrice Manton	Shearwater
4:30PM – 4:35PM		SHORT BREAK	
4:35PM – 4:50PM	Daily Wrap-up		Ballroom
END OF DAY 2			
SOCIAL DINNER AT 6:30PM Jarrod Hickling			

Day 2

13 Unravelling the layers to create safe homes for children – examining the success of Social Work intervention with vulnerable Aboriginal Families in SWSLHD

Kate O'Connor and Alyssa Alliston, South West Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD)

SWSLHD's Close The Gap program, as a successful model of care targeting early intervention with vulnerable Aboriginal families, is an example of an effective program that is flexible, focused on listening and meeting needs of Aboriginal families. Prior to the implementation of the program, service delivery was inconsistent, referrals from existing programs were minimal and there was no Aboriginal-specific cultural lens in place. This program served to support Aboriginal families with children aged 0–2, and the pilot program in 2018 focused on 22 pregnant Aboriginal women with high birth risk, of whom 20 women engaged with the program. All 20 women were able to take their child home from hospital.

The success of the program has been credited to the dedicated Aboriginal social worker who delivered the intervention. They were given the freedom to be flexible in their work, with a focus on strengths, being non-judgmental, listening and meeting needs. Meetings were held in safe spaces selected by the client and 24/7 contact access was available.

14 Aboriginal Go4Fun – A Community-based healthy lifestyle program for Aboriginal Families (slides available)

Jaimee Vandermade, Stephanie Rennie and Bill Webb, NSW Ministry of Health

The Aboriginal Go4Fun is a free, 10-week community-based program delivered by health professionals targeting Aboriginal children (aged 7–13) above a healthy weight to assist them in achieving positive health outcomes in relation to healthy weight and exercise. With early data showing that Aboriginal people were more likely to drop out of mainstream programs, a cultural review was conducted and the current Aboriginal-specific program developed. Unlike mainstream programs, the local health district partnered with the local ACCO for program delivery, with a cultural leader linking families to build trust in the program. Moreover, there are links with the Aboriginal medical services and incorporates traditional indigenous games, artwork and narrative-style storytelling to ensure that the program is culturally appropriate.

Outcomes for participating children have been positive, with sedentary time decreasing, time spent being active increasing, and consumption of healthy food increasing. In 2018 the program was rolled out state-wide, and in 2019 a program review was conducted with 693 children and 200 trained staff.

15 Embedding Cultural Safety in Health Professional & Child Protection Responses to Aboriginal Families in NSW hospital Settings

Dr Tara Flemington, Ms Joanne Shipp and Ms Jessica Morris, Mid North Coast Local Health District (MNCLHD), Dr Mark Lock, Committix Pty Ltd & A/Prof Jennifer Fraser, The University of Sydney

Relationships, appropriate organisational processes and respect for culture are critical to ensure Aboriginal families feel culturally safe in hospital settings. In collaboration with Aboriginal oversight, leadership, community engagement and researchers, a framework was drawn up with the three themes (relationships, organisational processes, culture) as central framework concepts. Through embedding these framework

concepts into the family, workforce, health district and Ministry of Health, the goal is to ensure that healthcare organisations respond to Aboriginal families in a way that is culturally safe.

Introduction, Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation (ISBAR), a clinical handover tool commonly used in hospitals, can serve as a good way to gain a culturally appropriate understanding of the Aboriginal family's health issues. It is, however, recommended that a practitioner using ISBAR delve into the background (B) of the Aboriginal family first before discussing their situation (S). In the context of child protection responses, it may be helpful to support the Aboriginal family in presenting ROSH reports or to encourage referrals for early intervention.

16 Orienting the system to the aspirations of Aboriginal People

Lakkari Pitt, Bruce Shillingsworth and Paul Gray, AbSec

AbSec is in the processes of building an Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Outcomes Framework as part of an Aboriginal Child and Family system, focusing on the needs, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal children and families.

This session workshopped three focus areas, including:

1. What does it mean for Aboriginal children and young people to thrive?
2. What do thriving Aboriginal families look like?
3. What are the features of strong Aboriginal communities that are best placed to support Aboriginal children to thrive?

Participant feedback included decolonising as key prior to engaging in this particular issue.

17 Walawin (strong and healthy) in Aboriginal OOHC

Karen Kime, Anglicare

The workshop emphasised the need for wise practice models when working with Aboriginal people and their families that acknowledge the impacts and effects of colonization past, present and future, while promoting the voice of Aboriginal people.

For this to take place, systems need to be based on Aboriginal models, not Western concepts. One such initiative was *Project Didn't/Don't* which used terms such as uncle, family, aunty instead of 'caseworker' to overcome the issue of professional boundaries and facilitate cultural safety. Humour has also been used as a tool to engage in healing, mourning and forgiveness. Wise practice models also require local Aboriginal people to be at the centre of consultations and creating solutions in order to facilitate cultural safety.

18 A road to trauma recovery and healing pathways: a journey to building stronger communities

Dana Clarke and Dr Natalie Green, Burrun Dalai

Healing Pathways is an approach that looks to understand the true impact of trauma on kids in OOHC and utilise strategies that will build strong foundations, enduring relationships and social success for them. It emphasizes the foundations of seven pillars: trust, respect, courage, honesty, gratitude, hope and purpose. The building blocks to a strong community involves connection to others and to ourselves, which means placing structures to allow Aboriginal people to do so. Achieving social success would

include the ability to think smart, self-love and care, have strong spiritual and cultural health, cooperate with others and harness and practice empathy. These multidisciplinary approaches will allow Aboriginal kids to transition into independence and grow in their communities.

