



Healing People Sharing Culture Regenerating
Communities

**Culturally informed, Trauma
Integrated Services for Aboriginal
children families communities**

**Judy Atkinson
We Al-li Pty Ltd**

Their Futures Matter



**Acknowledging the Ancestors, Elders, Gadigal Peoples of the great Eora Nation
Greetings from Bundjalung Peoples and Country.**

Who am I? Own who we are Grow their legacy

- Jiman
 - Eliza Shields
- Bundjalung
 - Henry Williams
- I am formed by who they were and are.
- Also mother of 4
- Barbing - Grandmother of 7
- Barbing - Great-grandmother of 2



**We are the products of our childhoods. The health and creativity
of a community is renewed each generation through its children**
(Bruce Perry M.D. PhD)



Dadirri - a practice of deep listening being aware - mindful



- Ngangikurungkurr - *dadirri*
- Pitjantjatjara - *kulini* (listening), or *pulgkara kulin tjugku* (really (deep) listening, and wanting to listen).
- Bundjalung - *gan'na* hearing, listening, feeling, thinking, understanding.
- Gunmbayngirr - *junga-ngarraanga miinggi* - hearing, listening, learning, feeling, thinking, understanding, knowing from the heart.

https://youtu.be/tow2tR_ezL8

Aboriginal communal practices of childrearing and parenting



Jali Rodriguez 2007

- Children learn from what they see - hear experience. (story of birthing - music today)
- The challenge of being educator ...
 - the listener -
 - the learner -
 - the possible change-agent in the life of a child.
- Rethinking child-rearing

Personal and Professional Development and Self Care

- At the basis of Indigenous philosophies and educational strategies are the underlying principles of relationships and balance ... the individual is required to develop to the full, those personal attributes that can enhance the life of the group..
 - (Townsend-Cross, 2003, p. 3).
- Educaring – where the teacher and the taught learn together to create the teaching.. focusing on the attitudes, philosophy, qualities, beliefs and ‘*ways of being*’ of the participants.. it is educating the self about the self..
 - (Atkinson, 2002, p. 17).

Self Care – Managing Triggers



The Oldest Living Culture: Massacre Sites Not Individual PTSD but Historic, Collective Trauma



World Wide Colonisations

“Symptom as History”

