

---

# **Beyond Empathy Pathways through Parenting**

**A Model for Improving Indigenous Access to  
Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Health and  
Family Services**

**Discussion Paper**

September 2008

## Executive Summary:

---

- **The Federal Government has identified Indigenous early childhood development and transitions into schooling as a priority issue** and has made significant provision for investment in early childhood development services in its 2008-09 Budget including:
  - \$13.8 million for investment in Indigenous playgroup and parenting skills development services and
  - \$23.5 million for investment in child care and early childhood services.
  
- **The delivery of an effective Indigenous early childhood development strategy requires a multi-faceted approach that gets Indigenous parents to engage more effectively with existing support services.**
  - The delivery of an effective Indigenous early childhood development strategy requires a multi-faceted approach that includes:
    - Pre-parenting strategies - to reduce risk-taking behaviours, improve sexual health and defer early parenthood amongst young adolescents
    - Maternal and child health strategies - to improve access to existing maternal, infant and child health services and improve maternal and child health
    - Parenting and early childhood development strategies - to improve access to parenting and early childhood development programs (including personal development and positive life pathways programs targeted at developing parents' self esteem and improving parental access to education and employment, family stability, financial security and safety)
    - Transition support programs - to encourage Indigenous engagement with the education system and support transitions into pre-prep, prep and primary school.
  - Although maternal, infant and child health, parenting and early childhood development programs are offered in most communities they often fail to provide an effective support system for young Indigenous parents and their children.
  - Services are often disjointed and do not have effective mechanisms in place to engage Indigenous parents or manage the transitions between service providers (ie from ante-natal care through birthing and peri-natal care, to infant and then child health and then into childhood development and education services).
  
- **There is a need to review existing service delivery models to provide more intensive support to engage Indigenous young people with local service providers and support their transitions across the service delivery pathway.**

## Executive Summary (Continued):

---


- In particular, there is a need to develop a service delivery model that
  - Leverages existing health, children and family service providers
  - Engages young Indigenous people at the pre-parenting stage and connects them with existing health, education and support services to improve sexual health and defer early pregnancy
  - Connects young mothers with ante-natal health services and supports ongoing engagement with mid-wifery services to promote improved maternal and fetal health
  - Supports transitions from ante-natal and birthing support services through peri-natal and infant and child health services
  - Connects young parents with play group and other parenting and child development programs
  - Builds early connections between parents and the education system and encourages transitions from play group through pre-prep, prep and primary school
  - Supports parental education and development with a view to assisting parents and families to improve family stability, access education and promote positive parenting and individual life outcomes.
  
- **Beyond Empathy has developed a service model that uses the arts to connect Indigenous young people with existing health and family support services and provide a supported pathway from ante-natal care through early childhood.**
  - Beyond Empathy is one of ten (10) community arts organisations receiving long term funding from the Australia Council as a Key Producer in its Community Partnerships Program.
  - It has worked with health and family service providers in Moree over the last four (4) years to deliver pre-parenting and parenting programs that use arts based activities to engage young Indigenous mothers with health and family service providers and provide a supported pathway from pre-parenting through parenting to early childhood
  - The above program has delivered significant improvements in ante- and peri-natal health service use, play group participation and day one primary school attendance.
  - Beyond Empathy is now working with regional health service providers in northern New South Wales (Hunter New England Health) and the Kimberley (Kimberley Health Service) and the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health and the Mothers and Babies Research Centre to document its service model and roll it out across health services in those regions.
  
- **Beyond Empathy is keen to speak with government about its service model and the prospect of using its work in northern NSW and the Kimberley as a demonstration model for integrated Indigenous parenting and early childhood service delivery at a national level.**

# Contents:

---

 **B**eyond Empathy Credentials

 **S**ervice Model

 **D**elivery Approach

 **O**bjectives

## **A. Credentials: Beyond Empathy has a track record of success in working with local health and family services to engage Indigenous young people who would not ordinarily access those services**

---

- Beyond Empathy is one of ten (10) community arts organisations receiving long term funding from the Australia Council as a Key Producer in its Community Partnerships Program.
- Since its establishment in 2004 Beyond Empathy has worked with over eighteen (18) marginalised communities in northern New South Wales and the Northern Territory including:
  - Armidale, Moree, Tamworth (2004 – 2008)
  - Boggabilla, Toomelah, Mungindi, Inverell, Narabri, Walgett (2004 – 2007)
  - Mackville, Nambucca, Bowraville (2006 – 2007)
  - Tennant Creek (2007 – 2008).
- It is currently developing projects for delivery in the Kimberley in Western Australia.
  