19 What are the unique experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW out of home care system

James Beaufils, University of Technology Sydney

Literature around rehabilitation and processes of OOHC have been sparse which points to a continued need for proactive discussion. Despite saying this, there is an 'over-research' into Aboriginal people and identifying the 'problems' but not developing solutions to the problems. There is a push for Aboriginal research by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people in order to inform policy and legislation that will reflect Aboriginal perspectives and voices.

James Beaufil's research is to understand how the OOHC system works and to provide information to start a database for Aboriginal people about OOHC processes and experiences. It included a complete and available survey that DCJ has sent to agencies within OOHC.

20 With and because of each other we get things done: programs and community ecologies

Chris Krogh, University of Newcastle & Alison Preece, Regional Youth Support Services

The workshop conducted an evaluation of the Indigenous Justice Program on the Central Coast of NSW and offered a way of thinking about service ecologies that programs are embedded in. The theme of the session emphasized an ecological framework that recognized the dependency of systems on each other to achieve and continue their movements. The framework aimed to reduce participant involvement with the criminal justice system and contribute to increased community safety and participation. The metaphor of ecology was used as an alternative model that understands services as members of ecologies where each program interconnects with others around it.

21 Your next step: leaving and aftercare

Daniel Barakate and Melissa Pearce, DCJ

This workshop focused on how to create quality care and support to young people after they leave OOHC. Between July 2018 and June 2019, more than 450 young people received assistance from Aftercare services. This workshop emphasized the development of tailored approaches for providing planning and care to young people once they leave OOHC, which can adapt to the different situations and contexts of each young person. Young people can receive a range of support when leaving OOHC from parents, grandparents, friends to no one, so quality planning and support is needed to set them up for success in life.

A good leaving care plan is involving young people in the process, early planning, a tailored approach, developing practices that allow young people to attain life skills, maintaining those life skills, providing confidence for independence. It means developing and learning life skills that build confidence and independence within themselves such as driving skills, handling work commitments, cooking meals, personal hygiene, keeping their home clean. These things ensure young people stay connected to family, culture and community and build 'forever networks'.

22 Working to avoid mental health

Steve Cochrane and Andrew Rowe, Safe Work NSW

The workshop introduced the issue of bullying and harassment, with a focus across organisational responsibility to defeat bullying and harassment that leads to mental health. The workshop also addressed the issues of cultural lateral violence suffered by Aboriginal people who work in isolation and explained the legislation and bodies involved in the platform to address the issue, as well as address what bullying and harassment are and the organisational ramifications.

The workshop established a method within any organisation to meet the challenges and address the often deep seeded issues of bullying and harassment. The workshop also addressed the issues of being the isolated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person within a structure who wears racism from within and lateral violence from the community they deal with.

23 Holistic support and strengthening of family well-being

Christine Walters, Aboriginal Housing Office

Services Our Way (SOW) uses a unique holistic, trauma-sensitive and collaborative approach to support Aboriginal people and families experiencing vulnerability. SOW is led by the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office and provides service coordination and support solutions.

At the core of SOW is the desire to keep families connected and supported for their entire lives. It supports services to keep people housed and kids within families not in OOHC. There is a demand for improving housing and evaluating the services which deliver housing needs to families. SOW is looking to improve standard of living, safety of lives, home, work and future security.

The collaboration of services such as the NDIS, Special Medical Services can help keep kids out of the child protection system. SOW has seen 11 staff assist over 88 families in achieving better outcomes for their lives, work and families.

24 WWCC and carers register compliance projects

Stella Cue and Janet Burke, NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) has recently developed two new compliance projects to support designated agencies to align with goals of the Carers Register and WWCC. The workshop presented the WWCC Self-Certification project and the Carers Register Self-Assessment project.

However, blockages and Community Services checks have slowed down the WWCC process. The WWCC compliance reveals statistics on the situation and makes clear the steps to maintain in order to address these issues.

The Carers Register Self-Assessment project is the development of a self-assessment tool in order to assist maintaining compliance to Carers Register and provisional authorisation compliance. It is looking to be developed into legislation and practice. The next steps of the workshop were to publish the workshop on Provisional Authorisation Report and Checklist on the OCG website for the use of all designated agencies.

25 Bunyarabugalma – therapeutic family and community program

Lara Bennett, Deidre Currie, Janette Saunders and Rackell Sussyer, Guyahyn Playgroup

This workshop arose in the need for a model to support young people back to community and Country. The Guyahyri Aboriginal Early Childhood team developed an interactive workshop to demonstrate healing techniques connected to Aboriginal philosophies and world views. Resources available for healing and incorporating therapeutic breathing, movement, language, deep contemplating techniques were also presented. The interactive session had delegates participate in and evaluate a draft program. Feedback found it would be beneficial for kids in out of home care and assist in families bonding.

The future of the draft program would be to release it for free to Aboriginal people and share it with Juvenile Centers.

26 Commissioning for better outcomes

Kerrie Jordan, AbSec

This workshop provided an overview of AbSec's commissioning approach to guardianship support. At the moment there is a focus on outputs instead of outcomes which makes the structures for supporting Aboriginal people inflexible because it doesn't include service users within the design. There is a need for the process to return to the basics and build a new framework.



TACKLING LOCAL ISSUES FORUMS

Conference delegates gathered to discuss key local issues affecting Aboriginal children, families and communities. The goal of the forums was to brainstorm key issues in their local regions and work together to outline possible next steps to address these issues locally.

Delegates were split into five forums;

1. Southern, including Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW Districts
2. Western, including Murrumbidgee, Far West and Western NSW Districts
3. Greater Sydney, including Sydney, South Eastern Sydney, Northern Sydney, South Western Sydney, Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains Districts
4. Northern, including Mid North Coast, Northern NSW and New England Districts
5. Central Coast, including Hunter and Central Coast Districts

These conversations were facilitated by representatives of AbSec Board of Directors and staff, with representatives of the Department of Communities and Justice invited to attend and participate. First, delegates were invited to brainstorm key challenges present in their communities, before narrowing in on selected high priority issues to workshop in greater detail. Given the focus on being participant-led, each forum took a distinct approach.

