

Summary Report

Right Support. Right Time. 2019 Better Chances Regional Forum

The *Right Support. Right Time. 2019 Better Chances Regional Forum* held on 13 June 2019 at Lennox Head Cultural and Community Centre explored what we need to operate in a more trauma responsive way and to connect children, young people and families with the right support at the right time. The forum was an initiative of the Northern Rivers Better Chances Forum (BCF), a collaboration focusing on reducing the number of children and young people in/ entering out of home care (see BCF Terms of Reference at Appendix 1).

The event attracted 135 attendees representing 46 organisations. The day was facilitated by Naomi Moran, General Manager at the Koori Mail and we had 16 presentations and 4 workshops. All of the presenters were from the Northern Rivers, with the exception of two NSW Government presenters from Sydney who joined with The Family Centre to present on the results of a child protection pilot project. There was a really strong focus on Aboriginal culture, and understanding how the whole sector can work more supportively alongside Aboriginal workers, organisations and communities. Other themes for the day included connecting across organisations and systems, acting on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and connecting with community in our work. Most presentations will be online at www.socialfutures.org.au/development/better-chances-forum

Evaluation told us that 95% of attendees surveyed thought the forum was engaging and interesting, and 96% of those surveyed learnt new things or made new connections that will assist them with their work. Participants also told us that most useful and enjoyable sessions on the day were Helene Collard, (We Al-li), Carmen Stewart (It Takes a Town) and Naomi Moran (Forum facilitator). (Evaluation results summary at Appendix 2)

Discussion on the day documented in this summary report has informed the proposed next steps for BCF.

Proposed next steps...for discussion

1. Ongoing financial support from BCF member agencies for a Strengthening Day every term for the next 1 - 2 years.
2. BCF host a conversation between child protection services (including NSW FACS), interested Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers and other interested stakeholders about collaborating with community on responding to child protection concerns.
3. BCF host a conversation between Aboriginal early childhood and family support workers and other BCF members about strengthening a supportive, integrated service approach and nurture the community of care and practice, and what this means in practice for mainstream services.
4. Follow up session for workshop 2 on becoming more trauma responsive in our work; and consider ongoing opportunities for reflection and peer support.
5. BCF steering group to consider options to respond to FASD issues and needs from workshop 3 and stakeholders who need to be included.
6. Discuss the connecting with community workshop 4 notes and options for supporting each other with this work.
7. Continue Working Together initiative connecting school principals with services and programs. Evaluation and follow up.
8. Continue to seek and follow up opportunities for cross sector connection, eg, promoting referral to legal advice in the early childhood sector, explore service gaps, focus on "Tell us once".



Following discussion at the BCF steering group our next steps will inform BCF's work program and results framework. We thank everyone who contributed to making this event a great and challenging day for the sector. Most presentations from the forum, as well as more information about the Better Chances Forum will be available online at <https://socialfutures.org.au/development/better-chances-forum>.

Forum overview

Welcome and first plenary

Laurel Moran, Nyangbal Bundjalung Elder, welcomed delegates.

Overview of the Better Chances Forum (BCF), Ian O'Reilly, Social Futures (BCF Convenor).

This presentation included the purpose and activities of the forum and how they relate to the changes we are working towards in services and our population. The BCF is working to reduce the number of children and young people (C&YP) in out of home care in our region. Latest available data (FACS 2017) reports there are 963 C&YP in out of home care (OOHC) in Northern NSW.

Nationally, at the time of the Bringing Them Home Report in 1997 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander C&YP represented one in every five children in OOHC (Figure 1). This increased to one in three by 2017. For NSW the rate is higher at 38.1 per cent. In our Northern NSW region it is higher again at 42.5 per cent, while the 2016 census found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people only represent 4.5 per cent of the total Northern NSW/ Northern Rivers population.

Fig 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people – per cent of all in OOHC



References: [Family Matters Report 2017](#)¹; NSW FACS Improving the lives of children and young people [dashboard](#); NSW FACS 2017 Targeted Earlier Intervention Northern NSW data analysis.

Given over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander C&YP in OOHC, particularly in our region, the BCF is focusing on bringing the community services sector more supportively alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, organisations and communities.

