

# NARN *newsletter*

Dry season, 2019

- ⊙ Children developing well
- ⊙ Young people and adults growing well & staying strong
- ⊙ Older people ageing well in place

From the Leadership Team



Welcome to our first Northern Australia Research Network (NARN) biannual newsletter, beginning with the Dry Season newsletter, to be followed by a Wet Season newsletter towards the end of the year.

We would like to begin by introducing you to NARN. In 2016, NARN was established to conduct research in the area of Functioning, Disability and Health, to inform delivery of rehabilitation and lifestyle services in regional, rural and remote Northern Australia. Recognising and acknowledging the cultural and diverse needs, beliefs, practices and authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Northern Australia, in 2017 NARN partnered with Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA).

NARN is a small cross-jurisdictional collaborative network of researchers, clinicians, health managers, Primary Health Network (PHN) managers and consumers from the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. Allied health professionals form the majority of the NARN membership with a range of other members who contribute to delivery of rehabilitation and lifestyle services.

Thank you to those who have shared their stories that intentionally provide a real-world, oft personal view of research in Northern Australia. Please feel free to contact us or [email](#) us your stories about your research in Northern Australia. See our details below.

The NARN Forum, in partnership with HOT North -12th to 13th June  
Mt Isa- Free Registration - [Click here](#) for more details

Children- Katherine & Alice Springs

**F**linders NT has a long history of partnerships with local community organisations to provide student-led services in the Northern Territory. These partnerships operate from a service learning framework which ensures that the allied health student participants contribute to addressing community challenges while at the same time pursuing their professional learning needs.

The student-led services in Katherine schools is a long running project which now operates for six weeks four times a year. Every school term, four final year speech pathology students, supervised by a local speech pathologist and school staff, assess and provide therapy to children identified by their families and teachers. To date, more than 60 student speech pathologists have lived in, learned from and contributed to the Katherine community and schools. Flinders is about to commence a tracking research project to learn more about the longer term career work location impact of placements in regions such as

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### Northern Australia Research Network



We acknowledge Australian Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People as the first inhabitants of the nation, and acknowledge Traditional Owners of the land and waters where we live, learn and work.





Children - West Kimberley



Young People & Adults - Galiwin'ku & Darwin



Katherine. In 2019, occupational therapy student-led services were added to the program, supported through a Northern Territory Primary Health Network (NTPHN) grant. The occupational therapy student-led services have been welcomed by the Katherine community. These students will work alongside their supervisor, the speech pathology students, and school staff to extend in-school allied health support services. Flinders NT Katherine campus staff have developed a solid orientation and support program for the students, which includes cultural orientation provided by Indigenous Allied Health Australia, local pre and post-arrival support and quality accommodation.

In Alice Springs, the needs of school students with disability resulted in a successful grant application to the NT PHN to develop a student-led physiotherapy service in Acacia Hill primary school. This service will commence in term 2, 2019 and is a partnership that includes the school, Flinders NT, the PHN and local allied health government providers.

Student evaluations of their experiences in these service-learning programs provide a powerful testimony to the value of training health professionals in areas of need. Recent student comments included:



'It was very attractive to me that I was able to help clients who otherwise would not be able to access services'.

'Working in such a remote environment enabled me to have the opportunity to work with a variety of different clients, strengthening my clinical skills'.

"Encourage any student to take it. It was an amazing experience and I loved it. I was very unsure about it at first but I'm so glad that I did it'.

By Narelle Campbell, Academic Leader, Engagement and Social Accountability, Flinders NT.

### Children - West Kimberley

The Majarlin Kimberley Centre for Remote Health, was established in 2018 with Department of Health Rural Multidisciplinary Training funds, to increase the number of nursing and allied health students undertaking clinical placements in the Kimberley region of WA. Majarlin supports the educational needs of local clinicians and will provide research and evidence on innovative remote health service

models. Majarlin is a local (Yawuru) word for "coming back" and the centre is establishing well supported, positive remote health placements for students from all over Australia, in the hope that they will return and contribute to the future remote health workforce.



In 2018 Majarlin successfully coordinated and supported 88 allied health students and 48 nursing students from 13 universities, equating to 754 placement weeks in the Kimberley. Service learning programs were commenced at three schools and one aged care facility in Broome, with plans to expand these programs into other Kimberley towns and to add other disciplines such as social work and speech pathology in 2019. Majarlin has employed occupational therapy and physiotherapy clinical educators who, with the aid of students, deliver services to clients who previously have been unable to access allied health services due to the shortage of clinicians in the region.



Majarlin has appointed a researcher to evaluate programs as well as to assist and build capacity with Kimberley clinicians undertaking research projects. Majarlin will shortly be increasing their research capacity through recruitment of Aboriginal health, allied health and mental health academics.