While the focus of these sessions was on identifying local challenges and commencing conversations about local solutions, it is unsurprising that the types of issues identified across all regions are generally consistent. These issues included strengthened processes and structures to promote the voices of Aboriginal peoples, including children and young people, families and communities, across the service system, greater investment in prevention and early intervention services, and the establishment of holistic, Aboriginal community-controlled services to provide tailored, culturally embedded services and supports to Aboriginal children and families that are focused on preserving Aboriginal families and supporting Aboriginal children and families to thrive.

Southern, including Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW Districts

Key Issues Identified

- Improved funding processes to direct investment towards Aboriginal children and families, addressing key community priorities. This includes greater flexibility in funding and outcomes, and access to focused funding aligned to the needs present in Aboriginal outcomes, allowing communities to develop tailored approaches.
- Need for cultural services, particularly for young people, to build the confidence of youth and enable greater participation in service design and delivery.
- Empower communities to facilitate services and advocate for services needed
- Improve implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), including community-based programs to improve understanding of NDIS and issues of access, and the development of local roles at the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) for Aboriginal staff to support Aboriginal clients in the community.
- Deliver greater cultural support within the area, including for both practitioners and families, recognising the importance of culture in promoting resilience. Services and supports for Aboriginal people, families and communities are most effective when grounded in culture. This includes

supporting practitioners in their role, connecting people to community and supporting cultural events and developing local language programs.

- Confidentiality
- Need to improve scope and access to services, including greater investment in family supports
- Many participants noted a lack of cultural understanding across the service system
- Need for greater communication across the service system
- Improve access to transport across the region
- Improve access to services for Aboriginal women and girls
- There is a pressing need for more Aboriginal carers, including kinship carers, so that more Aboriginal children are able to stay within family and community wherever possible

Workshopped Priorities

Prioritise community-led approaches

A key theme emerging from the forum was the need to strengthen advocacy and decision making processes to empower local Aboriginal communities in service design, as well as empowering families in case planning. Participants urged the development of local mechanisms to empower local communities and improve the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to develop solutions to local issues.

Invest in Cultural Supports

Participants identified the important role of culture as a foundation for strong Aboriginal families and communities and urged greater investment in cultural supports for communities. This included the suggestion to establish a cultural centre to provide a hub for cultural reclamation and other cultural activities, including language programs and supports directed for men, women and youth.

Reformed service system

Participants noted a number of barriers present in the current service system that affect outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. They described the service system as unresponsive, inflexible and not sufficiently tailored to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. The service system is disproportionately focused on responding to harm, rather than providing early supports and other proactive initiatives to prevent harm and preserve families.

Participants called for greater investment in early intervention and family supports, tailored to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. This includes long-term funding to enable the development of holistic, culturally-embedded supports, as well as solutions to address any barriers that may affect access to services (for example transport), or otherwise contribute to the risk of poor outcomes (such as access to safe and stable housing). Participants also called for greater integration across the service system through Aboriginal mechanisms including Aboriginal interagency and community working parties to develop local, community-led solutions to identified challenges, and overcoming jurisdictional issues that present as a barrier to delivering client-focused, tailored supports.

Participants also identified the need for greater local effort in building the necessary Aboriginal workforce to deliver family supports and other services to Aboriginal children and young people and their families.



Key Issues Identified

- The need for culture as a foundation for service provision. This will enable a holistic approach with frameworks informed by culture, spirituality, emotional and physical aspects. Environmental issues that affect communities, including drought and climate change, and their impacts on children and families. Water shortage is a key issue.
- Isolation and lack of transportation as an issue across the district.
- The need for the sector to recognise and value existing community strengths
- The lack of accountability by service providers to local communities. Need to involve the Aboriginal community in decision making about the policies, processes and services that affect Aboriginal children, families and communities
- Services need to address domestic violence and housing-related issues. There is a need to have quality housing and nutritious foods.
- Need for family supports, including advocacy, and a connected approach that allows referrals for families. A better integrated local service system can provide a holistic, responsive service tailored to the needs of families.
- Lack of services, including drug and alcohol services, health services, mental health services and other supports for families (allied health etc.) which take a trauma-informed approach.
- Need for greater supports for young people, including mental health, drug and alcohol treatment and youth crime.
- Need to address systemic issues in school that contribute to ongoing challenges which increase the likelihood of poor outcomes.
- Need to address the workforce gaps and skills shortages. Need to have more local Aboriginal workforce to meet the needs of the community including more Aboriginal carers
- Implementation of NDIS has not been effectively communicated and is not sufficiently understood by the community contributing to difficulties for families in trying to navigate the system and access the supports they need.
- Need for a process of continuous improvement and service system evolution. Evaluation and improvement with capacity building rather than cutting and changing services constantly



Workshopped Priorities

Holistic approach grounded in culture

Participants mapped an integrated approach that is broad enough to consider the contribution of the issues identified and their impact on Aboriginal children and families, and the need to develop approaches that are multifaceted, including health, mental health and drug and alcohol services. Access to services must also be considered, including intake processes and transport. Importantly, participants emphasised the importance of seeing culture as a key foundation for effective solutions, promoting wellbeing for children and young people, their families, and communities. This was intrinsically tied to care of Country and the physical environment, noting the impact of environmental issues (including the availability of water and the health of Country and river systems) on family and community wellbeing.