The presentation referenced: The Healing Foundation's 2017 Bringing Them Home 20 years on report: an action plan for healing, which calls for a comprehensive response for stolen generations, healing intergenerational trauma and creating an environment for change; and The Families Matter Roadmap (SNAICC) which has set a target to eliminate over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC by 2040. Sub targets in the Family Matters Road Map and The Healing Foundation's action plan are informing development of the BCF results framework and

¹ The Family Matters Report 2017: Measuring trends to turn the tide on over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia.

work plan. See <https://healingfoundation.org.au/bringing-them-home/> and <https://www.familymatters.org.au/>.

An overview of the BCF submission to the NSW Their Futures Matter Access System review – endorsed by 22 BCF member organisations – was also presented. It is available via the BCF web page and provides a policy platform for the work of the forum.

Delegates were encouraged to use the 2019 BCF Regional Forum as an opportunity to reflect on how we can contribute to creating an environment for change, what we need to operate in a truly trauma-responsive way, what makes it possible to have the time to listen, to offer consistency, validation and true connection? What gets in the way? How can we work more supportively alongside Aboriginal workers, organisations and communities? What can we do within our own work and what needs organisation support or system change?

Trauma and system transformation: Aboriginal cultural approaches to personal and professional growth, Helene Collard, We Al-li

Helene presented We Al-Li's Culturally Informed Trauma Integrated Healing Approach and discussed how it relates to our work with clients and strengthening our staff and organisations.

Breakout sessions

The breakout session included presentations around four themes.

1. Approaches to working with trauma

- **The main thing is knowing that you have support behind you: The lived experience of children in therapeutic foster care**, Dr Lynne McPherson, Southern Cross University.
- **The science of trauma informed practice: A wholistic perspective**, Katie Burgess, Northern Rivers Community gateway.
- **Adventure therapy: A 'deep intervention' program for young people at-risk who have experienced trauma**, Andy Hamilton, Human Nature Adventure Therapy.

2. Integration and referral across programs and sectors

- **Working Together: connecting schools with community services and programs**, Trish Kokany, NSW Department of Education and Katrina Ross, Social Futures.
- **Early legal assistance: Pathways to keep families together while keeping children safe**, Karin Ness, Charlotte Buckton and Jo Colautti, Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre, with the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT Ltd.

3. Understanding and responding to local needs

- **Exploring and responding to youth mental health and substance use challenges in the North Coast**, Dr Belinda Gardner and Dr Orit Ben-Harush, North Coast Primary Health Network.
- **Next steps in a restoration case: A Photovoice participatory action research workshop; building relationships, mapping assets and enhancing cultural safety from the ground up**, CASPA's restoration care team and lead clinician, Paula Gilding.

4. Connecting with families

- **Flourishing Families: Supporting families in the outside-of-school-hours care program**, Jennifer Parker, Northern Rivers Community Gateway.
- **A holistic early childhood project for enhancing parent-child wellbeing**, Jane Hanckel, Inspired Education.

Second plenary

Placing community at the centre of change, Carmen Stewart, It Takes a Town

Carmen presented the findings of the first two years of It Takes a Town (ITAT) – a collective impact initiative focused on growing a culture of generosity and responsiveness to create opportunities and environments for all children to thrive. This is a story about what happens when we put community at the centre of change. Government and the sector can't respond to the complexity of problems on their own. When we find permission and confidence to act communities can turn protective factors on and off. People want to contribute but are often not sure how.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and offending behaviour, Meg Perkins, Tweed Coast Psychology

Meg's presentation provided an overview of FASD, understanding FASD as brain injury, its impacts, how to recognise it, the importance of early diagnosis, and treatment and strategies for working with children and families. The presentation was a key input to the BCF afternoon workshop on *Acting on FASD in the Northern Rivers*.

Lunchtime performance Budjerah Slabb

Budjerah is a young, 17 year old singer songwriter from Fingal Head, Northern NSW. Budjerah performs locally and interstate and has been a part of many major productions including Interwonven and The Spirit of Churaki as part of Festival 2018 on the Gold Coast and more recently performed as a special guest for The Spirit of Churaki at the Sydney Opera House for Vivid 2019. Budjerah's music is a blend of soul and R&B.