By Lindy Swain, the inaugural Majarlin Director, passionate about trying to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and recent NARN leadership team member.

### Young People & Adults - Galiwin'ku & Darwin

There's a breeze through the window, and it *finally* has a less-humid feel to it. I think back over the last few months with relief, pride and disbelief at where the time has gone... But, two and a half years in to this PhD and I can honestly say that I'm still looking forward with anticipation and hope – I'm told this is a good sign!

It has been a fun start to the year for our communication research team working with Yolŋu living with Machado



Joseph Disease in Darwin and Galiwin'ku. We've been in the stage of our research where we get to develop resources together, try them out and see them in action.

From 2017 to 2018 we spent time sharing experiences and listening to each other. It is an honour to be witness to, and hear stories about, the communication frustrations and worries for Yolŋu living with MJD. But it is inspiring to hear the same people sharing with each other their strengths, knowledge, dreams and ideas for how we can learn together to support family members who are losing their speech. And, it is *exciting* to be a part of the creative team that's putting some of these ideas into action.

Since last November we have developed four prototype Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems incorporating more than 300 Yolŋu words. Two of my Yolŋu co-researchers and I have sat together and carefully selected and generated symbols for each of these words, together. We have designed and developed literacy and language activities to try these systems out, sharing stories about kinship, identity, and things that Yolŋu love to do. I have been blown away by the engagement of some of our participants, and in awe of their effort and tenacity. I look forward to seeing these prototype Yolŋu AAC systems make it to the next stage of publication and sharing them more widely in the future.

The collaborative research journey is a long, slow road we walk together. Academic timelines don't always align nicely with real life timelines. There are hospital visits and funerals, pain and fatigue. There are also successful hunting trips, laughter, new babies and warm camp fires. It's all part of it. It's why we're here and why we love it!



By Rebecca Amery, Speech Pathologist, PhD candidate, Charles Darwin University. Thanks to the MJD Foundation for their generous support of this project.

## Young People & Adults - Groote Eylandt & Ngukurr

**A** original families on Groote Eylandt, and in other Top End communities, have lived with Machado Joseph Disease (MJD) for many generations. MJD is a hereditary neurodegenerative disease which causes loss of mobility and coordination of movement, with no cure available.

Families with MJD on Groote Eylandt were finding that exercise was helping them but wanted to find other ways that could help. They welcomed researchers to collaborate with them to work out the best ways to keep walking and moving around for a long time.



We talked to families in their languages about 'what works best' to keep them 'walking and moving around' and also looked at what has worked best in other MJD research around the world. We worked together with families on Groote Eylandt and in Ngukurr to put these ideas together and made the 'Staying Strong Toolbox'.

This Toolbox is a book full of tools for families with MJD to use to stay strong inside and outside (emotionally, mentally, spiritually, physically) so they can keep walking and moving around for as long as possible. 'Exercising your body', 'searching for good medicine', 'having something important to do', 'keeping yourself happy', 'going country' and 'families helping each other' keeps families strong inside and outside. There are tools to help with all of these things, whether you are in a wheelchair, wobbly or walking strong. Families can choose the tools that will work best for them in their life.

Right now, we are helping families on Groote Eylandt and in Ngukurr to test the Staying Strong Toolbox. It is having a positive impact on walking and moving around and quality of life. We hope our story helps other families with MJD in Australia and around the world and gives ideas to other people working together to do research in other communities.

By Joyce Lalara, Community Research Partner & MJD Foundation Community Worker, Groote Eylandt & Jen Carr, PhD Student (Joyce's apprentice) James Cook University.

## Young People & Adults - Cairns

Wuchopperen Health Service, in partnership with James Cook University, Edith Cowan University and Indigenous Allied Health Australia, are conducting a pilot project, funded by HOT North, to implement a service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experienced a stroke or other traumatic brain injury and are having issues with communication.



Older Adults - Napranum & Weipa



Older people - Nhulunbuy



The Talking After Brain Injury and Stroke Program specifically targets issues or difficulties with speech, finding words and memory or problem solving. Developing the services Wuchopperen offers to people who have experienced stroke is essential in meeting the needs of our community, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience stroke up to 3 times more frequently than non-Indigenous Australians.

Wuchopperen's coordinator of Allied Health, Michelle Dougan, and Speech Pathologist, Natasha Barlow, believe their 8-week program is essential for connecting people back to their community and helping them to regain their independence.

"Having the ability to communicate and engage with your family, friends and community is an essential element to the holistic approach to health we take at Wuchopperen. Losing your ability to communicate effectively after a stroke or a traumatic brain injury can be really isolating for people and have a huge impact on their mental health. While this program specifically addresses speech, we are also able to link clients in with our other health programs including physio and mental health services," says Natasha.