With culture recognised as the foundation of effective approaches, it was seen as essential to develop culturally-based frameworks that consider social, emotional and physical wellbeing. These frameworks could then support service system design, working with community to breathe life into those frameworks, including through the establishment of cultural programs and activities. Participants also emphasised the need to work with other agencies, particularly noting the role of education, and the need to integrate connection to Country, language and other cultural elements into the curriculum. This will require staff development initiatives across all relevant services to build awareness of culture. With respect to staffing, it was also noted that achieving a holistic local approach will require a localised workforce strategy to address current skills shortages in a sustainable way. Participants also noted the need to strengthen advocacy for children and families.

Community-led approaches to family support

Participants identified the importance of community-led approaches to family support, and urged the development of local, community-based strategies for family support services, engaging with local communities in their development with ongoing follow up. Participants also emphasised the importance of improved communications with communities, building awareness in communities regarding local services and supports, using methods other than the internet. These should enable culturally-based models to address local challenges, working with communities to identify the appropriate and effective ways to identify local priorities and implement community solutions.

Local system reforms

Participants identified five areas to improve local systems:

1. Establishing sustainable funding processes, with adequate resourcing to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families and providing confidence that services will continue to be funded and available in the longer term
2. Strengthen local service coordination through local involvement in decision making, with local service mapping and greater access to relevant data to inform decision making about service design and the needs of local Aboriginal children and families
3. Address unrealistic expectations through strengthened data processes, including a greater partnership in data collection and management, enabling Aboriginal community-led, data-driven approaches.
4. End the "one-size-fits-all" approach to service delivery and work in greater partnership with local Aboriginal communities to develop a flexible and tailored service system.
5. Ensure that governments make a genuine commitment to working with Aboriginal communities with greater transparency and accountability, and empowering Aboriginal communities in how these services are administered locally. Participants noted the need to change the way people think about these issues and value social welfare programs.



Greater Sydney, including Sydney, South Eastern Sydney, Northern Sydney, South Western Sydney, Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains Districts

Key issues Identified

- Empowering the community to actively participate in decision making
- Strengthening partnership approaches – getting everyone (including agencies and community organisations) on the same page for the benefit of Aboriginal children and families
- Build capacity and coverage of ACCOs to provide services for kids and families in need
- Implementation of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy as a framework for ensuring best practice for Aboriginal children and families
- Promoting greater consistency across Community Service Centres and districts
- Promote greater information sharing and opportunities to work collaboratively for the benefit of Aboriginal children and families
- Improving the understanding of services and agencies regarding the nature of the child and family system and their role.
- Improving support for young parents to prevent entry into statutory out of home care
- Remodelling the service system, improving restoration services and increased community engagement
- Responding to the recommendations of the Family is Culture Report
- Improving the cultural competency of the service system, including through greater investment in ACCOs.

Workshopped Priorities

Engaging & empowering Communities

A common theme arising from the discussion was the need to do more to engage with Aboriginal communities and to empower them with respect to decision making about their children, families and communities, including service design. Initiatives proposed for further development included:

- Greater community education regarding Department of Communities and Justice processes, including for parents following the removal of their children, and opportunities for Aboriginal family-led decision making
- Further develop family conferencing during pregnancy as this was seen as an effective strategy for intervening early to prevent removal and preserve families
- Develop strategies and processes to strengthen service system accountability, including family and community meetings
- Create opportunities for Aboriginal communities to have their voices heard regarding the issues that affect them on a regular basis, with commitment from DCJ to engage with communities towards solutions

Building Capacity & Coverage of the local Aboriginal child and family service system

Issues of service access were raised as a significant barrier in achieving the desired outcomes for children and families. By focusing on strengthening the capacity and coverage of local services aligned to the needs of Aboriginal communities, a more integrated and responsive service system could be developed for Aboriginal children and families. The group identified that ACCOs that are embedded in, and represent the needs of their communities, often achieve the best results. However, efforts to strengthen these approaches must

be mindful to ensure sustainable growth rather than placing considerable pressure on communities and organisations that may set them up to fail. Key features of this initiative included:

- Changes to commissioning and tendering of services for Aboriginal children and families that promote collaborative solutions rather than competitive tendering.
- More consistent funding, including longer-term contracting and greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in funding decision making
- Competitive tendering discourages collaboration – the need for collaborative tendering
- Resourced support from the Department of Communities and Justice that promotes a single, consistent approach to building the capacity and coverage of the Aboriginal child and family sector.

Breaking the cycle – Working more effectively with families

The need to more effectively partner with families, and particularly young or expectant parents, to break the cycle of risk and disadvantage was also identified. The goal of these initiatives was to establish local approaches that are able to deliver supports to families that need them in a way that doesn't confer shame but builds relationships of trust. The workshop acknowledged good practice they had observed or heard about, such as the role of Aboriginal midwives in supporting families, but also noted that administrative processes could get in the way of providing the services and supports that families need. A 'no wrong door' is needed to enable these models to achieve their full potential for Aboriginal children and families. Proposed actions included:

- Identifying opportunities to deliver supports to families as early as possible based on existing resources, as well as gaps or barriers to the identification of families in need
- Develop opportunities for government agencies (including DCJ and Health) and Aboriginal communities and organisations to create connections across services and provide a more integrated experience for families.

Northern, including Mid North Coast, Northern NSW and New England Districts

Key Issues Identified

- Health needs of local children and families, including mental health and initiatives to address suicide and self-harm among Aboriginal children and young people
- Drug and alcohol misuse, and access to effective treatment and rehabilitation services
- Domestic and family violence
- Issues of identity and culture, and interactions with the operation of government systems (including the identification and de-identification of Aboriginal children and families by DCJ, at times to promote DCJ priorities of exiting children and young people through guardianship and adoption by de-identifying children to avoid additional safeguards for Aboriginal children). The impact of intergenerational trauma and forced disconnection were also raised as systemic issues that must be addressed.
- Improving the pool of potential Aboriginal carers to ensure children removed by DCJ remain within the community
- Improving the relationships between Aboriginal communities and local services, including DCJ, Police and Courts
- Improving information sharing and communication across services (including local health and other services) to provide collaborative supports and more integrated services to families, rather than agencies working in isolation. This includes greater priority placed on interagency networks to more

effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal families who may be engaged with multiple agencies and services at once.