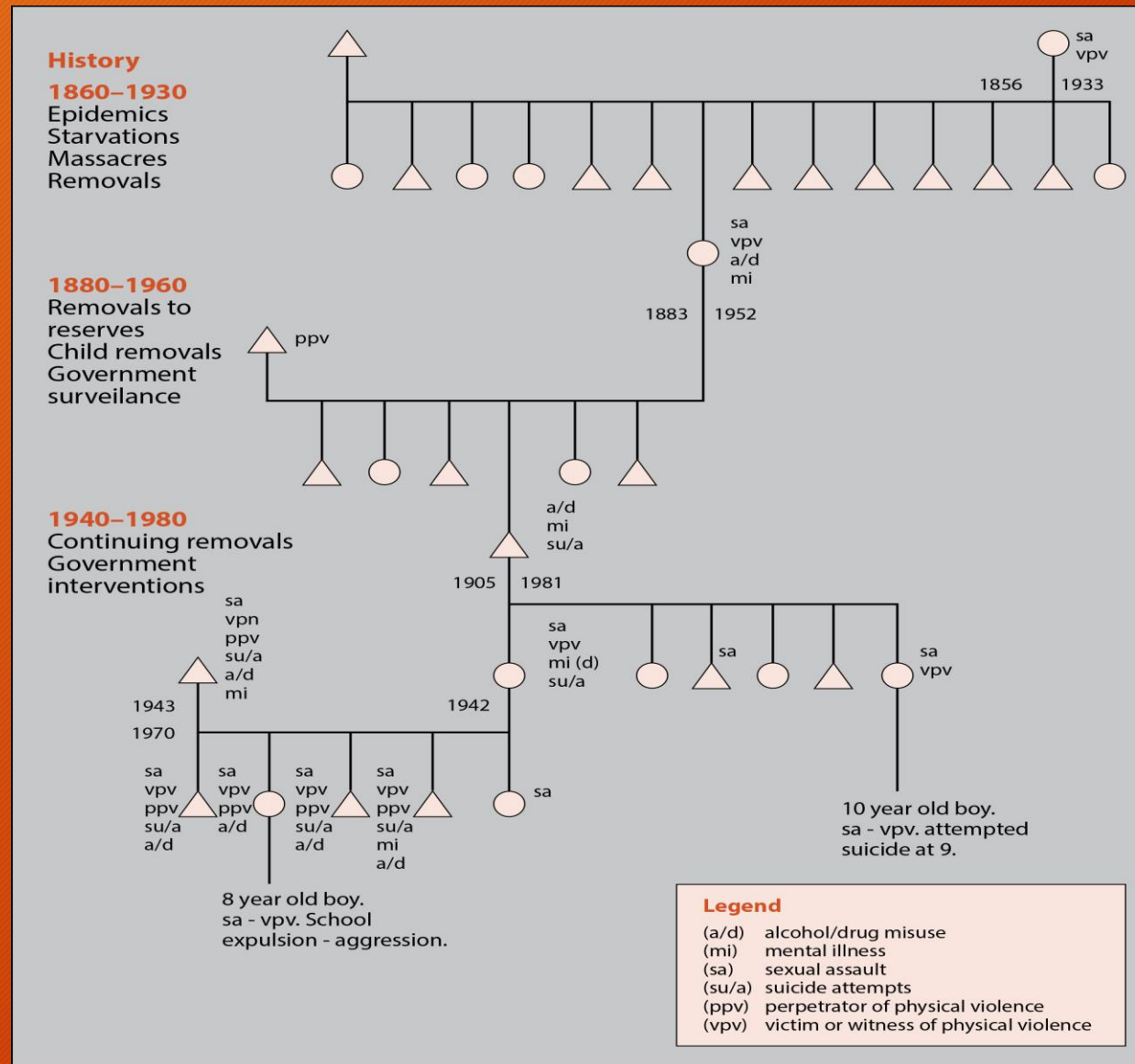


- ©Subjugation of Indigenous peoples -
Physical Violence - Structural Violence
- Psycho-Social dominance
- ©The creation of culturally unsafe
learning and living environments.

Understanding the trauma story
Historic, Social, Cultural, Collective,
Complex Developmental Trauma



Colonisation as Traumatization



Trauma Ruptures our Vital Connections

- To ourselves
 - physically
 - emotionally
 - mentally
 - vitally (spiritually)
- To others
 - family
 - social group
 - generations
 - culture



- To nature
 - instinctually
 - environmental

Creation of violent individuals communities / societies

1. Living in culturally unsafe environments

2. Being profoundly hurt as a child as people

3. Being hurt but being prevented from experiencing or expressing the pain of that hurt

4. Having no one in whom we can confide our true feelings, not being heard acknowledged in our pain

5. Having a lack of education or knowledge therefore being unable to intellectualise the abuse.

6. Having no way we can transform our pain without repeating the cycle of abuse on ourselves or others.

Alice Miller 1983

When We Ignore Generational Trauma

(Merida Blanco, in Peter Levine, Waking the Tiger)

- **1st generation. colonised – males killed – imprisoned – females sexually misused**
- **2nd generation. Men turn to alcohol or drugs as their cultural and spiritual identity is damaged – self worth eroded.**
- **3rd generation. Spousal Assault -- Societal trauma**
- **4th generation. Abuse moves from spousal assault to child abuse or both.**
- **5th generation. Cycle repeats as trauma begets violence begets trauma.**
- **The grown children of the conquerors live in fear of the grown children of the conquered.**



Trauma can become generational, unless healed

- Collective trauma is the *“psychological blow to the basic tissues of social life that damage the bonds attaching people together and impairing the prevailing sense of community”* (p. 233), *“a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as a source of nurturance and that part of the self has disappeared”* (Erikson, 1976).
- Historical trauma is *‘the collective emotional and psychological injury, in the life of an individual or of a community, both over the life span and across generations’,* (Muid, 2006, p. 36).



