

## Re-building connections in NT communities

The 2021/22 year was a period of transition for many of our services, as the Northern Territory Government gradually eased pandemic restrictions. Particularly effected were the targeted programs our Aboriginal and Islander Cultural Advisors (AICA) deliver. This includes an internally developed group program 'Straight Talk' and 'Aboriginal Building Connections' (ABC), a parenting education program developed by Interrelate. Both education programs support Aboriginal people in remote parts of the Northern Territory to connect with their family, culture, and traditions.

Valarie Tambling, Senior Aboriginal and Islander Cultural Advisor, developed Straight Talk as a prequel to Aboriginal Building Connections (ABC).

"ABC is focused on children and family. We do Straight Talk before ABC to help people first reconnect and understand who they are." Valarie explained.

"Aboriginal people are navigating two worlds, with Straight Talk, we help them connect with their traditional side. Then we talk about how they can find their way in the western system"

The program uses a strengths-based approach that explores the complexity and depth of culture, traditional lore, family roles and kinship structures. It also provides language and understanding of the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

Straight Talk is a stepping stone to the Aboriginal Building Connections program, which our staff have been trained in facilitation. It focuses on the needs of children and provides parents with practical solutions for setting aside conflict. There is an emphasis on the importance of self-care and the wider

impact of grief and family breakdown. It also provides tools and motivation for improving communication and setting goals for healthy parenting.

Since the start of the pandemic, staff have been restricted from travelling regularly to remote communities, due to enhanced restrictions put in place to protect remote communities from COVID-19. As these restrictions were lifted in 2022, Valarie and the team were able to resume regular face-to-face delivery of their programs.

"It was a difficult period for us and our clients" Valarie said.

"Zoom sessions aren't always appropriate for our clients culturally, especially when talking about sensitive topics and family. We are glad to be back out there in-person again."

The AICA team are relieved to be back out delivering their programs in remote areas of Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, and Tennant Creek with the support of local Aboriginal organisations. The support and relationships with local Aboriginal organisations have been an important part of sustaining the service over the pandemic period.