- Improved education support for Aboriginal children and young people, including a greater understanding of the impacts of trauma, mental health and wellbeing, to support healing focused approaches rather than suspensions and other exclusions that disengage Aboriginal children and young people from education. Exclusions from school was identified as another pathway towards involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- Improve referral pathways and service access for Aboriginal families, strengthening partnerships with DCJ and other partners to provide timely, holistic supports, in the context of regional areas that may not have access to the services and supports they need.
- Improving access and stability of housing, particularly for families at risk of child protection involvement
- Collision between non-Aboriginal government approaches and policy, and Aboriginal perspectives and approaches, particularly where imposed timelines create barriers rather than enabling holistic healing work with children and families. This included issues of cultural competency within the government service system
- Importance of keeping kids on Country and connected to their family, community and culture
- Lack of culturally relevant Alternative Care Arrangement services in the area and the risk of children in these placements becoming involved in the juvenile justice system
- Greater engagement with the Aboriginal community regarding the NDIS system and how it works, including access to supports for children and families. Community education programs are needed to strengthen understanding
- Improved focus on restoration services and supports, which are currently not adequately available for families wanting to work towards having their children returned to their care

Workshopped Priorities

Improve carer recruitment and assessment

Given the importance of ensuring Aboriginal children and young people remain connected to their family, community and culture, the need to improve processes for carer engagement, recruitment and assessment was discussed. Compliance barriers were raised that make it more difficult to engage and approve Aboriginal carers, including challenges with the Working With Children's Check process that are well known and have been consistently raised with relevant stakeholders. Government organisations involved in these processes need to be more visible and 'own' their role, including where particular processes are imposed, as otherwise, it creates a wedge between Aboriginal organisations trying to administer these processes as well as maintaining relationships with the communities they represent and serve.

This could also be strengthened through the development of more appropriate carer assessment tools and processes, empowering local Aboriginal communities to assess and support Aboriginal carers through culturally-embedded frameworks. Efforts to develop more culturally appropriate carer assessment processes should be prioritised.

Participants noted that carer recruitment, particularly for kinship carers, appears to be affected by a lack of clarity about guardianship and adoption, which is not supported by their community.

Broaden regional engagement and access

There was a consistent view that Aboriginal families and communities hold the solutions, and more needs to be done to engage with Aboriginal people in the care and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. Participants felt strongly that DCJ needs to listen to what Aboriginal families and communities are saying

and work towards improving relationships and strengthening partnerships through regular engagement, empowering Aboriginal voices in policy development and local service system design. Similarly, family voices must also be heard in case planning at every step, recognising the child's family and community as central to achieving safety and promoting the best interests of Aboriginal children and young people. More robust Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making processes that prioritise Aboriginal family voices and solutions. Finally, many participants felt that some geographical areas do not receive the same attention or opportunity, creating inequities across the region.

Holistic, Trauma-Informed Approach Needed

Many participants emphasised the importance of working in a more holistic way with Aboriginal children and families, acknowledging the broader social context that may be contributing to what is happening with individual families. In particular, the role of inter-generational trauma, in part arising from historic experiences of child removal, was noted as a significant issue. This is unlikely to be resolved by future or ongoing removals of subsequent generations. Steps to addressing this issue include enriching the training of local practitioners across all services to provide appropriate trauma-informed supports, with a key focus on early support, prevention and preservation. Where Aboriginal children or young people are removed, significant effort to keep children safe within their family network must be undertaken, in addition to active supports focused on addressing identified risks and achieving timely restoration. This should include realistic assessments of the supports needed and realistic timeframes to achieve sustainable change. Participants noted that regardless of placement decision making, many young people seek to self-place during adolescence, emphasising the importance of working with families broadly to address risks, rather than focusing solely on current placement options.

Related to this, better training in working with families affected by substance misuse, and greater access to treatment options across the region was seen as key steps in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Establish Culturally Appropriate Alternative Care Arrangements services in the area

The issue of Aboriginal children and young people in so-called 'alternative care arrangements', including hotel placements, was noted as an issue of immediate concern, particularly as there are no culturally appropriate services across this region to meet the needs of this cohort of children. Participants were concerned that such placements, along with education exclusions, may increase the risk that Aboriginal young people may come into contact with the juvenile justice system, placing them on a trajectory to poor long term outcomes.

Participants urged DCJ to engage with AbSec and invest in the development of appropriate local services and supports, by and for Aboriginal communities themselves, to better meet the needs of youth at high risk of poor outcomes. This might include a local Aboriginal steering group to design a tailored service system, with investment from DCJ for implementation and ongoing development.

Central Coast, including Hunter and Central Coast Districts

Key Issues Identified

- Government tender processes need to be better structured to empower Aboriginal communities in the design and delivery of services to their communities
- Implementation of data sovereignty principles
- Better representation of Aboriginal people on government agency panels, including funding panels, noting, in particular, the desire to include AbSec in efforts to strengthen the inclusion of Aboriginal voices on high-level panels in the region

- Improved funding for Aboriginal child and family services, including therapeutic 'wrap-around' services, building on sector advocacy, led by AbSec, for the transition of Aboriginal kids to Aboriginal-led services. In particular, greater therapeutic supports for Aboriginal children and young people currently in hotel placements was seen as a particularly urgent issue.
- Improved local political advocacy on issues affecting Aboriginal children and families
- Increased investment in prevention, preservation and restoration supports for families, rather than continued investment in 'business as usual' crisis intervention and carer recruitment (including system-wide advocacy with AbSec).