Developmental Trauma

- Repeated instances of developmental trauma such as abandonment, abuse, and neglect during a child's early life can cause negative effects on cognitive development, neurological development, and psychological development as well as attachment development.



Developmental trauma

- When the survival brain is active it overrides the learning brain, interfering with usual development.
- The survival brain is driven by fear and “*the most complex occurrences of psychological trauma tend to involve’ ... harm and abuse of children, which ... ‘teach the child or adolescent to focus on danger and survival, rather than on trust and learning’*” (Ford 2009).

Bessel van der Kolk

building from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

(ACE questionnaire – is it relevant?)

- “Childhood trauma including abuse and neglect is probably the single most important public health challenge ... a challenge that has the potential to be largely resolved by appropriate prevention and intervention”

(van der Kolk, 2007, p. 224).

- van der Kolk continued:
- Violation of a child's sense of safety and trust, of self-worth, with a loss of a coherent sense of self; can trigger emotional distress, shame, grief, self harm and other destructive behaviours;
- In adolescents – this can result in unmodulated aggression, difficulty negotiating relationships with caregivers and peers,
- Demonstrated outcomes showing adolescent links to suicide, alcoholism and other drug misuse, sexual promiscuity, physical inactivity or over activity, smoking and obesity;
- Adults with a childhood history of unresolved trauma are more likely to develop: heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, skeletal fractures, and liver disease; and finally
- People with childhood histories of trauma make up almost our entire criminal justice populations (2007, pp. 226-227).

Grief versus Trauma Billy and Billy's brother

Grief generally does not attack or 'disfigure' our identity.	Trauma generally attacks, distorts, and 'disfigures' our identity.
In grief, dreams tend to be of the person who died.	In trauma, dreams are about the child himself dying or being hurt.
Generalised reaction SADNESS	Trauma reactions generally also include grief reactions.
In grief, pain is related to the loss.	In trauma, pain is related to the tremendous terror and an over whelming sense of powerlessness and fear for safety.
Grief reactions are generally known to the public and the professional.	Trauma reactions, especially in children, are largely unknown to the public and often to professional counsellors as well.
In grief, a child's anger is generally not destructive.	In trauma, a child's anger often becomes assaultive (even after non-violent trauma, fighting often increases).

Our brain tells us how to behave in response to our experiences.

