



14/09/2016 – For Immediate Release

MEDIA RELEASE: Better Chances for Our Children

Close to 200 people have registered to attend the inaugural Better Chances Forum being held Thursday 15th September at the Lennox Head Cultural and Community Centre.

The event has been designed for workers and services working with children, young people and families – focusing on collaboration, prevention and early intervention, and child protection.

The Better Chances Forum is hosted by The Far North Coast Family Referral Service

- Bring together services and workers from across the Northern Rivers:
- Hear about what is working well to support children, young people and families in our own region and further afield.
- How can we focus more as a region on prevention and early intervention to support the best chances for children and young people
- Information stalls – nominate to have a stall to share your service or program information with delegates.

Among the Speakers on the program are **Mary Jo McVeigh, founder and CEO of Cara House and CaraCare; and Penny Dakin, General Manager – Policy & Strategic Development, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).**

Both Mary Jo and Penny have agreed to be available for media.

Mary Jo McVeigh, founder and CEO of [Cara House](#) and CaraCare.

Mary Jo completed her Honours degree in social science in 1983 and worked in her community of North Belfast before returning to university and completing a Master's Degree in Social Work in 1986. Mary Jo is currently enrolled in undertaking a Doctor of Social work degree at Sydney University

Mary Jo is a trained trauma therapist and an accredited mental health social worker with a passion for exploring and studying comprehensive bodies of knowledge bringing this emphasis for diversity of wisdom to her work.

Mary Jo is acknowledged in her field as an expert in child protection, trauma therapy, in clinical supervision, management consultancy and leadership coaching and professional self-care.

Mary Jo has presented at national and international conferences and published in professional journals and has published two books, one on her development as a



therapist and one on leadership and three **innovative resources for working therapeutically with children and young people who have been abused.**

Mary Jo has been interviewed in the media in Ireland and Australia about her work and life, featuring in magazine and newspaper print.

Mary Jo was Canada Bay City Council Woman of the Year in 2010 and a nominee for NSW Woman of the Year award for her work with traumatised and abused children and young people.

Penny Dakin, General Manager – Policy & Strategic Development, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

Penny Dakin is ARACY's General Manager – Policy & Strategic Development and provides strategic oversight to the wide array of activities across the organisation.

Prior to joining ARACY Penny held a number of executive level positions within the Australian Government Department of Health, spanning over 15 years. Most recently, Penny was A/g Director of the Prevention and Child Health Policy Section and Population Health Policy Section. **Penny has played a significant role in the design and development of population health and prevention policy, with a particular focus on the social determinants of health and domestic policies in relation to the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.** Penny worked closely with the National Preventative Health taskforce and on the development of the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health.

Penny holds Arts and Asian Studies degrees from the Australian National University majoring in sociology, development studies and Hindi.

Effective prevention and early intervention is possibly the most promising strategy for changing the life trajectories of children. Improving the wellbeing of children, young people and their families at population-level requires flexible and responsive systems. In 2015 the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth undertook a rapid strategic literature review of prevention and early intervention programs and systems. The findings of this work were presented in the influential document Better systems, better chances.

Penny's presentation will focus on ARACY's finding about Prevention and early Intervention, including key risk and protective factors, effective systems and what they look like, and key local implementation factors.

MEDIA CONTACTS

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