Workshopped Priorities

Increased early intervention and therapeutic support

Participants identified the urgent need for increased investment in early intervention and therapeutic supports for families, shifting current investment and overcoming 'business as usual' which is too focused on removal, including permanent removal. Participants called for the development of a new approach to system design and investment that prioritised prevention and preservation services for families, with a key focus on therapeutic supports. This includes discussions involving local communities, DCJ and AbSec to direct greater investment in Aboriginal-led family supports.

Procurement and tendering processes regarding services for Aboriginal people

A related issue is the need to reform procurement processes to direct greater investment towards Aboriginal-led solutions and empower Aboriginal communities in decision making about services and investment for Aboriginal children, families and communities. This includes working with AbSec and government to develop focused funding streams that prioritise investment in ACCOs in the design and delivery of services to their communities and opportunities for direct negotiation between communities and government, including DCJ and Treasury, regarding investment and tendering processes for services to Aboriginal children and families.

Other steps to be pursued in this district include the inclusion of Aboriginal community representatives on procurement panels, and working with local communities to identify the commissioning and procurement processes best suited to delivering supports to Aboriginal children, families and communities, including direct negotiations, select tender and other commissioning and procurement options. This should also include reviews of funding to non-Aboriginal organisations to ensure adequate involvement of Aboriginal communities in service design and delivery and to ensure that Aboriginal communities are not marginalised once funding has been awarded.

Data Sovereignty

Participants identified the pressing importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty in empowering Aboriginal communities in service design, evaluation and continuous improvement, as well as driving accountability of government and service providers in achieving outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. Participants expressed concern about current data processes, including its collection, use and interpretation, and questioned whose interests it was serving and who benefitted from current data processes. By way of solution, participants noted, in particular, the approach present in New Zealand and urged a similar discussion in NSW to identify and establish data protocols for the collection, access and use of data about Aboriginal children, families and communities, ensuring data is safe and that Aboriginal peoples are able to exercise ownership over their data for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.

SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS

The Tackling Local Issues Forums sessions provided an opportunity for delegates to come together in their geographical regions to discuss key issues affecting Aboriginal children and families and to consider actions that could be undertaken to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities. The sessions identified key issues and proposed local approaches, to be pursued in partnership between Aboriginal communities and their organisations, as well as DCJ and other government agencies and non-Aboriginal service providers. This information is collated to inform local DCJ Districts in the priorities identified by conference delegates.

For AbSec, the issues identified by conference participants provide further reinforcing information to the positions AbSec has developed, or needs to

develop around certain aspects of the system as it relates to supporting Aboriginal children, families and communities. AbSec intends to use this information to inform its policy papers, submissions and advocacy to the NSW Government in seeking genuine change that will deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. AbSec acknowledges participants that gave their time during this important session, and over the months ahead, AbSec will continue to engage at the local and regional level with Aboriginal organisations and communities to continue to build on the priorities identified in this report. As a more practical first step, all Executive District Directors of DCJ will be provided with a copy of this conference report and invited to have a conversation with AbSec in relation to progressing the priorities identified by each group.



DAY 3 AT A GLANCE

8:30AM		REGISTRATIONS OPEN
Plenary 9:00AM – 10:30AM	<p>Welcome Day 3</p> <p>Reading: Makayla Gilbert, Winner of NSW Creative Writing (12–18 years) competition for NSW Children's Week</p> <p>Guest speaker: Mr Andrew Johnson, Advocate for Children & Young People</p> <p>Presentation: AbSec Youth Ambassadors</p> <p>Performance: Kulai Preschool</p>	Ballroom
10:30AM – 10:45AM		MORNING TEA
Plenary 10:45AM – 12:30AM	<p>Panel Discussion: Understanding 'Permanency' for Aboriginal Children and Young People</p> <p>Chairperson: Tim Ireland (CEO AbSec)</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deb Swan (GMAR NSW) • Wendy Knight (Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation) • Paul Gray (AbSec) • Storme (Youth Ambassador) <p>Closing Address: AbSec representatives</p>	Ballroom
12:30PM – 1:00PM		LUNCH
CONFERENCE CLOSE		

Day 3

Andrew Johnson ACYP

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP), Mr Andrew Johnson, kicked off the final day of the conference – a day dedicated to the voices of Aboriginal children and young people. Andrew presented the key messages that Aboriginal children and young people have shared with him and his team over the last few years, including in particular the views of Aboriginal young people and those in Juvenile Justice Centres. Aboriginal children and young people have consistently raised the importance of culture and identity, and the role of communities and community-controlled organisations in supporting them to thrive as Aboriginal children and young people. Andrew was supported by two Aboriginal young people, Emily and Sebastian, and brought the voices of Aboriginal children and young people into the room via videos created throughout their community engagement work.

The key themes raised by Andrew are included in the ACYP report '**What Aboriginal children and young people have to say**', and '**What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice Centres Have to Say**'.

Youth Ambassador Report Launch

The 2019 Conference marked the end of the two-year term of the current cohort of AbSec Youth Ambassadors. Over the last 2 years, the AbSec Youth Ambassadors have gathered quarterly to develop their priorities and engage with various sector stakeholders to have their voices heard in policy and government reforms. This session provided an opportunity for the current cohort to share their experiences, and their perspectives, with the sector, and to launch the **2018/19 AbSec Youth Ambassador report**.