Prefrontal lobes

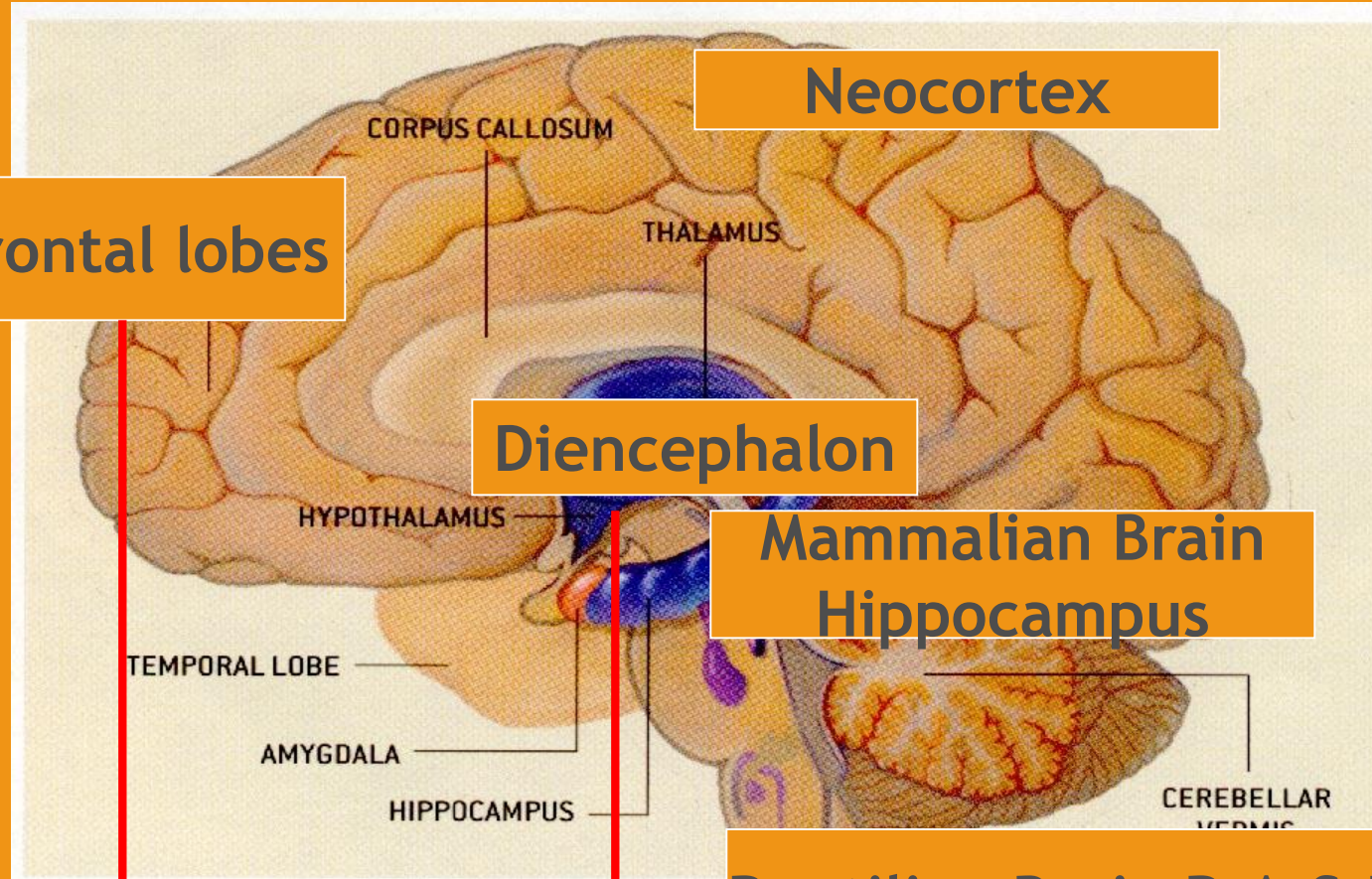
Neocortex

Diencephalon

Mammalian Brain
Hippocampus

Heart Brain

Reptilian Brain R.A.S.Hi
Amygdala



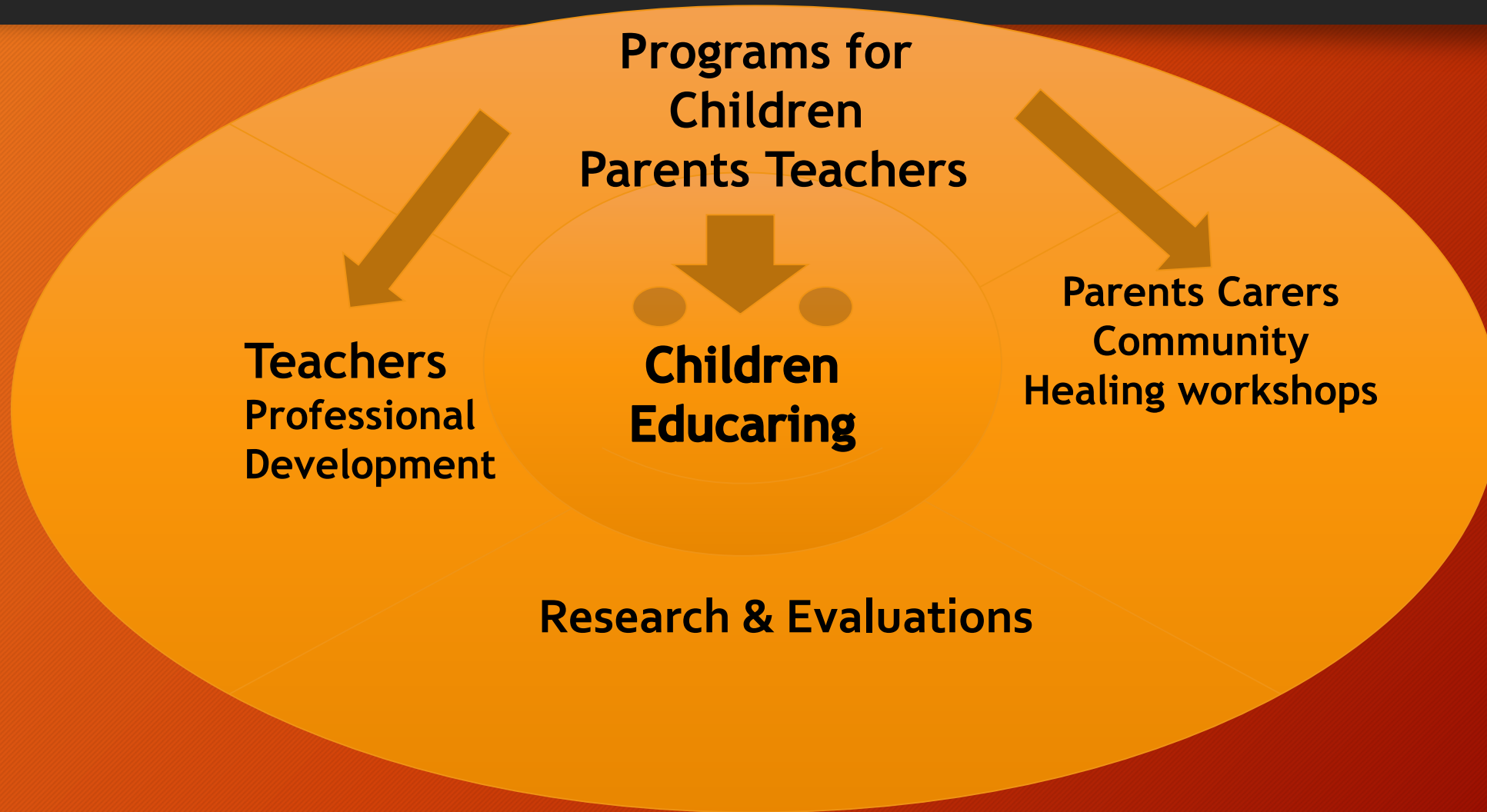
Developmental trauma – Adverse experiences

- “Developmental trauma occurs when significant adverse experiences have an impact on the physical development of a child’s brain, particularly in the first three years of their life, and have lasting effects on their self-concept, relationship-building skills and behaviour.”

What are Adverse childhood experiences (ACE):

- “ACEs fall under three categories: abuse, neglect, and family or household challenges. These stressful experiences may include: parental separation; living with caregivers who have mental illness or addictions; sexual abuse; verbal abuse; having an incarcerated caregiver; emotional neglect; and witnessing or experiencing domestic violence.
- Racism is not listed, however it has massive adverse experiences.

A Whole of Community Approach Children in a Special School



What we Found

Diagnosis:

- Emerging psychosis with mood depressive content – some paranoia he thinks the world is unsafe)
- Suicidal ideation
- Chronic grief
- Chronic Complex Post Traumatic Stress

Observable behaviour

- Highly sexualised
- Sexualised language
- Sudden uncontrollable rages,
- With self harm
- Subservient versus controlling
- High fear based survival behaviours
- Emotionally illiterate
- FAS ... ?