- Beyond Empathy uses arts based programs to:
  - Connect Indigenous community members with local health, family and child support and education services
  - Strengthen individual agencies' ability to engage with Indigenous community members and deliver services to them more effectively
  - Provide a forum through which to strengthen coordination between local service providers and improve service and referral pathways.
  
- Programs work at three levels:
  - With individual participants - to promote personal development, develop individual skills, facilitate access to support services and promote positive life outcomes
  - With support agencies - to develop support service networks, assist agencies to connect with dis-engaged young people and improve service access and delivery and
  - With communities - to build awareness of participant support needs and encourage community support for local programs to address those needs.

## **Beyond Empathy has been recognised as having particular success using the arts to connect young Indigenous parents with existing maternal, infant and child health and family support services**

---

- In 2004 Beyond Empathy began using arts based activities to encourage young Indigenous mothers to attend ante-natal and peri-natal health services in Moree.
- In 2005 it received the NSW Baxter Health Award for Consumer Participation for its work in Moree with young Indigenous mothers.
- It has since expanded that program to include activities to support Indigenous participation in play group and parenting skill development programs and has worked with education services to broker the development of relationships between Indigenous parents and local schools to support transitions into school.
- As at August 2008:
  - 58 Indigenous families access the Moree play group on a regular basis
  - On average 11 families attend each session
  - The majority of those families access the play group independently (ie without requiring transport or other support)
  - All children regularly participating in the play group who reached school age this year started school on the first day of term.
- Similar ante-natal programs have been successfully implemented in:
  - Nambucca Heads
  - Bowraville
- Beyond Empathy has translated the work that it has done in Moree and the above areas into an integrated pre- and early parenting service engagement model that can now be expanded into other areas.

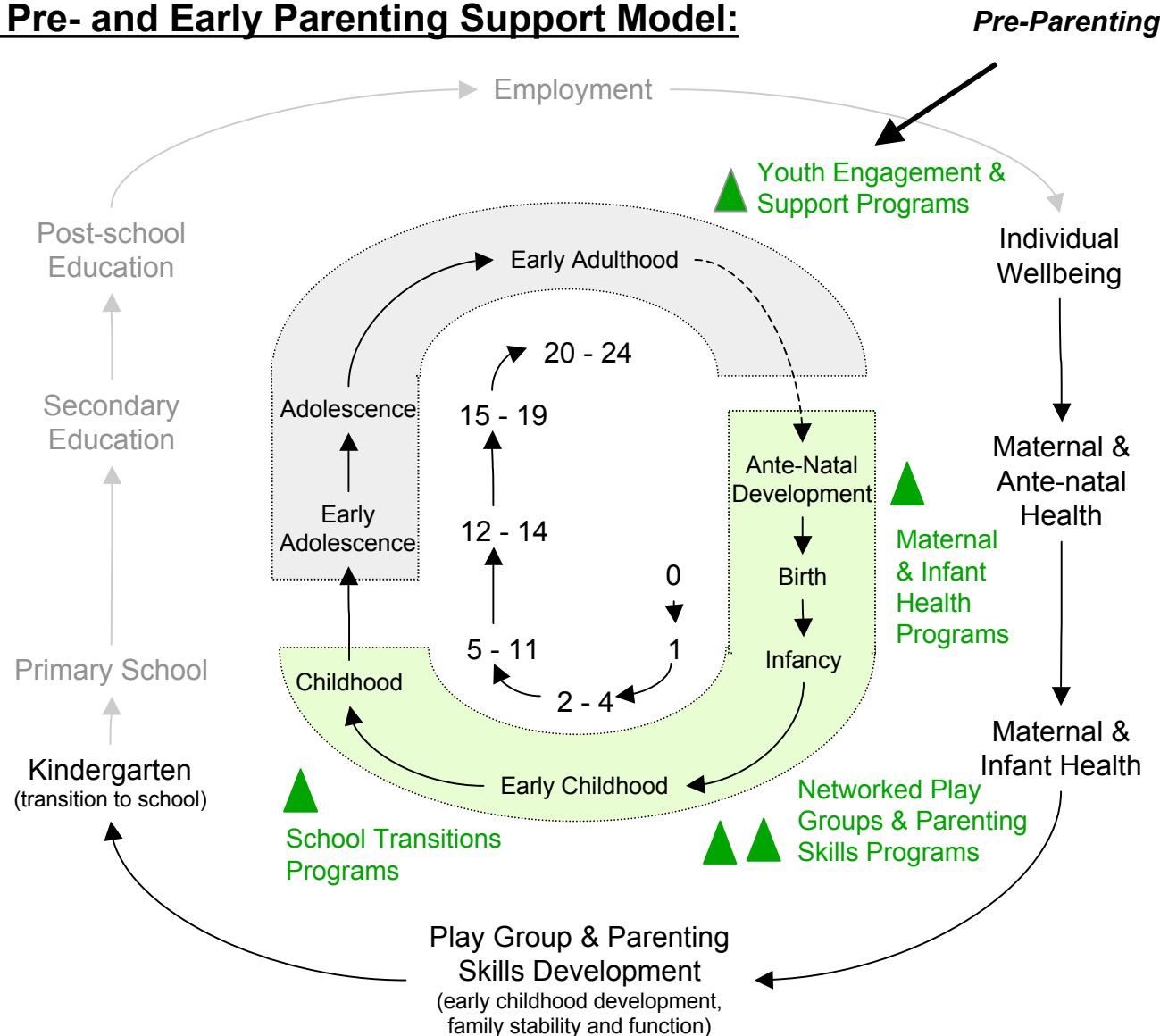
## **B. Service Model: Beyond Empathy's service model includes a mix of youth support, maternal and infant health and early childhood development, parenting and school transition programs**