Some of the current Youth Ambassadors shared their story growing up and the impact of the statutory child protection in their childhood. Through their personal experiences, the Youth Ambassadors emphasised the importance of hearing the voices of Aboriginal children and young people and to uphold their rights to their culture and identity. While the Youth Ambassadors demonstrated themselves to be strong and proud Aboriginal young people, their stories emphasised that this strength in identity could often be hard-fought for Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care, struggling against a system that does not value and does little to safeguard their rights as Aboriginal children and young people.

These themes were reflected in their Work Plan and Youth Ambassador report, focused on three key priorities as identified by the young people themselves – permanency, housing and a hotline for Aboriginal children and young people. More information about these issues and suggestions for reform can be found in the [2018/19 AbSec Youth Ambassador report](#).

Permanency Panel

Panellists included:

- Deb Swan, Grandmothers Against Removal (GMAR) NSW
- Storme Burton, AbSec Youth Ambassador
- Paul Gray, Executive Leader Strategy, Policy and Evidence, AbSec
- Wendy Knight, Chief Executive Officer, Ngunya Jarjum

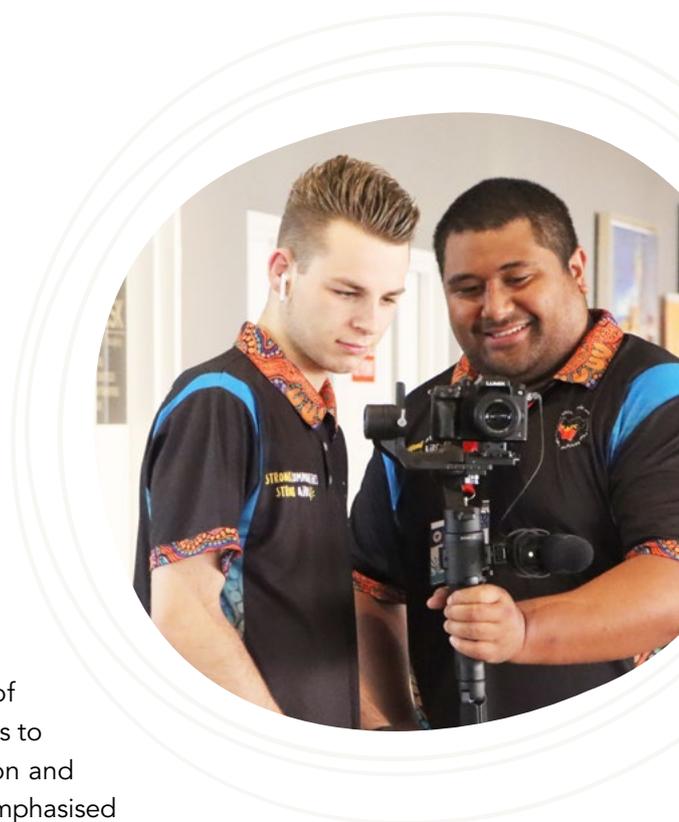
A dynamic panel provided their perspectives on understanding “permanency” for Aboriginal children and young people. The panel plenary session was chaired by AbSec’s CEO, Tim Ireland and tackled the critical issue of ‘permanency’ and what it means for Aboriginal children and young people.

The panel raised significant concerns about current approaches to ‘permanency’ for Aboriginal children and young people which they saw as being inappropriately centred on issues of legal permanency. The language of permanency, and approaches to achieve it, were rejected as perpetuating systems of intervention and separation of Aboriginal children and families. Rather, the panel emphasised the importance of ongoing connections and belonging for Aboriginal children and young people; connections to family, connections to community, connections to culture and connections to Country as a foundation for stability and identity and lifelong wellbeing.

In addition to rejecting permanent legal orders that sever Aboriginal children and young people from their families and communities, the panel focused on the services and supports needed to preserve and heal families, and called for greater investment in prevention and early intervention for families.