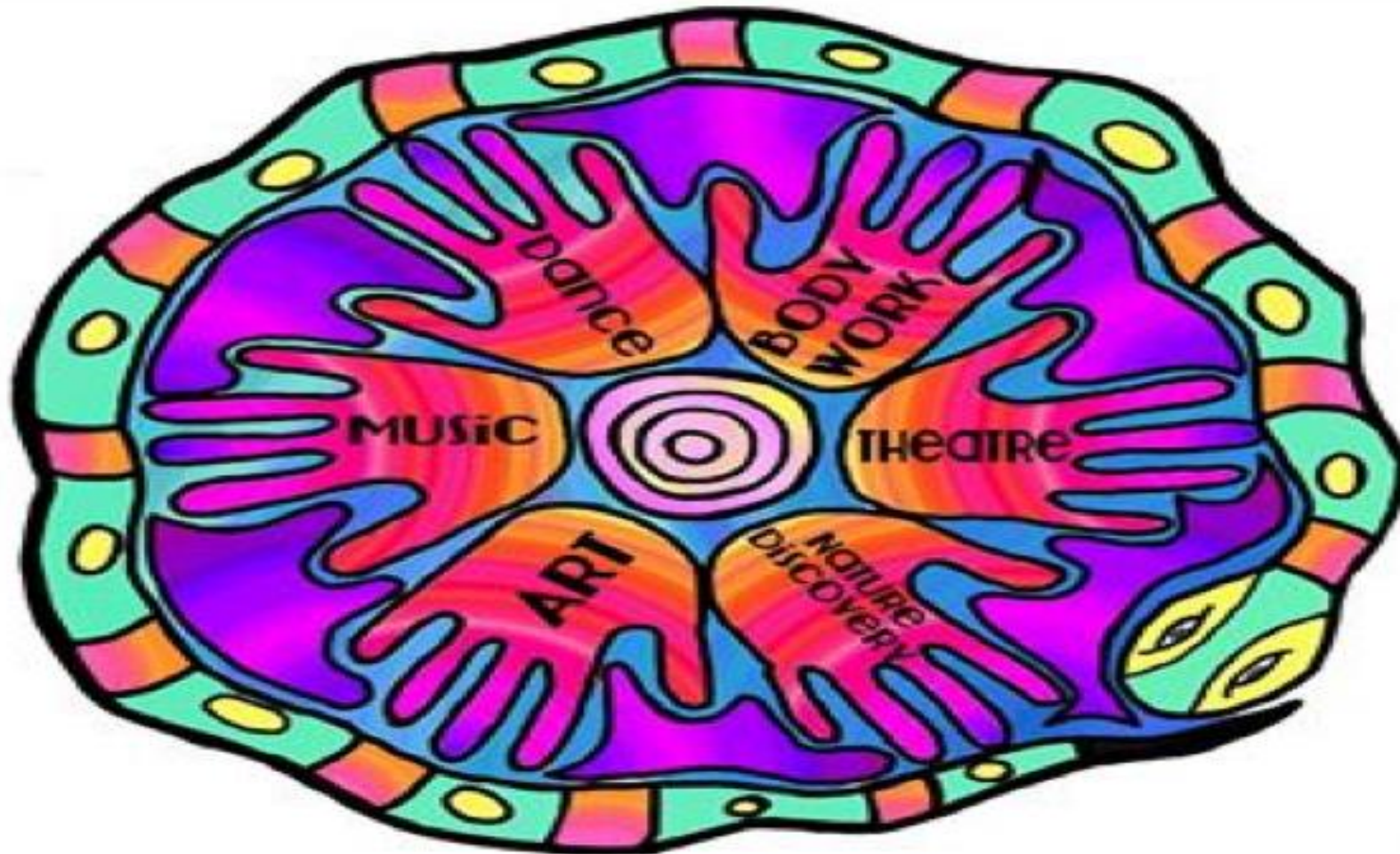
THE CHERUBS – THE SCHOOL - GOVERNMENT SERVICES - NGO'S