---

- Beyond Empathy's pre-parenting and early childhood development model draws off the work that it has done in Moree and northern NSW.
- Activities are based around three (3) core program areas:
  - Youth Engagement and Support - aimed at engaging young people before they become parents, as well as young parents, and working with them to address risk-taking behaviours (including drug and alcohol use and sexual health) and to promote positive life choices
  - Maternal and Infant Health - aimed at increasing Indigenous access to ante-natal, peri-natal and maternal and infant health and education services
  - Early Childhood Development, Parenting and Transition Programs - aimed at increasing Indigenous access to parenting skills development and playgroup and other early childhood development programs supporting Indigenous engagement with the education system and encouraging attendance at pre-prep, prep and primary school.
- Arts based activities are provided by Beyond Empathy in collaboration with specialist service providers to:
  - Engage Indigenous young people
  - Provide an entry point into the local support services
  - Encourage service usage and
  - Facilitate transitions between the different service providers.
- They also provide a forum to work with local agency staff to provide them with tools to engage more effectively with Indigenous young people and build rapport with them.
- The coordinated delivery of the above services has meant that Beyond Empathy and its service partners have been able to work across the full range of risk and protective factors that impact maternal, infant and child health and development outcomes.

The inclusion of prep-parenting programs in the model has been critical in influencing young peoples' behaviour and linking them into local maternal and infant health and support services at an early stage ...

**Integrated Pre- and Early Parenting Support Model:**





# ... it has also strengthened the ability to work across the full range of risk and protective factors that impact maternal, infant and child health and development outcomes

