



5th SNAICC National Conference

# For Our Children: Living and Learning Together

4 – 6 June 2013, Cairns

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS - SUMMARY FROM PRESENTERS

Session Number	62
Your Presentation Title	<b>Help them grow up in head and spirit: culturally appropriate community education around child trauma from abuse and neglect – the lessons from a mobile outreach service</b>
<b>Abstract /Summary of Presentation (1/2 to 1 page)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• objectives</li> <li>• main ideas, topics and findings</li> <li>• evidence?</li> <li>• Outcomes?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Abstract</b> MOS (Mobile Outreach Service) <i>Plus</i> Aboriginal Therapeutic Resource Officers deliver culturally appropriate community education sessions which are designed to increase community awareness about the prevention and impact of, and response to, child trauma from abuse and neglect in Northern Territory remote communities. This paper will outline our innovative model: what we do, how we do it and the positive outcomes of the sessions so far.</p> <p><b>Background</b> The Northern Territory Government’s Mobile Outreach Service <i>Plus</i> (MOS <i>Plus</i>) provides counselling, support and education to children, young people and families in remote Northern Territory communities who are at risk of, or have been traumatised by, abuse or neglect. This includes sexual, physical and emotional abuse and/or where children or young people exhibit problem sexual behaviours or sexually abusive behaviours.</p> <p>MOS <i>Plus</i> is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, is delivered by the Northern Territory Government and works closely with community based services. MOS <i>Plus</i> is made up of eight counselling teams comprising an Aboriginal Therapeutic Resource Advisor (ATRO) and Counsellor. The MOS <i>Plus</i> model is predicated upon the working relationship of this unique therapeutic pair of aboriginal worker and counsellor. ATROs are essential to the work of the counsellor as they provide the cultural trustworthiness in order to access and work effectively in remote communities.</p> <p>The teams, based in Darwin (five teams) and Alice Springs (three teams), visit 30 remote communities at least eight times a year on a FIFO basis. Each team visits four communities on a frequent schedule of visits negotiated and known to the communities being visited. Other remote communities may be visited on an identified need and/or referral basis.</p> <p>The provision of services in communities is affected by the logistics of working in remote Northern Territory; the physical limitations of access to communities in the Wet season; access to clients who often return to homelands in the Dry as well as community happenings and cultural obligations; sorry days, ceremonies, Men’s and Women’s business and other community events.</p>

### **Community Education**

MOS (Mobile Outreach Service) *Plus* Aboriginal Therapeutic Resource Officers deliver culturally appropriate community education sessions which are designed to increase community awareness about the prevention and impact of, and response to, child trauma from abuse and neglect in Northern Territory remote communities. MOS *Plus* ATROs are knowledgeable about aboriginal culture. They are supported by a MOS *Plus* counsellor when delivering the session. Where possible the sessions are delivered in-language by MOS *Plus* staff or with interpreters who are specifically trained in MOS *Plus* community education content.

The development of the community education package involved locating and adapting existing local, national and international tools and resources, to produce new materials to communicate consistent messages about abuse, neglect and trauma. ATROs and counsellors were consulted to ensure a high level of relevancy. MOS *Plus* community education uses a number of community development strategies to empower community members with skills and knowledge to engage in action both individually or collectively to bring about change. The materials were trialled in four communities across the Territory; two in the Top End and two in Central Australia.

A considerable amount of planning and discussion sits behind the community education sessions. Community education topics are workshopped with ATROs to develop common key messages and to agree on possible ways of delivering the messages. Cultural overlays form an important part of this process. Through this process, ATROs take strong ownership of the material they are delivering, internalising the material so that they feel confident about varying the content to suit the situation. ATROs periodically convene to workshop, reflect on and review the material, sharing knowledge with each other about what works in a culturally appropriate way. Topics include why it is important to break the silence; the strengths of Aboriginal child rearing and importance of culture; types and signs of child abuse and neglect; the effects of trauma and how to support and respond in developing a child safe community.

Formal planned and structured education sessions are held when MOS *Plus* staff considers communities are “ready”, when trained staff are available and when relationships with community are strong. Less formal community education discussions are held spontaneously with community members (i.e. one to one, small group, family members, elders) with information and education being provided in an appropriate and intentional way. One of the measures of the success of this program is that community members are increasingly initiating these ‘less-formal’ sessions themselves. Formal sessions may lead to action at a community level whereas less formal sessions have led to individual awareness and action.

At a Community Education session information is provided in a flexible and responsive manner and, through guided facilitation, participants are encouraged to discuss relevant issues. Delivery encourages interaction and often visuals such as DVD’s (“Children See, Children Do”, “The Big Shame”) and pictorial prompts are used as discussion points. Following principles of safe practice, MOS *Plus* workers maintain a presence in the community for at least a day after the formal community education session to follow up referrals, offer counselling, and link community members to other service providers. Where possible other remote services programs are engaged to ensure “wrap around” service delivery in supporting the sessions and issues raised.

### **Selected outcomes of the community education sessions for communities so far**

- The sessions do **break the silence** about child abuse and neglect. For example, at a formal community education session in the trial stage, representatives of a Central Australian community raised concerns about child abuse and neglect in their community. The session provided the impetus for community members to discuss concerns and develop plans of action.
- **Development of group understanding and action** in relation to child abuse and community preparedness to tackle issues. For example, at a Central Australian community, participants of a community education session were concerned that young girls were becoming pregnant. This issue required a community response. Young people were banned from attending discos until they attended cultural activities/camps. The cultural activities included developing respectful relationships, and encouraged responsible behaviour. Information about other support services such as Family Planning was provided.
- There is **greater understanding of trauma and the effects on children and the community**. This includes a greater understanding about why a child might be acting in particular ways. There is a greater acceptance of the counsellor's therapeutic work and role of MOS Plus, with self-referral to MOS Plus now happening.
- **Creation or strengthening of a mutual support network** For example, in a Top End community, participants of a community education session expressed concern that a Non Indigenous group of service providers were making child safety decisions about their children with little consultation from family and community members. Participants of the community education session discussed the formation of an Aboriginal Child Wellbeing Advisory Committee.
- The ATRO leads and influences the style and the way information is portrayed, ensuring that key messages are heard. As the lead deliverer of the community education session, the ATRO acts as a role model and **provides leadership** exposure to people in remote communities.
- Mentoring, coaching and training assistance provide the opportunity for **career development** for the ATRO.

The MOS *Plus* community education model is making a difference to increasing the community awareness and understanding about the prevention and impact of, and response to, the effects of trauma related child abuse and neglect, in remote communities of the Northern Territory. The framework and tools have been specially designed and are constantly reviewed. The design and delivery of community education incorporates principles of community development including appropriate delivery methods (facilitation encouraging participant discussion, whenever possible conducted in language, working with the community to support local decision making). Community outcomes include the formation of support networks, developing individual and group understanding / action and building the ability to tackle identified community driven community issues (mapping of safe places for children; setting up Indigenous child and wellbeing group; development of young women's culture camps; older women discussions with young women about the implications of being a very young parent). ATROs are encouraged and supported to be role models to community members and assisted in developing their careers.

<b>References if applicable</b>	<p>An internal evaluation of the MOS <i>Plus</i>, Office of Children and Families, NT Government</p> <p>Staff Guide to delivery of MOS <i>Plus</i> Community Education, April 2013 (Unpublished), Office of Children and Families, NT Government</p>
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