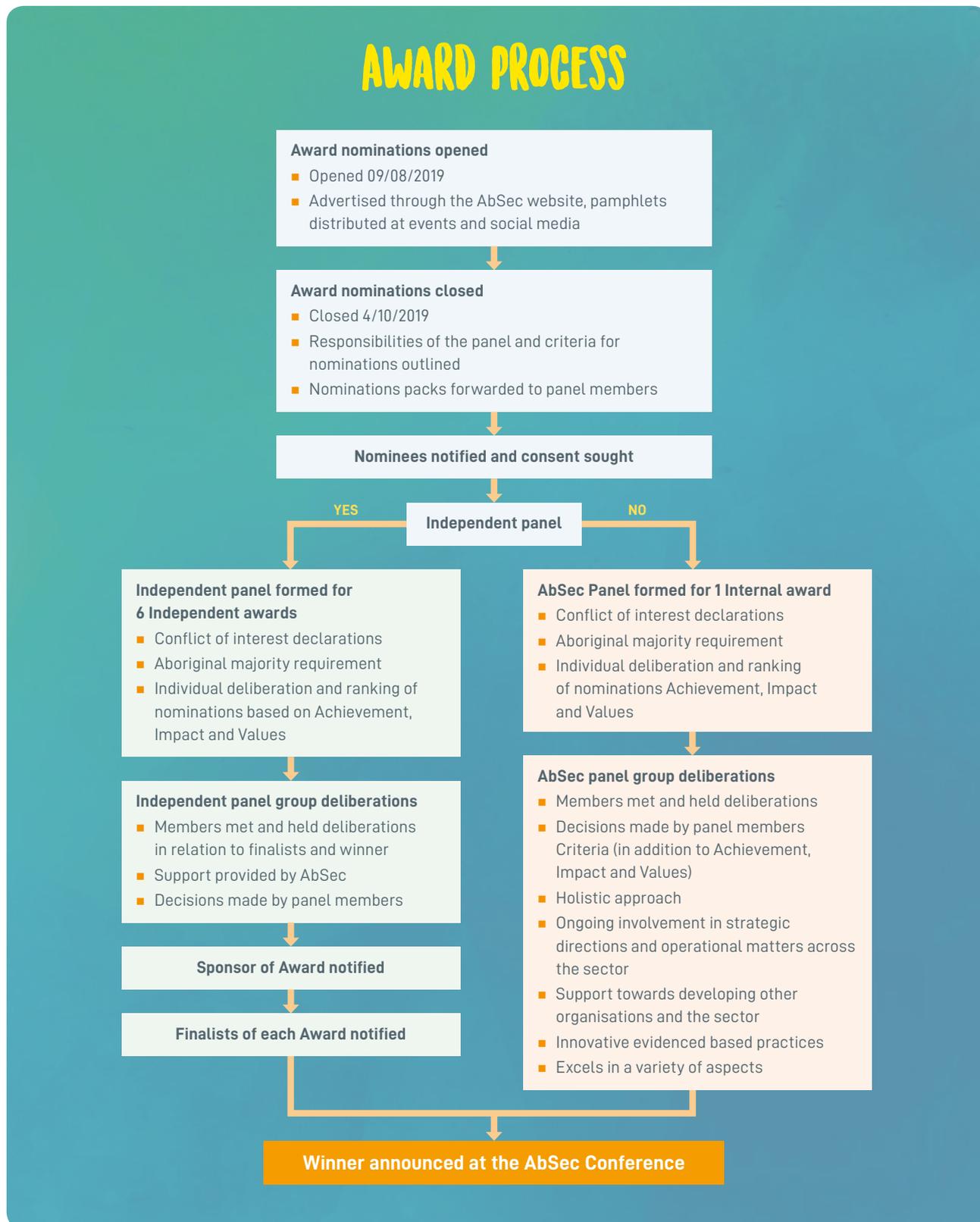
Importantly, the panel challenged each other, and all the conference delegates, to stand together against harmful policies of forced separation and disconnection, and to demand a new approach that recognises, values and strengthens enduring connections for Aboriginal children and families as a key foundation to the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.

AbSec will continue to lead this conversation into 2020, engaging with communities and stakeholders to develop a framework that defines ‘permanency’ from the perspective of Aboriginal communities, encouraging practice and systems to preserve and value an Aboriginal child’s enduring connections to their family, community and culture.



CONFERENCE AWARDS

The inaugural NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Awards celebrated individuals and organisations that have made remarkable contributions and outstanding achievements to improving outcomes for our children and families.



Community Member of the Year

Awarded to an Aboriginal community member that has demonstrated outstanding commitment to and positive impact on the wellbeing of families and communities.

Winner: Bettina Goolagong

Bettina trains, manages and coaches the Koori Representative Netball Team in Wagga Wagga. Her dedication to supporting her team as they represent the Wiradjuri community has not only strengthened their girl's health and overall wellbeing but has built their self-esteem, their connection to their team and community and their broader resilience as young women.

Carer of the Year

Recognising the outstanding contributions of a carer for an Aboriginal child or young person

Winner: Natalie Bird

Natalie is a single parent to three children who also cares for three foster children. She manages the needs of all children with care and compassion. Natalie is vigilant about the children's health and quick to seek professional support when needed. This has resulted in early intervention for one child who is now getting the significant support they require. Natalie keeps the children connected to their culture and their family and she is dedicated to continuing her training and education through Wandiyali.



Practitioner of the Year

Recognising an Aboriginal Practitioner's excellence in achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities

Winner: Shiree Talbot

Shiree is a Wiradjuri woman and an ardent advocate for the de-stigmatising of mothers with a lived experience of the criminal justice system. Through her work with the Beyond Barbed Wire program, she has supported over 85 mothers and 205 children to reconnect after the mother's release from jail, acting as a role model through her own story and helping mothers to overcome the hurdles and barriers thrown their way.

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation of the Year

Recognising an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation demonstrating excellence in service delivery to their community, achieving lasting positive outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and their communities.

Winner: Waminda

Waminda is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation that has been working alongside women and Aboriginal families on the NSW South Coast for over 34 years. Dedicated to creating opportunities for families to thrive, they deliver a unique women's centred approach to primary health care, championing not only the physical wellbeing of individuals but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

Walking Together Award

Recognising the contribution of a non-Aboriginal agency in partnering with Aboriginal communities in service design and delivery, achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal families and communities.

Winner: Barnados Australia's Permanency Support Team – Wyong

The Barnardos Permanency Support team in Wyong supported two Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to become accredited out of home care services. The Barnardos team worked cooperatively and generously with both organisations to enable the transfer of all Aboriginal children and young people and their carers to Yerin.



Young Person of the Year

Recognising the achievements of an Aboriginal Young Person aged under 25 years, and their leadership and contribution to their community

Winner: Storme Burton

Storme has overcome significant barriers and stigma to turn his love of aviation into a career with a major airline. Storme is a resilient, hardworking person who isn't afraid to fight for his rights and advocate on behalf of other young people. He is a shining example of determination and courage.

AbSec Excellence Award

Recognises the achievements and contributions of one nominee across all of the independent categories. It may be awarded to an individual, community or organisation that has excelled in influencing the work, processes and support of the Child and Family sector in NSW.

Winner: Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation

Burrun Dalai is driven by a desire to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities, advocating for self-determination and community-led approaches that are responsive to needs in Aboriginal communities. They model excellence through their therapeutic approaches to supporting children and families and continue to grow their focus towards delivering preservation services, keeping more Aboriginal families together, connected to their community.



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AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (ICN 8926)

21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

T: (02) 9559 5299

E: admin@absec.org.au

W: www.absec.org.au

