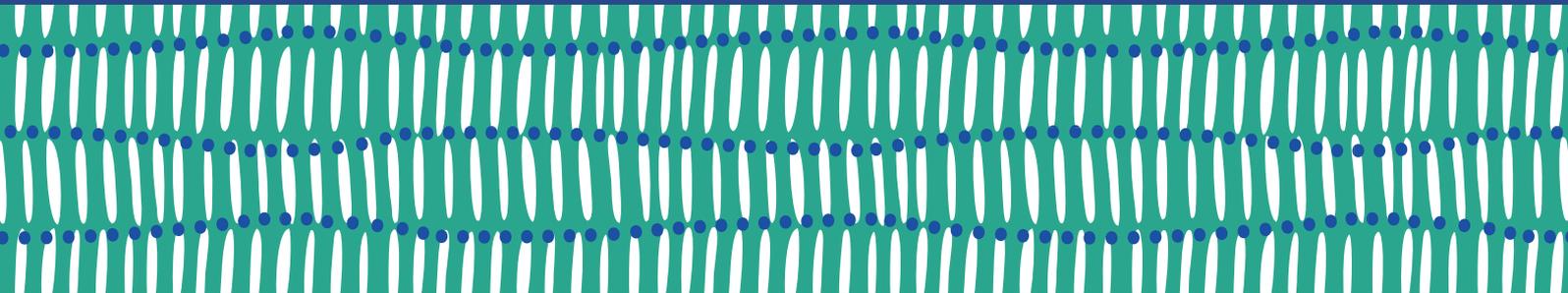




Barang Regional Alliance

NSW OCHRE Healing Forum

June 2018





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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About the NSW OCHRE Healing Forums

During the consultations that took place to inform OCHRE, the NSW government's Aboriginal Affairs policy, healing was identified as a priority by NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The state-wide *Healing Our Way Forum* held in July 2014 was the first step in formal healing dialogue between Aboriginal people and government.

In the *Healing Our Way Forum* report, the NSW Government committed to continue the dialogue with interested communities to understand how agencies can operate to support healing with Aboriginal people. Building on that commitment, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, in partnership with The Healing Foundation, committed to supporting six OCHRE Healing Forums across NSW.

This document presents the findings from the Barang (Central Coast) Healing Forum which was hosted by the Barang Regional Alliance.



Barang Healing Forum in Context

The Barang ('tomorrow' in Darkinjung language) Healing Forum was held on November 30th 2017 at the Crown Plaza, Terrigal. One hundred and fifteen (115) people attended the Healing Forum, made up of community members and representatives including, but not limited to; health services, child and family services, education, the Local Aboriginal Lands Council, justice, disability services, arts and culture and Local, State and Commonwealth government service providers.

The forum was facilitated by Grant Sarra, an experienced healing facilitator, following discussion with the local planning group – all of whom recognised the importance of independent facilitation to achieve the best possible outcomes for the community.

Local Elder, Uncle Gavi Duncan, welcomed guests with a smoking ceremony through traditional song and performed in Darkinjung language. There were performances by the Didgeridoo group and dance groups from Gorokan High School to create a culturally safe space for the healing conversations to take place.

The Barang Healing Forum represented Aboriginal people and communities of the Central Coast (acknowledged as the fastest growing Aboriginal community in the country), with a population of approximately 12,600 and with a diverse demographic and mix of traditional nations.

Barang Regional Alliance is the backbone organisation for the Commonwealth *Empowered Communities* and NSW *Local Decision Making* initiatives on the Central Coast. It aims to work together with government and key stakeholders, empowering Aboriginal people through a unified voice to create a strong, empowered future that will generate social and economic prosperity for all community members.

At the time of the Barang Healing Forum, Seven Aboriginal organisations opted in, to form Barang Regional Alliance: Bara Barang Corporation, Bungree Aboriginal Association, Darkinjung LALC, Mingaletta Aboriginal Corporation, NAISDA Dance College and Yerin Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Service. Barang Regional Alliance's vision is to provide direct access to key government stakeholders via the *Empowered Communities* and *Local Decision Making* frameworks. On a practical level, this means promoting Aboriginal-led decision making, accountability and structure. There is also a focus on the retention of Aboriginal culture for the wider community and future generations.

Goals of the Forum

Key healing themes identified by the Local Planning Committee ahead of the Healing Forum were:

- Building strong cultural identity to increase the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. The Aboriginal population of this area have a variety of connections to other communities across NSW. There are very few community accessible alternatives currently available to preserve cultural knowledge to pass on to future generations;
- Maintaining and developing strong families to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people. The development of strategies such as alternatives to violence, increasing family connection and formalising safe and affordable housing were identified as factors that could serve to strengthen young people and their families;
- Access to appropriate levels of education specifically tailored to the unique need of individual young people. The creation and development of pathways with links to further education to ensure young people are supported to stay in school, to transition to tertiary education and importantly, to have access to cultural education as a means to building strong and resilient identities;
- Employment opportunities where school leavers are supported to find employment, especially when they are young parents or when they have limited family support options available to them;
- Support for young parents and investment in young people as future leaders to ensure better outcomes for the next generation. There is already many emerging leaders who will benefit from continued support and encouragement.

These healing themes informed the specific goals for the Healing Forum:

- To clearly define the healing needs and aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the NSW Central Coast;
- To set clear short, medium and long-term healing goals that will form the basis for the development of a Barang Healing Strategy after the forum;
- To establish strategic partnerships between key agencies and service providers that prioritises understanding of the healing needs and aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the NSW Central Coast.