## Targeted Risk and Protective Factors:

All factors impacted in parenting and early childhood programs

Factors impacted in the pre-parenting stage

Child Characteristics	Parents & their Parenting Style	Family Factors & Life Events	Community Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low birth weight</li> <li>▪ Prematurity</li> <li>▪ Pre-natal exposure to toxins or infections</li> <li>▪ Poor maternal nutrition</li> <li>▪ Prone sleeping position</li> <li>▪ Birth injury</li> <li>▪ Exposure to stress</li> <li>▪ Delayed development</li> <li>▪ Difficult temperament</li> <li>▪ Poor attachment</li> <li>▪ Poor social skills</li> <li>▪ Poor problem solving</li> <li>▪ Disruptive behaviour</li> <li>▪ Hazardous environment</li> <li>▪ Unsupervised play</li> <li>▪ Impulsivity</li> <li>▪ Poor self esteem</li> <li>▪ Alienation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Young maternal age</li> <li>▪ Single parenthood</li> <li>▪ Post-natal depression</li> <li>▪ Physical / mental illness</li> <li>▪ Drug &amp; alcohol misuse</li> <li>▪ Parental smoking</li> <li>▪ Risk-taking / criminality</li> <li>▪ Inconsistent discipline</li> <li>▪ Lack of stimulation for the child</li> <li>▪ Lack of sensitivity / affection</li> <li>▪ Separation from / rejection of child</li> <li>▪ Lack of parenting knowledge</li> <li>▪ Poor supervision</li> <li>▪ Abuse / neglect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poverty</li> <li>▪ Unstable / inappropriate housing</li> <li>▪ Family instability, stress, conflict or violence</li> <li>▪ Marital disharmony</li> <li>▪ Separation / divorce</li> <li>▪ Large family size / rapid successive pregnancies</li> <li>▪ Parental disorganisation</li> <li>▪ Parental absence</li> <li>▪ Social isolation</li> <li>▪ Low parental education</li> <li>▪ Long term unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Socio-economic disadvantage</li> <li>▪ Poor housing and urban conditions</li> <li>▪ Neighbourhood violence / crime (including public space violence)</li> <li>▪ Lack of support services</li> <li>▪ Social / cultural discrimination</li> <li>▪ Adverse community behaviour / norms</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Risk Factors from Ant-natal Period to About Five Years., Continuity of Care: A Communication Protocol for the Victorian Public Maternity Services and the Maternal Child Health Service 2004., Department of Education and Early Childhood, Victoria.

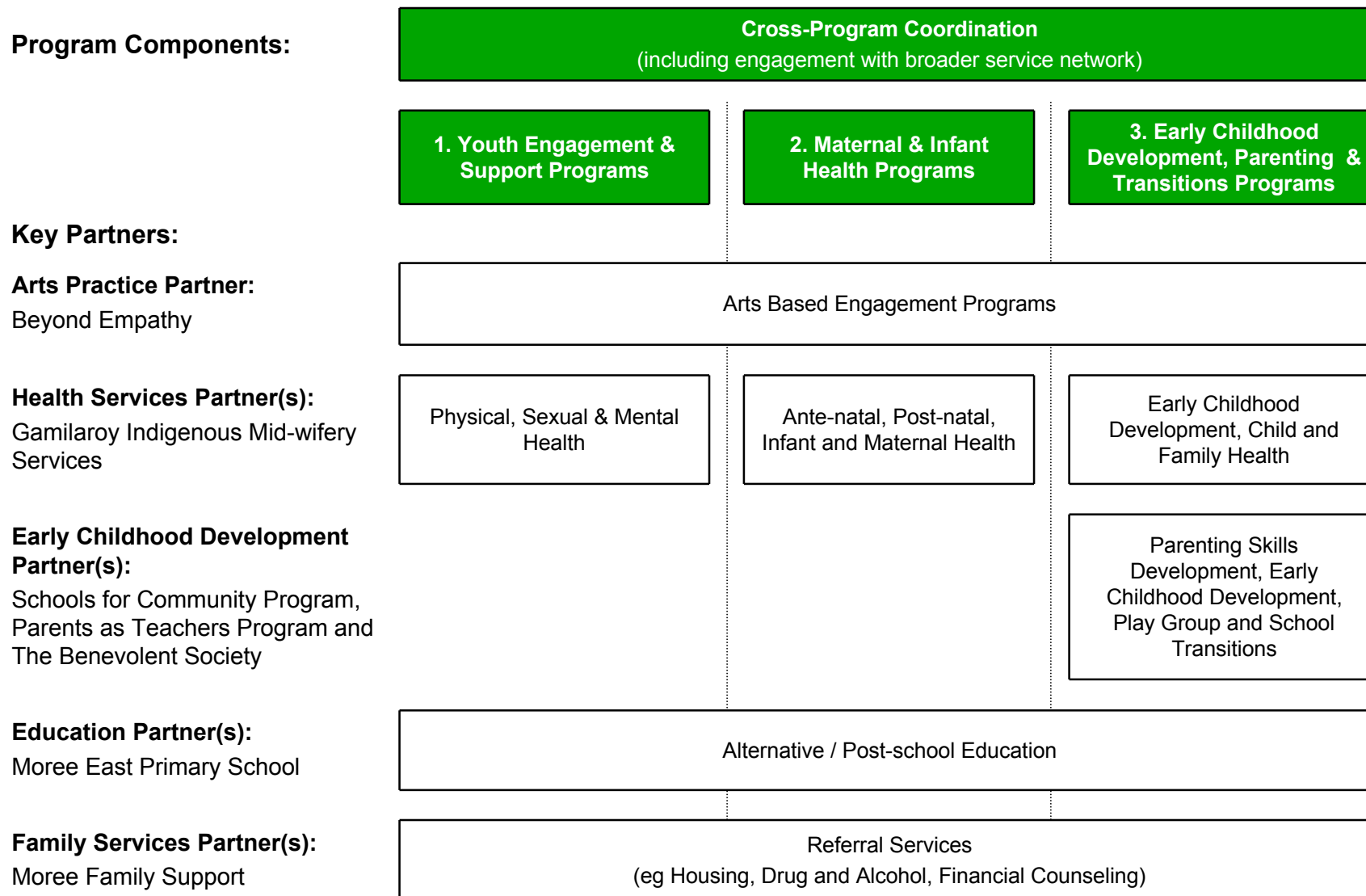
## **B. Delivery Approach: Beyond Empathy has used a community development based approach and partnered with local service providers in Moree to build the above service model**