Third plenary

Streamlined response pilot, David Boutkan, The Family Centre and Gemma Millar, Joanne Dobry and Tony O'Brien, NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

David, Gemma, Joanna and Tony presented findings of the Northern NSW pilot project to build and strengthen the Child Protection Helpline's relationship with the district and increase the quality of information and decision making at the helpline.

Feedback to the sector and decision-makers about working alongside us, Aboriginal early childhood workers' strengthening day, North Coast NSW, 31 May 2019

The first Aboriginal early childhood workers' strengthening day, was held in Ballina on 31 May, Supported by the Better Chances Forum, YWCA and Northcott. 28 workers from across the North Coast came together for a day of healing and peer support, acknowledging they are often the first people families come to for support when their children are at risk of removal. This was also an opportunity to talk about what Aboriginal early childhood workers would like the wider sector to do to work more supportively alongside them. Lara Bennett and Aunty Janette Saunders presented this to the 2019 BCF regional Forum on behalf of Strengthening Day participants.

Summary – our perspective

- 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 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.

Collaborating with community on responding to child protection concerns – family support worker perspective

“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.”

Aboriginal early childhood workers, and particularly family support workers and GMAR groups, are often the first port of call, faced with the voices and faces of heightened anxiety and hysteria when families are informed a Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) report has been received. Contacting FACS at this point, when families are at their most vulnerable, to understand the report and support the family, can be a difficult process, but it does not need to be. This point of contact is vital and the best opportunity to work together to understand unmet needs and work together to resolve concerns and issues relating to the safety of the child/ young person.

We need to ensure there is connectivity between community and the child protection system, and financial and other resources to assist families needing support and advocacy to succeed in caring for their children. From us and them, we need to create unity. This is what true reconciliation looks like.

What we as Aboriginal workers need from the sector

- Strengthen a supportive, integrated service approach and nurture the community of care and practice.
- 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 [once every school term?]. Connection makes us feel stronger and therefore makes us better workers.

Collaboration for reconciliation: Working towards a better future for our Aboriginal children, families and communities, Kate Maclean, Coraki CWA Preschool & Cath Gillespie, Teacher and Educational Leader from Evans Head Preschool

Kate and Cath talked about their experience, working through the Northern Rivers Preschool Alliance, making a commitment to Reconciliation in their services for their children and families. They shared about the process of their collective approach and how it has helped to shift early childhood teachers' focus to understanding what they are already doing in working towards Reconciliation in their preschool and extending on those ideas.

Workshops

1. Connecting across organisations, programs and systems, led by Jem Mills and Chereece Dixon, Social Futures

Participants were seated in groups based on the part of the sector they worked. They picked another part of the sector they wanted to connect with and used a template to clarify the purpose of connecting. They then met, discussed barriers to connection and a 'big dream idea' to create greater connection between their parts of the sector. Feedback from the workshop

stated that participants enjoyed taking the time to connect with people and learn more about local services.

Part of this session also included a connection card activity which ran throughout the event. Attendees were invited to fill in a 'Connection Card' (questions: name, organisation, mobile number, I would like to connect with someone from, about/for), stick their card on the 'Connection wall', check the wall throughout the day and make a connection by sending a text message to someone you might be able to connect with. On the day we received 15 connection cards on the Connection wall. These connections will be followed up through BCF.

2. Becoming more trauma responsive in our work, led by Helene Collard, We Ai-Li and Ian O'Reilly, Social Futures (BCF Convenor)