Setting the Context for Yarning

In setting the context for the day, Tina West, representing Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council noted the high population of Aboriginal young people on the Central Coast and that the region has one of the fastest growing Aboriginal populations in NSW. She added that there is a need to recognise that trans-generational trauma is a huge issue for communities and that this means Aboriginal people in the region are represented on the lower end of health, education and employment spectrums. It was noted that having discussions about how to heal communities can be difficult – *“we know that sometimes hearing and saying the things that need to be said is hard”*. However, participants were informed that the forum provided a safe space to look at the healing

needs of young people in the community; to make a better, stronger, more resilient community for everyone – but especially young people.

“Community has told us that we want government and other agencies to work in partnership with us, to better understand our challenges, and recognise our ability to develop the best kind of strategies and solutions to bring harmony back to our community. We can’t do this without government and other agencies being a part of our conversations as they are an important link on our healing journey”

Throughout the day participants explored issues and solutions via three concurrent Yarning Circles. The use of Yarning Circles is an important process within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It has been used by Indigenous peoples for enabling learning from a collective group, to build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge.

Yarning Circles are a harmonious, creative and collaborative way of communicating to enable responsible, respectful and honest interactions between participants, building trusting relationships and fostering accountability while providing a safe place to be heard and to respond. Breaking out into Yarning Circles therefore increased the possibility for all participants (given the very large attendance at the forum) to have a voice in a culturally safe environment.

The Yarning Circles were co-facilitated by young people from the Central Coast Local Community. This provided an opportunity to build the capacity and cultural knowledge of young Aboriginal leaders in the community. Each of the facilitators were mentored leading into and during the forum, to ensure they were fully supported and capacity was enhanced. The involvement of young people from the local community was a strong, important and successful aspect of the Barang Healing Forum.

The Yarning Circles were structured as follows.

Yarning Circle 1 included three concurrent sessions which were held across three themes:

- **Strong families / strong identity** which explored issues preventing families from being strong, and affect cultural identity;
- **Supporting young families** which explored issues facing young families;
- **Education and Employment** which explored the factors preventing Aboriginal people on the Central Coast from engaging in education, and the factors that prevent Aboriginal people on the Central Coast from engaging in employment.

Yarning Circle 2 then provided an opportunity for the same group to follow up on the themes and conversations from the previous Yarning Circle identifying healing solutions and identified actions to support healing:

- **Strong families / strong identity** which identified actions that need to be taken to strengthen families and identity; as well as considering the role that services can play in supporting healing;

- **Supporting young families** which identified actions that support young families and considered the role service providers can play in supporting healing for young families;
- **Education and Employment** which identified actions to overcome the barriers to education and employment for people on the Central Coast and considered the role service providers play from a healing perspective.

On conclusion of each of the yarning circles the co-facilitators discussed with the community what was spoken about in each of the groups and spoke about the issues raised by the community. This was important as attendees were only able to participate in one of the yarning circles on the day. Community and service providers were able to listen to the current and long standing issues being spoken by all who attended.

In the second half of the day, a Youth Panel Discussion was held with the young people who had facilitated the yarning circles, leading the discussion. Following the conversations held between young people and the community present, the following points were raised:

- Young people were able to give feedback to the community and service providers on the key themes that had emerged in the Yarning Circles they had facilitated;
- Young people were provided with opportunities to reflect on their own journey as emerging leaders and some of their successes, challenges and aspirations;
- Young people were provided with an opportunity to discuss the future direction of healing for young Aboriginal people and their aspirations for the Aboriginal community on the Central Coast.

The following section presents the key findings from both the Yarning Circles and the Youth Panel Discussion, these are structured under the key themes from each Yarning Circle.



Key Findings

Key themes are structured according to those presented in each of the Yarning Circles:

1. Strong Families / Strong Identity

In Yarning Circle 1 participants considered the problems and issues that are preventing families from being strong and the problems and issues that affect cultural identity. The same group then held a second Yarning Circle to identify actions that are needed to strengthen families and identity, and role services can play in supporting healing.

What prevents families from being strong? What problems and issues affect cultural identity?

The Yarning Circle acknowledged that while there are some strong families with strong identities within the Central Coast, there are critical issues that prevent others from being strong. Strong families and strong culture were viewed as having a strong correlation.

Our complex history means we don't always know the truth and it creates a lot of problems. We are struggling to understand how to manage our own people

Identity is right down the list. We are struggling with issues of trauma such as mental health, addictions and racism

We have suffered from colonisation and we have to not just identify but embrace culture and heritage... We need to celebrate the positive parts of identity. We need to understand what identity is and we have to challenge the stereotypes

Dealing with the impacts of colonisation and separation (through the Stolen Generations) was a paramount issue that has impacted negatively on families. The continued ramifications and impact of negative and detrimental government imposed policies has resulted in significant levels of trauma and therefore compromised families.

Having knowledge of their own cultural identity, and having connection to land and country was reported as a challenge faced by many Aboriginal people on the Central Coast. This is a region that has a diverse demographic with many of the current community having traditional links to other nations across NSW and Australia.