- **WE NEED** quality assessments of each CHERUB so the necessary infrastructure of support can be put in place.
- “what I see as fundamental ... **child rights - human rights** ... is seemingly so difficult and never delivered ...”
- These assessments ideally should be done before placement.
- An analogy ... ”If I got sick and someone rang the air ambulance and I was put in intensive care in Tamworth.....and then when someone looked over the paperwork it was realized I had never been triaged by a nurse or doctor!!!!
- **Surely someone would ask some questions??** (Principle Margaret Hayes)

A Model for Healing Trauma Specific responses to their needs

STORY

HEROS



ART

MUSIC

DANCE

THEATRE

BODY
WORK

NATURE
DISCOVERY



The four main principles of neuro-development that guide our work are:

Bruce
Perry
(xxxx)

1. Sequential development
2. Use-dependent development
3. Doors of opportunity
4. Contextual development

Neuro-developmental rationale for healing trauma

The Heart brain
Resonance

Resonance - growth, and physical wellness, vitality, meaningful life- evidenced by responsiveness & responsibility - curiosity and openness promote growth.

Cortical

Encourage Abstract thought

- ✓ Story telling- writing
- ✓ Drama theatre
- ✓ Art and music

Limbic

Facilitate Emotional Regulation - Relationships

- ✓ Dance - play - art -

Midbrain

Somato-Sensory Integration

- ✓ Movement & Yoga games
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Touch
- ✓ Nature Discover

Brain Stem

Establish State Regulation

- ✓ Safe touch massage pressure points

Vitality

4

3

2

1





1. Sequential development

The brain, at birth, is considered by some to be undeveloped. Nonetheless, the nervous system has been developing since conception along the blueprints of the genetic structuring, unique vitality of the organism and its unique environment.

During and after birth the organism continues to organize and grow in a sequential fashion, starting from the lowest, most regulatory regions of the brain and, proceeding up through the more complex parts of the brain responsible for more complex functions.



2. Use-dependent development

- The normal organization of any nervous system and brain area or capability is 'use-dependent.';
- The more patterned activity (e.g., music, dance, reading, conversation), the more the nervous system and brain regions responsible for these tasks will organize and be functionally 'healthy'. The implications of this are profound.
 - Children exposed to consistent, predictable, nurturing and enriched experiences will develop neurobiological capabilities that will increase the child's chance for health, happiness, productivity and creativity.
 - Conversely this means that the child with neglect, chaotic, and traumatizing environments will have significant problems in all domains of functioning.



3. Doors of opportunity

- The majority of this sequential and use-dependent development of the brain takes place in early childhood.
- Indeed, by age three, the child's brain is 90% adult size. This means that of all the experiences throughout the life of an individual, the organizing experiences of early childhood have the most powerful and enduring effects on nervous system organization and functioning.
 - “Society does not optimize this opportunity in early childhood. Indeed, we typically wait until a child is so impaired, dysfunctional, acting out and failing in school, before we initiate services.
 - Those few resources that are dedicated to early childhood tend to be inefficient and unfocused.”



4. Contextual development

- Children learn in the context of their social environments.
- School is a critical social environment.
 - The social nervous system affects this sequential and use-dependent development of the child in their neurodevelopment progress.
 - Trauma permeates and can immobilize the nervous system affecting personal resiliency, self-image, interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, and communication patterns.

Moving through an Educaring Approach in Healing Trauma

1. Creating culturally safe environments

2. Finding and telling our Stories through play art dance story mapping

3. Making sense of our stories through music theatre art

4. Feeling the Feelings

5. Moving through the layers of loss grief to ownership choices

6. Strengthening Cultural and Spiritual Identities

**Health and Wellbeing
Judy Atkinson 2002**



What happened when the teachers applied these principles in the school

Grandparents cried

School secured a doctor to visit and children and families started to get Health and Mental Service assessments

Literacy and Numeracy Improved 150% - 300%



Children never missed a day

Look I can read now

Empathy

Parents regularly visited the school

What the Teachers Said

- We have the freedom to teach in the way that the children need.
- They are so excited about learning.
- They are not angry any more.



