

Aboriginal Early Childhood Workers Strengthening Day

Feedback and adapted presentation



PAST: WHAT HAS WORKED

- Even when things get hard our passion for the work never stops
- When our communities are empowered to look after our jarjums.
- Our ability to talk things through and work things out
- Even though we had to follow policies and procedures that were in place, we still kept flexible in our responses to suit each situation.
- When Managers and Leaders listen to us and support us we always get better outcomes for us as workers and for the families we are of service to.
- When we are able to take the time to listen to both sides of the story (system/family) to better understand.
- When local Aboriginal workers from other places and local Aboriginal community members were given the opportunity to sit together to share knowledge about local cultural protocols and how things work in the community (kinship/cultural practices/history of the place/who's who) as a local induction/introduction to the region.
- When we created spaces to connect as Aboriginal workers in work time without the expectation that we would connect outside of work hours in our own family and down time.
- When we were able to use nature as our classrooms. Camping trips that were funded.
- Strong cultural leadership created strength in the group as we were more connected and able to support each other.
- When Aboriginal workers feel heard and respected
- When we all connect and support each other it helps keep us on the same page.
- Having the opportunity to stay connected made us feel supported and not alone and isolated.
- When we focus on our identities it increases our ability as workers to focus on the children's identities.
- When we are able to come together to engage in cultural practices, just like this day (art/dance/song/yarning circles)

PAST: WHAT HASN'T WORKED

- When we undervalue ourselves and when others undervalue us in the workplace
- When we have had fear about doing or saying the wrong things in the workplace (things that don't fit into policy/procedure)
- When Managers and leaders don't allow time and space to have the hard conversations.
- When we don't have the time to look after ourselves through self-care when we are the only Aboriginal worker in the workspace.
- When lateral violence in the workplace and in the community affects our ability to focus on our own work with children and families.
- Being told we can't do things our cultural way when we know it's going to work better than the way the system says we should do it.
- Lack of Aboriginal staff to do the front-line work and the paperwork.
- Being the only Aboriginal worker which leads to burn-out, sadness and high staff turnover. It stops the community from wanting to build relationships with us as workers because they know there won't be any longevity to it.
- Not being able to stop to see the positive outcomes, the small wins, and then be able to celebrate the outcomes of our hard work.
- Always being controlled and told what to do, differently, the system way, when we already know why it's not working or improving.

PRESENT

- As Aboriginal workers and community members, we don't need to FIND our voices, we want to USE our voices with courage and be listened to so that we feel heard and respected, the same way that we hear and respect the ways of the departments that we work for.
- We commit to supporting our Aboriginal managers and leaders more so that they don't burn out and carry the heavy burden of living and working between two worlds. We commit to having each other's back and will do what we need to do to create more connection on a regular basis as Aboriginal workers in this region during work hours.
- As Aboriginal people we have valuable gifts to offer to our communities and workplaces. We have knowledge, we are patient and listen deeply, we are able to sit in silence and contemplation with ourselves and with the families and children that need our support. We have our own tools, internal strength and power.
- We would like to be consulted with in connection to child protection concerns, because as community people, we can resolve most issues.
- We would like more opportunities in work hours to connect, communicate with each other, debrief, support each other with openness and respect. In this work we feel that it is easy to lose the stillness we need to be able to keep doing our jobs so that we don't burn out.
- If we are being listened to and heard, our workplaces will respect and support that as Aboriginal community members and workers, we need to network and share what we do with each other so that we can create a more streamlined approach that is cultural informed with a healing approach for the families and also for our own self-care.

MAIN THEMES FROM WORKSHOP

- Aboriginal workers want to strengthen a supportive integrated service approach and nurture the community of care and practice.
- Construct a committee (GMAR) in every area who will become the first contact point for all child protection concerns.
- Empower families and communities to keep our jarjums safe.
- Create community networks to keep our jarjums safe.
- Create more connection between services who look after kids and carers.
- More communication between services to support each other to reduce burn-out and overloading Indigenous staff.
- Healing for Aboriginal workers on a regular basis through more connection days like this one. Connection makes us feel stronger and therefore makes us better workers.

**Feedback from Aunty Janette
Aboriginal Family Support Worker, Murwillumbah Community
Centre**

- I acknowledge the traditional caretakers of 'Country' and thank my Elders past and present for their dedication to and preservation of culture. I thank them for their resilience which enables me to continue taking care of the community in which I live.
- For Family Support Workers and GMAR groups our story is a little different to that of Early Childhood Educators. We are at the coalface when the process of removal begins. We are the ones who are faced with the voices and faces of heightened anxiety and hysteria when clients are informed by DoCS that there has been a ROSH report received.
- We are the first port of call to advocate for clients when they are at their most vulnerable and in my role that means contacting the DoCS office who have raised the concerns.
- This can be a difficult process, but never needs to be. This point of contact is vital to addressing and resolving concerns and is the area which holds the 'unmet needs'.
- At this point it would be of best practice to work together to resolve concerns and issues relating to the safety of a child/young person.
- Child protection is not new, we have been protecting jarjums and keeping them safe for over 60 000 years within kinship systems, using cultural frameworks. FaCS/DoCS did not invent the need for child protection, only complicated it with rigid policy and procedure which do not fit individual needs and flexible community supports.
- We need assistance to ensure the ongoing support and employment of integral conduits between community and the FaCS/DoCS system. Financial support which will enable us to be better resourced to assist those needing support and advocacy. From us and them, we need to create unity. That is what true reconciliation looks like.