This is the mini-United Nations [the Central Coast]. We have so many Aboriginal groups here and there is loss of identity and movement through colonisation... we don't have a place where we can come together and be strong... we lack a place to be... a safe space

Confirmation of identity is a challenge for many Aboriginal people on the Central Coast and proves to be a barrier to education and employment (see sections that follow). It also affects general health and well-being due to a sense of disconnection from land, culture and even self:

Tick a box on identity has become the basis of my existence but I lack a sense of what culture is... our own children don't know where they are from and our families are disconnected

We are often off country and families don't always get a sense of connection when you are off country or can link into services... we don't always have links and we don't have the connections to create support

Identity takes us a long time. It is part inside of me as an Elder and I have to help pass it on and help people to find supports

Colonisation has left families disconnected and divided. The Yarning Circle noted that an additional legacy of colonisation is lateral violence and that this weakens families and communities:

Separation has caused a lot of resentment in families... this is the outcome of Stolen Generations policies

{The} thing that happened to us is colonisation ... we were powerless against this ... whilst we run everybody down we continue to be powerless. We have to stop this and our families will grow stronger

Respecting the culture and knowledge we all bring ... that brings us together... If you walk on my land I am responsible for you and you are responsible to me

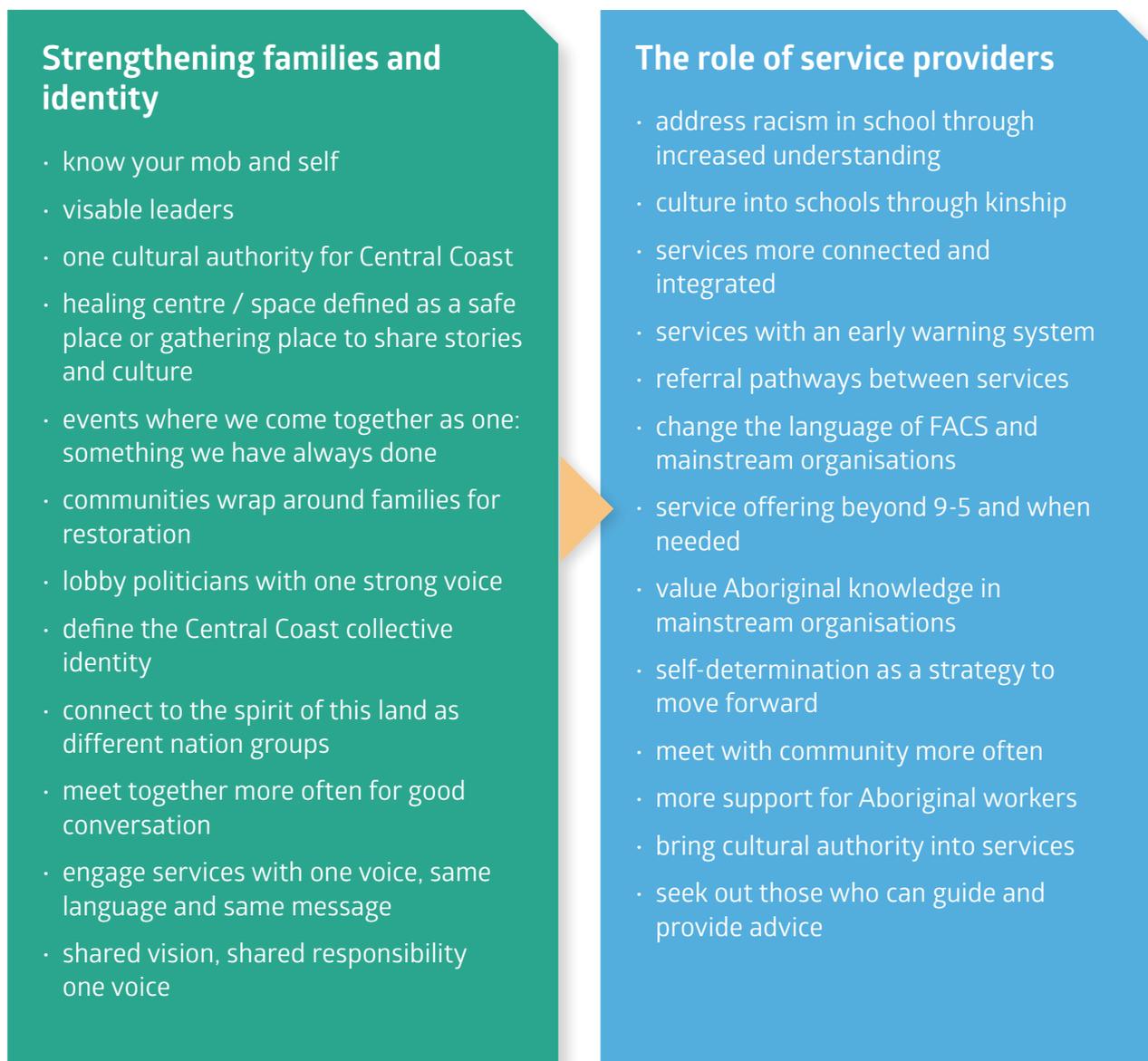
In summary, the key problems and issues that prevent families being strong are related to colonisation – which has left families and communities divided, a legacy of lateral violence, and the loss of identity and connection to self, others and country. The Yarning Circles reported the need to find ways to celebrate connection – to each other and to culture; as well as to develop solutions to combat this:

We have suffered from colonisation and we have to not just identify but embrace culture and heritage... we have to stop fighting amongst ourselves and find solutions

What action do we need to strengthen families and identity? What role do services play in supporting healing?

Participants in the second Yarning Circle considered these two questions together. A number of key themes emerged. Diagram 1 provides a summary of that conversation.