What the Children Said

- I like music because I can feel the beat through my body
- I like dance because I can tell different stories
- I like the body work because I feel calm and relaxed
- I like theatre because I can be growly different characters
- I like art because I can't make mistakes
- I like nature discovery because I learn things when I am outside.

(Bruce Perry, in Malchiodi 2008, pp. ix-xi).

- “Examination of the known beliefs, rituals, and healing practices for loss and trauma [by Indigenous peoples]... reveal some remarkable principles.
- Healing rituals converge into a set of core elements related to adaption and healing following trauma. ...
- These core elements include an overarching belief system - a rationale, a reason for the pain, injury, loss; a retelling or re-enactment of the trauma in words, dance, or song - all provided in intensely relational experience(s) with family and clan participating in the ritual. ...



Perry continued

- retell the story,
- hold each other,
- massage, dance, sing,
- creating images of the battle in literature, sculpture and drama,
- reconnecting to loved one and to community,
- celebrate,
- eat and share together

Perry is clear that these Indigenous healing practices work because they are:

- ‘repetitive, rhythmic, relevant, relational, respectful and rewarding’,
- “While these therapeutic practices may not at first seem “biological”: be assured that they are not only likely to change the brain, but they will assuredly provide the patterned, repetitive stimuli required to specifically influence and modify the impact of trauma, neglect, and maltreatment on key neural systems” (ibid).

Healing childhood trauma within the framework of Whole of Community Healing.



Educaring Models of Practice

The Educaring model proposes transformational learning designed to provide opportunities for children to learn at their optimal levels, while receiving therapeutic care in the learning environment - Edu-caring.

The model is built on the 7 R's of educaring.

RIGHTS RESPECT RESPONSIBILITY

RECIPROCITY RELATEDNESS

RESILIENCE RESONANCE

- **RESPECT ...**

**for each child
as a unique
being with
unlimited
potential**





**RIGHT to be safe, protected,
allowed to grow and learn at their optimal
level within cultural and spiritual ways of
being in the world, at home, within school and
in the community**



Learning
RESPONSIBILITY
for
life choices
and
behaviours

Embodied in principles of **RECIPROCITY**





• RELATEDNESS

how the child
engages in the
world in which
they live and learn

a world of
relationships.

RESILIENCE

Flexibility

Hardiness

Toughness

The capacity to
recover from
adversity,
tragedy, trauma.



Resonance

the language of the heart

empathy - compassion
character - moral integrity
the heart brain

To unit hearts and establish order!



Principles of a Yarning Circle.

Working towards trauma Integrated services across all systems, so that **Their Futures do Matter**

Group Mapping

- First round: Opening the talking circle - Introductions - rules - no blame - listening - what is said in the circle stays in the circle.
- Second Round: Short sentence about thoughts on the case study, issues that stick out, what might be discussed in round three.
- Third Round: Open discussion - writing on A4 sheets, and mapping ideas about responding to the needs as outlined in the Case Study.
- Forth Round: Close the circle with one word or short sentence.



Generational Trauma in families

Case studies

- **Request:** Grandmother trying to hold her family of children and grandchildren together to avoid the risk of extensive child removals. ... To bring extended family members to one place so that all have the opportunity to talk to and listen to each other, while planning an agreement of future (anticipated year long) work.
- **Request:** A family who wants to run a series of family mediation – healing workshops, after some incidents which caused serious fractures.

Mapping a way forward: (Atkinson, 2007; Hobfoll, 2007; Silove, 2007).

1: Safety and Security.	2: Calming - Rebonding after Crisis.
3: Attachment and Belonging.	4: Justice Fairness Dignity.
5: Valuing Self Valuing Others - Role, Self and Collective Identity.	6: Hope Meaning Coherence.

**“You said, 'They’re harmless dreamers
and they’re loved by the people.'
'What,' I ask you, 'is harmless about a dreamer, and what,'
I ask you, 'is harmless about the love of the people?’**

**Revolution only needs good dreamers who remember their dreams
Tennessee Williams**

There is always a dream dreaming us

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