Participants worked in small groups of three to four people to discuss and document what they need in their work to become more trauma responsive. Some preliminary collaborative analysis was done to group the data generated. Participants agreed to reconvene to continue the discussion and analysis, and to consider next steps. Data from the workshop is presented below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing power and governance • More autonomy as workers • More decision-making authority • More Autonomy as a worker • Supporting choice and control for customers that are unable to speak for themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to build relationships with families • Longer timeframes needed to work with families • Smaller caseloads (even one family less) • Time for follow up • Connection to family [between worker and family?] • More time, more capability to assess understand needs • Manageable caseloads (including distance to travel; number of family members) • Paradigm shift: I see you; I hear you. I Join you. We are here for you (responsibility in action) • Time to yarn between colleagues and build relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for families: additional funding; local connections • Appropriate resources for staff: allocated research time; investing in staff development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More outreach services in regional communities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and procedures are not people • Walk the TIP talk • Environment effect on children and families • Being still to listen and learn – to best connect • TIP before the front door • Working from a trauma informed way, how do I make sure that my staff are taking care of themselves and their wellbeing • Trauma informed practice starts at the front door
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New accountability frameworks: data/ reporting; outcomes; flexibility 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-medicalisation of trauma • Hyper-awareness of trauma behaviour – embed in model/ framework/ culture 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In education more staff trained in trauma awareness and how to respond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural consultancy – staff safety [what does this need to look like?] • Cultural competency • How does entitlement and privilege and lack of cultural humility block true connections? • Maintain Aboriginal culture, history, local context in our reflective practice and therapeutic approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers need humility – to understand the history of Australian culture was constructed by the dominant narrative – Aboriginal narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral processes: Limitations; meeting criteria • More collaborative approach to integrating services • Simplified referral pathways 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical services Vs group preventative services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and education • Collaborative therapeutic care teams • Collaboration • Accessibility to other services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing power and governance + giving more choice, control + autonomy to Aboriginal staff and clients • Formally and informally put TIC knowledge and skills into the hands of clients • Staff and org to practice TIC as an org
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional supervision: internal; external • More training and supervision 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma champions: to debrief; filter info; & external clinical supervision • Trauma informed champions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote yarning • Yarning circles (continuity) 	

3. **Acting on FASD in the Northern Rivers**, led by Joy Peters, Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre

This workshop was scheduled in response to very strong interest on consolidating our approach to acting on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the Northern Rivers. Several workshops and forums within the region in the weeks leading up to the forum included discussion of FASD. Needs and issues identified for consideration are listed below.

- Need to promote media focus on FASD – break down stigma.
- Supporting parents:
 - create a support group for parents/carers of children with FASD – consider the Gold Coast model (Liz Lewis to share information regarding this group).
 - educate carers/parents about FASD alongside therapists and staff.
 - many parents don't understand the diagnosis.
 - need medicos to inform parents how important assessments are, implications of missing appointments for assessment, missed opportunity for early intervention and support.
- Need a longer forum to discuss FASD – for everyone who works with children. Psychologists and other therapist forum to improve diagnostic skills.
- Assessment and diagnosis:
 - create network of psychologists [and other practitioners?] who can diagnose [and treating practitioners?]
 - a soft entry questionnaire modelled on the Canadian example which asks parents about alcohol consumption during pregnancy to be used by all practitioners.
 - structural issues- consistent assessment forms eg antenatal services
 - misconceptions and diagnosis and packages with NDIS – once a diagnosis no opportunity to change diagnosis by OT and others.
 - issues with NDIS- misdiagnosis resulting in inappropriate plans
 - new FASD diagnosis criteria 2016
 - speech assessments need to be undertaken as soon as possible eg. Early years before school.
- More collaboration around referral pathways.
- Information sharing on acting on FASD – Meg Perkins has a FB page which can be used for FASD info sharing.
- Therapeutic strategies do exist- earliest intervention best outcome, before age 4 ideally – Meg and Anne starting a consultancy practice for referrals for assessment of FASD and therapy.
- Consider funding options including North Coast Primary Health Network.

4. **Connecting with community in our work**, led by Carmen Stewart, It Takes A Town

This workshop built on Carmen's It Takes A Town presentation. Participants discussed and reflected on opportunities and challenges for connecting with community in their work, as reflected in the notes below.

Connection

- How do I build connections (meaningful) in an area where I don't live?
- Is there a way of showing what people are doing now and how we can connect with them?
- We need to learn what is in the community.
- It needs to be about reciprocity rather than people being passive recipients – ask clients what their passions are.
- Barriers- Too much emphasis on paperwork, not enough opportunity to connect. Difficulty in getting commitment for people to engage. People aren't offering because of legalities. Risk and compliance is a huge barrier.