Diagram 1: Healing Solutions – Building Strong Families and Cultural Identity



A safe place to enable healing

The Yarning Circle strongly advocated for the establishment of a safe place for families to come together to strengthen families and strengthen cultural identity. As one participant suggested: *“this is a healing thing... this is how we can heal”*.

The group suggested the spirit of the Central Coast needed to be defined: *“we need to connect to the spirit of this land – as different nation groups”*. Within this there is a need for a place where stories can be gathered and shared:

It's been over twenty years that we've been talking about a centre, a place where we can gather to share stories and culture and support each other

A safe place with a sense of space and place to share challenges and stresses... Identity will be strengthened when we have a space/ place that belongs to us

We need a gathering or healing centre for the Central Coast and then we can meet more often and join together and have regular contact... everyone coming together for good conversation

The group noted the importance of the Central Coast community having a united voice, and that this would enable the community to be *“at the peak of our power”*.

Young People and Education

The group acknowledged that there were already some strong young leaders that are visible in the community – including those co-facilitating the forum, however, more young leaders need to be provided with opportunities for leadership development and the place for such development could be undertaken within schools.

However, some young people in the Yarning Circle suggested that identity is not something schools can teach, while others talked about the possibilities within the school setting for culture to be strengthened:

Can't get a lot of info as my father tried to hide my culture and this has made it hard for me to know who I am. School has opened up new paths for me culturally ... I am learning didge and dance

We can bring culture into schools through kinship or an event where we all come together as one which is something we have always done... come together

What Services Can Do?

Diagram 1 articulates actions that services can undertake to improve their service delivery. This included the need for more connection and integration of services, with an early warning system that would allow for greater community level support for families. This suggested process would potentially include referral pathways within services operating outside of the standard nine-to-five service model; *“we [communities] don’t live nine-to-five”*.

The Yarning Circle also identified the need for mainstream services to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and recognise ‘Aboriginal English’ as language since *“White language is a barrier that needs to change”*. This would be part of a broader commitment and strategy to self-determination moving forward.

The Yarning Circle noted that services have unrealistic expectations of Aboriginal workers and also noted the importance of having people with local knowledge, culture and connection in positions that are able to service the community. Finally, the group reported that communities should engage with services with *“One voice, the same language and the same message; then the services will listen to the unified voice... we [Central Coast communities] need a shared vision, shared responsibility and one voice”*.



2. Young Families

The second theme had a focus on young families. Across two Yarning Circles the participants in this group first explored the problems and issues facing young families and then identified actions to support young families and the role that service providers can play in supporting healing for young families.

During Yarning Circle 1, the group firstly held discussions to define a 'young family'. The definition was 'families where the parents were aged between 16 and 20 years'. It was noted that many of the issues and challenges described in this focus group were the result of intergenerational trauma and could be associated with disconnection from culture and a lack of appropriate role modelling.

In Yarning Circle 1, a key theme raised was the 'shame factor', which limited the ability for young parents to access services and help. 'Shame' was also considered to be part of the barrier for young parents to gain access to culture and also resulted in fear of not being recognised by others as Aboriginal.

Young parents might not know what supports are there and what they're entitled to... they feel shame of being a young parent and suffer from stigma

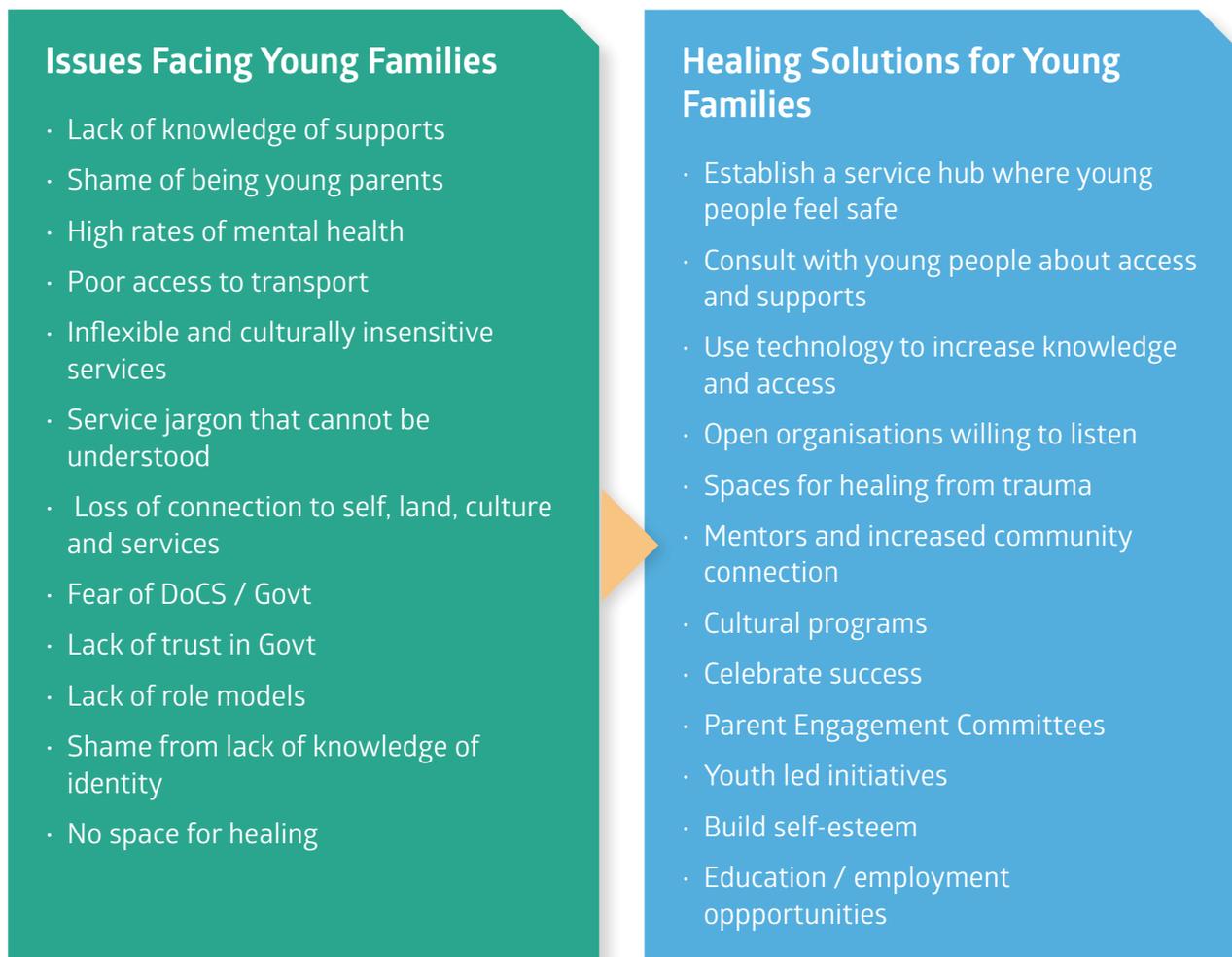
Shame was reported as leading to fear – fear of children being taken and a general fear with regard to government intervening (as it has in the past) in family issues and assuming responsibility for parental rights. This leads to a cycle of shame. The fact that many young families are not provided with the opportunity to have access and connection to culture and community leaves them feeling isolated.