---

- Program activities are coordinated through a regional, cross-disciplinary partnership made up of local service providers working in:
  - Maternal, infant and child health services (including ante-natal and peri-natal care and mid-wifery services)
  - Play group and early childhood development support services
  - Parenting skills development
  - Family services and
  - Education.
- A dedicated Beyond Empathy staff member works with "Lead Partners" in each of the three program areas and coordinates cross-disciplinary activity through a formal Steering Committee structure and ongoing formal and informal communication
- The Lead Partners are responsible for delivering specific services / activities in their specialist areas as well as providing specialist input into the other program areas - for example:
  - Health services workers regularly attend play group activities to perform infant and child health checks and immunisation and work with parents and carers to help them understand how their children are going and what support they need
  - Parents as Teachers coordinators work with parents and carers in the play group providing hands on guidance to parents helping them to learn how to engage and play with their children in order to support early childhood learning and development
  - Community for Schools workers attend the play group to build connections between parents and the local school and work with parents to support transitions from play group into school
  - The Grannators (a local grand parent / elders group) run a regular breakfast program through the play group.
- Programs are designed to "introduce" participants to different service providers across the support service spectrum and encourage them to access different services as they require them

# It has partnered with local health, early childhood development, education and family services providers to build a supported parenting pathway for young Indigenous parents in Moree

## Moree Collaboration Model



## C. Objectives:

---

- Beyond Empathy has translated the work that it has done in Moree into an integrated pre- and early parenting service engagement model that can now be expanded into other areas.
- Beyond Empathy has established partnerships with Hunter New England Health and the Kimberley Health Service to support the roll out of the model in:
  - Tamworth and Moree, NSW - with a view to then rolling the model out across the Hunter New England Health Service network in northern New South Wales and
  - Derby, WA - with a view to rolling the model out across the Kimberley Health Service network in WA
- Both of the above partners have a track record in strong regional health service delivery and Indigenous health and health related education program delivery in the regions in which they work.
- The intention is to leverage the regional health services as a key service partner through which to set up and then expand the Beyond Empathy program model.
- Beyond Empathy has also established a partnership with the University of Newcastle to assist in the ongoing development and evaluation of the program.
- The partnership with the University of Newcastle's Department of Rural Health and the Mothers and Babies Research Centre provides Beyond Empathy with access to scientists, medical and allied health professionals across a wide variety of fields with proven track records in research, education and clinical practice.
- The above partnership will assist Beyond Empathy to develop, document and evaluate its program model and will provide input into the development of training materials that will be able to be used to train other services providers how to roll out the program.
- Beyond Empathy is keen to speak with government about its service model and the prospect of using its work in northern NSW and the Kimberley as a demonstration model for integrated Indigenous parenting and early childhood service delivery at a national level.