Service promotion

- How do we service an area without many services?
- What is the best way to show people what services are available?
- Use Co-design and community involvement.

Focus on the positives

- "I live in a street where people look out for each other. How do we extend this?"
- There are lots of people willing to share their skills.

Technology

- How can we use technology to connect people?
- Can we use technology to demonstrate a community is safe?

Appendix 1: Northern Rivers Better Chances Forum Terms of Reference

Purpose

Bring together services and workers from across the Northern Rivers to identify and share information about what's working well in communities across Northern Rivers – and examples from further afield – and what we can do better **to support better chances for children, young people and their families:**

- responding to evidence about what works, and generating evidence about what works
- identify where support, collaboration and/ or resources are needed for successful activities to continue or grow – and how it can be provided
- where / how successful activities can inform work in other parts of the region
- where / how do we need to focus more on prevention and early intervention, and critical gaps the Better Chances Forum can respond to.

Develop shared population level indicators to help us track progress in supporting better chances for children, young people and their families across the Northern Rivers, and to ensure this information informs the direction the Forum.

Steering Group

The Better Chances Forum Steering Group meets every two months to drive the Forum. The steering group aims to have members representing relevant community services networks and groups across the region (including from the health and education sectors). Membership is open to any group or individual who supports the purpose of the Better Chances Forum.

The steering group is also a subcommittee of the Northern Rivers Social Change Collaboration – a group of community and government organisations working together towards improving community wellbeing and attracting investment for positive social change in the Northern Rivers region of NSW – supporting implementation of the Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan.

Steering group decisions will be made by consensus where possible, and by simple majority vote when consensus cannot be reached (50 per cent of member organisations plus 1).

Members are responsible for raising any conflicts of interest and ensuring they are managed appropriately, including not participating in decisions/ discussion if necessary. The convenor is available to discuss any conflicts of interests or related issues.

Activities and engagement

The Better Chances Forum Steering Group is committed to ensuring the Forum's work is informed by children, young people and their families, and particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Northern Rivers.

The steering group acknowledges the importance of culture to wellbeing for children, young people, and their families and communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and will work to reflect this in the approach and focus of the Forum's activities.

The Steering Group provides a forum for exploring service systems challenges, gaps and opportunities to consider how members of the forum can contribute to a response.

Members of the steering group and other interested forum participants will contribute to the work of the Forum by connecting relevant local activities and information with the Forum including through community engagement, programs, networks and groups.

Convenor: Social Futures Contact ian.oreilly@socialfutures.org.au or 0438 005 798.

Appendix 2- Evaluation results – Summary

Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the forum and sent an online link to the survey after the event. 135 evaluations were offered, 55 evaluations were received.

Most useful and enjoyable sessions

- Helene Collard, We Al-li (25)
- Carmen Stewart, It Takes a Town (25)
- Naomi Moran, Forum facilitator (22)
- Feedback from Aboriginal early childhood workers (12)
- Budjerah Slabb performance (15)
- Breakout: Approaches to working with trauma (10)
- Workshop: Connecting with community in our work (7)

Percent of respondents agreeing with the following statements

- Overall, the forum was engaging and interesting (95%) (50/53)
- Overall, the forum was well designed and informative (95%) (49/52)
- I learned new things today or made new connections that will assist my work (96%) (48/50)
- I enjoyed the opportunity to network and learn about how other organisations are delivering services in our region (98%) (50/51)

General comments

- 84% of people positively commented on the quality of the venue and the catering. Many people commented on the MC
- consideration and care were given by organisers
- excellent presentations and free time to connect with others
- Verbal comment- the event felt culturally lead and inclusive of Aboriginal people
- Post event email- I wanted to acknowledge how amazing the day was in so many ways!!! And that is including feedback I received from many people attending
- Post event email- it was a great event and great to network and find out about more programs happening in the region.

Considerations for future events

- Desire for extra forums focus on disability and young people
- Allowing more time for collaboration and networking
- People want more strategies with practical take away's from the day
- More time for each speaker and less topics
- Include participant note pads
- catering- ensure shorter line up time
- Better time management- less content on the day
- Focus on connection and refecation rather than overload of content
- Do not include the same content as previous years