Other issues that were discussed included those associated with poor mental health, high numbers of children in care, lack of support for parents in Corrective Services and lack of transport however, most of the conversation related to access to services and supports for young families:

- Participants noted that for many young parents there was a lack of awareness of services that are available, the supports that can be provided or the entitlements they are able to access
- It was also reported that where services do exist, they are rigid, inflexible and mandatory requirements often make it difficult for young parents to engage. Often the language that service providers utilise is full of jargon which young parents find difficult to understand. In addition, discussion also reported that there were too few workers in mainstream organisations that were culturally aware and/or culturally responsive, and further to that, service models have not been developed in response to the unique needs and requirements of young Aboriginal families.
- Parents did not want to engage with services due to the fear of involvement and intervention from FACS (Family and Community Services NSW) and of government generally. People reported not wanting to engage with services for fear of becoming known in the system. The Yarning Circle also identified an issue with young parents not feeling safe to identify as Aboriginal.

Young parents generally feel isolated and alone with few/no options for support. In the second Yarning Circle, the group explored solutions and considered the role of service providers in the healing process.

Diagram 2: Issues facing young families and some healing solutions

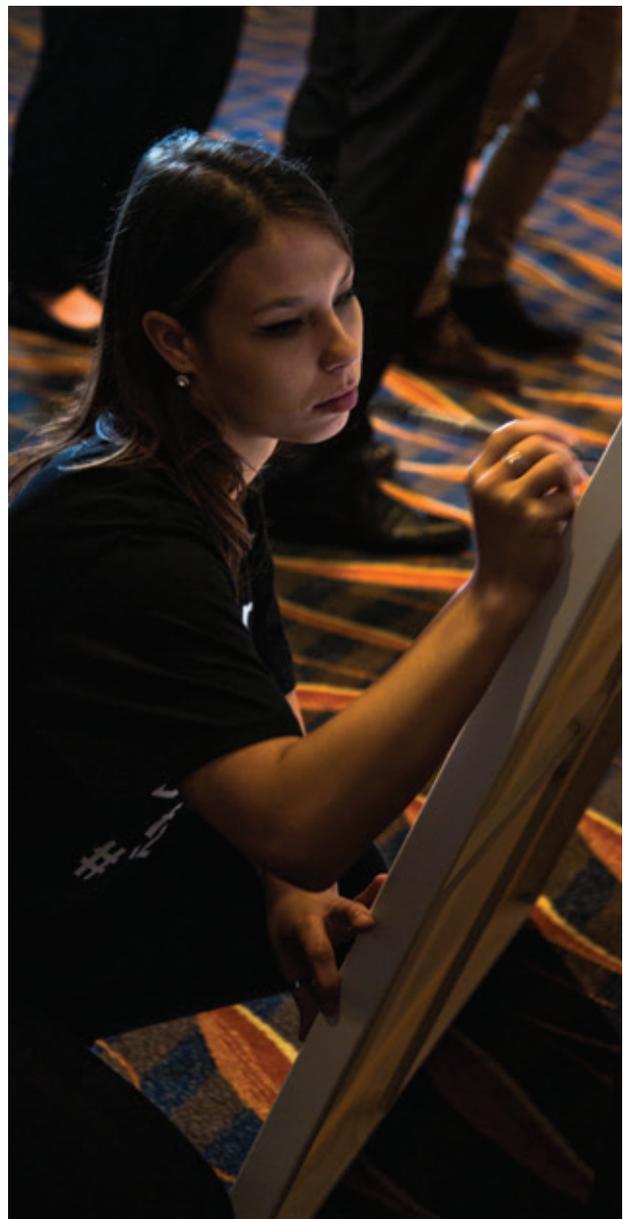


During the second Yarning Circle, the issue of shame was again raised, with solutions addressing shame requiring communities to “*be positive and build each other up and have good conversations*”. Discussions focused on processes to support the identification of strong leaders and role models, and a focus on the promotion of people in the community that can assist with supporting young parents.

Celebrating success and establishing cultural programs were reported as ways to build up young parents; as was establishing youth-led/youth informed support mechanisms and networks. One of the key ways of supporting young parents would be through the establishment of hubs that operate through an integrated service model with a strong focus on culture. Services need to consider the healing needs of the whole family with a willingness to listen.

Having a hub that operated as a safe place to support and enable healing for young people was discussed. The hub would provide a safe place where young parents could access support to build effective parenting skills. The hub could also support young people that are reintegrating into the community from incarceration, and programs that addressed shame.

We need spaces where young people can lead their own healing from trauma and give them skills so they can model emotional management of their children... ninety percent of issues are trauma so ninety percent of solutions will be through healing



3. Education and Employment

Over two Yarning Circles, the third group explored factors that prevent Aboriginal people on the Central Coast from having access to employment and education. Notably, naming and addressing racism (structural and systemic) was a major theme in both Yarning Circles.

In the first Yarning Circle, racism was reported as a major factor that prevented Aboriginal people succeeding within mainstream education, and/or participating in the labour market.

Specific barriers to education included Aboriginal students not being ready for school (at the pre-school level and beyond); with reports of students often “*arriving at school from complex backgrounds and with multiple and complex issues*”.

The Yarning Circle suggested that mainstream education systems were inflexible and gave examples of where learning was not well suited or sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal students. At the most extreme level, examples were provided of The Department of Family and Community Services removing children directly from the school environment, which lead to parents and children not feeling safe to attend. The Yarning Circle reported that schools in general, were not culturally responsive or culturally safe.

There was also a noted lack of support that exists to support Aboriginal students in the school system. A lack of parental engagement and family support were raised as an issue, with schools failing to effectively engage with parents, carers and other family members, therefore not enabling them to actively participate.

In terms of barriers to employment; work places were reported as not being culturally safe. There is a misalignment between Aboriginal ways of working and the demands of employers:

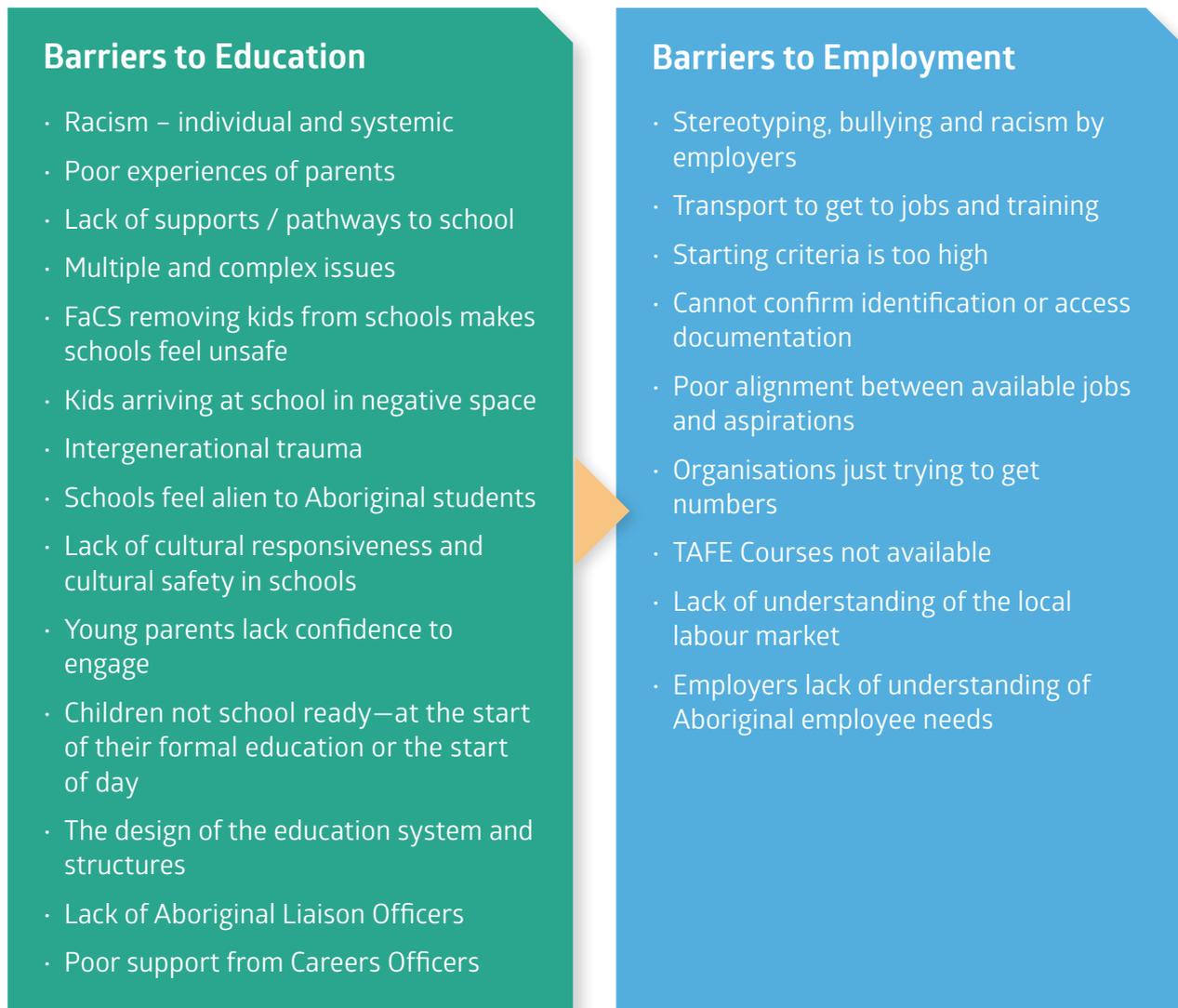
There is still a lot of stereotyping and bullying in the workplace ... racism is a big barriers for us

The jobs on offer don't really suit the interests of Aboriginal people and often they [employers] are just chasing stats so they will put us into any job... the lowest paid and lowest skill... they are not really interested in thinking about how we work and what we need

There is a cultural gap and we need workplaces to be more appropriate to our social, cultural and health needs

The barriers to employment and education, are included in Diagram 3 (see over the page) – noting that the barriers to education were intrinsically linked to barriers to future employment.

Diagram 3: Barriers to education and employment



Mentoring and support for Aboriginal students were highlighted as being critical – with these supports requiring cultural knowledge and understanding, particularly of kinship systems and community networks. The Yarning Circle also suggested that we need to ensure that schools are culturally safe for students, and that schools are supported and resourced to recognise and support the Aboriginal identity and culture of their students. Practical application of this could potentially involve parental engagement and the involvement of Elders, local Aboriginal organisations and the wider Aboriginal community.

There was recognition of existing strong young leaders that are visible in the community, however it was also discussed that there was a need to create further opportunities for more young leaders to develop their leadership capability.

There was a suggestion that this might best occur through the school system, as well as through other opportunities in the wider Aboriginal community. As noted previously, some young people reported that culture is not something schools can teach, although others felt the school setting could be an avenue that provided opportunities for culture to be strengthened.

Some of the key actions that emerged in the Yarning Circle were focused on providing mentors and role models both inside and outside the school environment. The role of Elders was also given priority as a means of working with Aboriginal students to strengthen their identity. Involvement of Elders in a school setting could build on cultural understanding for students and teachers alike. In addition, it was thought that Elders may also serve as 'cultural brokers' and provide opportunities for teachers and schools to better engage with Aboriginal parents and communities. It is important that Elders and Aboriginal organisations are appropriately remunerated for their cultural knowledge and wisdom.

Workplaces were reported as needing to find ways to provide cultural safety for Aboriginal employees through mentoring, buddy systems and increased knowledge, recognition and sensitivity to Aboriginal culture and needs.

Diagram 4 (see over the page) presents a summary of the required actions to better support Aboriginal young people in overcoming barriers in education and employment.

The Yarning Circle reported collaboration and two way learning to strengthen the cultural responsiveness of education providers and employers as the most effective way to improve education and employment outcomes.



Diagram 4: Actions to enhance education and employment outcomes

Actions to Overcome Barriers to Education

- Speaking with FaCS about impact of removing children from school
- Addressing issues of identity verification
- Identify local role models and help children get to know these people to help with connection and identity
- Elders as role models re-shaping how role models are perceived and who are role models
- Run programs in schools that demonstrate respect for, and celebrate Elders
- Mentoring in schools, TAFEs, community centers that support young students
- Cultural training for schools this is not generic training but local and specific
- Yarning and storytelling built into cultural activities that strengthen young peoples identity
- Supporting parents as mentors and helping parents to understand the education system
- Aboriginal support workers in schools that can engage parents on a one-on-one basis
- Teachers forming relationships with parents and with communities and creating trust
- Leadership in the school structure to allow for a space to listen
- Decolonize thinking and structures for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

Actions to Overcome Barriers to Employment

- Stop seeing Aboriginal employees as a statistic
- Hold organisations accountable for positive employment outcomes
- Increase employers understanding of Aboriginal employees needs – in the workplace and in community
- Ensure Aboriginal employees have buddies and / or mentors
- Partner to create stronger school to work transitions
- Work with employers / local industry stakeholders to ensure work environments are culturally safe
- Bring employers, mentors and Elders together with students on careers days
- Forums that nurture young peoples goals and dreams
- Explore different employment options including entrepreneurship and owning your own business
- Remove the pressure from young people to know what they want to do with their lives
- Recognition that Aboriginal employment pathways have been broken
- Create opportunities for Aboriginal people to try different types of roles, jobs and tasks
- Change conversations around work / work opportunities through a series of gatherings
- Hold summits where parents, communities and businesses come together

4. Youth Panel Discussion

As noted at the start of this report, the second half of the Barang Healing Forum included a Youth Panel Discussion. The panel members were young people from the local community. Questions were asked from the floor and through the Healing forum facilitator. The following provides a summary of those questions asked and the responses given by the young Aboriginal community panel members.

Question	Responses
What do you look for in a good leader?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Action leaders who contribute to the space · Lead from anywhere they stand and do more at home than community · Communicate at many levels · Someone who knows and carries themselves through strong identity · Honesty, trust, integrity, humility · Someone I aspire to be and guide young people from start to end · Passionate, driven, all at the same level · Does the right thing when no-one is looking and the spotlight is not on you
What three things can service providers do to support healing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Work together and not us and them for community · Better communication and confirmation · What is said is understood · Communication where the services are · Accessing the resources in a school as a community · Address and highlight lateral violence and stop it as it is hard for young people when older people add to it · Empower young people and don't put them down · Give us time to work out what we want to be
What is one idea or take away from the healing forum?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Looks like we all want the same things · How powerful young people can be when they are empowered · Looks like we are in pretty good hands · ...now is our time · Empowered by ourselves · Proud of myself and others that we did it · It all starts with me and what I will deliver to my children and my wife

Question	Responses
<p>What are you going to do about lateral violence?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It stops with us but we ask you as a community to stop: be the leader you want us to be · How will you influence those coming behind? · Bring others along and create leaders with younger people · Take respect with me everywhere and deliver it everywhere: for myself and others · Be proud of myself and ensure others are proud of me = be a role model · Lead as a group and take turns to be the lead pelican
<p>How long did it take for you to go down this path?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Don't know my path yet but I like where I am going and know where I have been so the path starts to set itself · The leadership journey began with those in front of us: and we must recognise our own and others strengths · Credibility and integrity counts not awards
<p>What are your goals as a leader?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It's okay to be what you want to be · Be inspiring · Be someone that inspires others · Share what I learn · Treat others as you treat yourself · Keep growing as a leader and a community · Empower others to be a leader · Take my education seriously and learn
<p>What is one thing you would do if you could not fail?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Take out poverty · Be a supercar driver · Get rid of violence · Complete a university degree · Captain NSW in the State of Origin · Reassure youth that it is okay and support them from early childhood to beyond school · Bring torn families back together · Be an astronaut

Question	Responses
<p>What keeps you going as a leader?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Other leads and my community · Family = my daughter = the successes of the community · Younger people to be a better leader · Community getting better · Competition – I don't want to be left behind · Change: knowing if it takes time
<p>Greatest source of pain and what has helped you heal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Oppression, policy and continued suffering and Constitutional recognition will help · Pain right now is the divide within our community but it's not our fault – these forums help · The cycle of hurt across generations and breaking the cycle in my family will help · Ensure there are mechanisms in place to maintain this voice through a youth board on the Central Coast



Summary

In planning the Barang Healing Forum, the Local Planning Committee set the following goals:

- To clearly define the healing needs and aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the NSW Central Coast;
- To set clear short, medium and long-term healing goals that will form the basis for the development of a Barang Healing Strategy after the forum;
- To establish strategic partnerships between key agencies and service providers that prioritises understanding of the healing needs and aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the NSW Central Coast.

The findings presented in this report demonstrate that the local community has gone some way to achieving these initial goals. The healing needs of young Aboriginal people living on the Central Coast are included in this report, and the conversations in each of the Yarning Circles provide the basis for the development of short, medium and long-term healing goals – that will form the basis for the development of a ‘Barang Healing Strategy’.

Key themes that have emerged include:

- The need for more conversations that focus on intergenerational trauma as a legacy of colonisation, and the ongoing negative impact of past and current government policies. Conversations about trauma, need to be held in safe places and should be inclusive of the voices of young Aboriginal people;
- There is strong support in the community for the establishment of a healing safe space to enable healing to take place, and where programs and supports can be provided, both directly and indirectly. There is a need for a safe space where cultural identity and connection can be maintained, and capacity developed as a means for strengthening families and communities;
- The forum has also identified the need for partnerships and collaboration across services and sectors – with a particular focus on improved service, education and employment outcomes. At the core of these partnerships and collaborations is a process of co-design where Aboriginal cultural knowledge is prioritised and the voice of Aboriginal people in the region – particularly young people – is included and amplified;
- The forum reinforced the valuable role of Elders who provide ongoing leadership and wisdom. This provides an opportunity to ensure that cultural knowledge, understanding and awareness is embedded in mainstream services and within organisations;
- The forum also identified, validated and celebrated the young leaders in the community. The involvement and leadership of young people from the local community was reported as a key success of the forum;
- The forum reinforced the role, value, wisdom and leadership of Elders who guide discussions and develop solutions in a community context regarding the healing needs of our community.

Finally, there were a number of specific ideas and recommendations that, due to the time constraints associated with a one day forum, were not able to be discussed in detail:

- Ensuring more young people attend future forums;
- Meet (6) times a year for families and friends together;
- Identify pathways to gain cultural growth and acceptance for everyone;
- A process for implementing the recommendations of the forum.



Recommendations

The following outlines recommendations emerging from the forum to support Barang Regional Alliance, and the Central Coast Aboriginal community, to continue the momentum of healing.

1. **Healing Solutions identified in this report should inform and be incorporated into** the future plans and strategies that emerge within the Empowered Communities and Local Decision Making processes.
2. **Support continued engagement with Young People** under the guidance of the Pelicans Emerging Leaders group. Ongoing processes should be developed that ensure young people are given the opportunity to be positive and future orientated and that support developing ongoing youth leadership within the community.
3. **Develop improved supports for young parents** that includes:
 - » A strategy that will result in greater integration of services and wrap around service delivery models to emerge, and scale up for families on the central coast;
 - » Support the development of safe spaces to be available for parents to seek support – including the possibility of a hub or parent support center where young parents can meet and create a network of support.
4. **Ensure that processes that will strengthen cultural identity for young people** within education are developed – this may include mentoring for students with elders and a cultural training programs for education staff that is locally driven and designed
5. **An employment strategy is developed** that supports stronger school to work transitions and is aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers employed to deliver services to the communities on the Central Coast.
6. **Develop a Central Coast Aboriginal Services Directory** that is accessible to all young people, families and prospective clients, creating awareness of key support services in the region.