"Culturally safe speech pathology is not readily available in most regions; we are very lucky to be able to trial such a unique program with James Cook University at a place like Wuchopperen where clients already feel comfortable with us. However, it is really the flexibility of this program which makes it extremely unique, we can deliver the sessions either at Wuchopperen or in the comfort of the client's own home or in a space decided on by the client, reducing any pressure on clients to make their way to our service site or missing their appointments due to a myriad of potential barriers," says Natasha.

In addition, The Talking After Brain Injury or Stroke Program will enable Wuchopperen to gather key learnings to share with other Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and medical practices across the country to inform the development of improved, culturally appropriate stroke rehabilitation services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

By Michelle Dougan, Coordinator of Allied Health Services & Natasha Barlow, Speech Pathologist, Wuchopperen Health Service, Cairns.

### Older People - Napranum & Weipa

**B**oosting community rehabilitation services using student-led services in the very remote communities of Weipa

and Napranum, Cape York has been the focus of a multi-service collaboration. James Cook University (JCU) academics have been working with local government aged and disability services Charkil-Om and Apunimina Health Service and local allied health and Queensland Health staff to co-design and implement a community rehabilitation and lifestyle service. This project used a strengths-based approach to identifying resources already

available within the community, including a range of allied health students coming to Weipa for university clinical placements.



After considering a range of potential models, the collaborative decided

the model most feasible to implement was a student-led community rehabilitation and lifestyle service. A pilot of this service commenced in 2018 with dietetic, social work and occupational therapy students dedicating up to three days/week of their placement time on delivering community rehabilitation services. In 2019 this service will run from April to December and include physiotherapy and speech pathology students in addition to the other students. The students work in interprofessional teams providing services aimed at a holistic approach to supporting the physical, social, emotional and cultural needs of people living with chronic diseases, disabilities and frail age. The focus of this service is on healthy aging, wellness and community participation.

Funding has been provided to evaluate this service through a HOT North Early Career Fellowship for Dr Alice Cairns (JCU, Centre for Rural and Remote Health) and a FNQ Hospital Foundation Large Grant. The collaborative is currently seeking ongoing funding for an allied health rehabilitation practitioner to support and expand this service in 2020.

By Dr Alice Cairns, HOT North Post-Doctoral Research Fellow.

### Older People - Nhulunbuy

**A**lthough this was a "normal" clinical placement for two occupational therapy and two speech pathology students, it was also part of a research project to evaluate the effectiveness of students working in remote areas to fill gaps in services where there are little or no existing allied



Older people - Nhulunbuy



health services. A Hot North grant from Menzies Institute has enabled a joint initiative between Flinders University, James Cook University and Indigenous Allied Health Australia, to pilot a student-led service in remote East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

Over an 8-week period, from February to April 2019, the students worked with people receiving home care packages who are supported by Anglicare in Nhulunbuy and/or East Arnhem Regional Council in Yirrkala. Linking in with the support workers helped to build relationships with the community and assisted with familiarisation with the culture. Additionally, formal cultural awareness sessions were organised including a trip to the Homelands with Laynhapuy Health. Meetings with key people were organised in the first two weeks of placement

including the local interpreter service, the centre for disease control and the local art gallery.



In the early stages of the placement the students spent

time understanding how services are delivered and how lifestyles of the families in the area differ to their own. Working closely with two local Yolŋu elders, who assisted with understanding culture and translation, the students had conversations to understand needs of people and their families. They then developed projects to address needs identified by the agencies or service recipients, in consultation with relevant service providers and supervisors.

A total of 21 people were seen, including older people and family members. A wide variety of interventions were undertaken and resources developed. A number of referrals were made for further intervention from visiting professionals to ensure ongoing support for service recipients.

Evaluations completed to date indicate the students made very strong connections with the older people and their families. Having time meant they were able to visit on multiple occasions to understand the needs fully and could take time to sit and listen. Working together with a local person significantly enhanced communication in 'Yolŋu Matha' and helped to build relationships. As a result, students are able to provide effective services in remote areas as long as there is appropriate supervision to guide interventions.

From the students, "An experience I never thought I would have the opportunity to get. I have learnt so much about my profession in a rural environment that will follow me wherever I go! The rapport built with the community is something I have never experienced elsewhere and has found a way into my heart. This work is rewarding beyond my wildest imagination and I am so lucky to have been a part of a service that has assisted in improving the quality of life of people all over the Nhulunbuy area" (Jess Garard, OT Student).



"I highly recommend rural and remote placements for student experience. After a short eight weeks I feel I have grown so much and developed great skills that I know will be valuable for when I start my career, such as being flexible to change and able to think quickly on my feet. I also thoroughly enjoyed working with the clients and our cultural consultant Murphy and Djerrkŋu, who made us feel so welcome and enriched our experience even more so". (Beth Bailey, SP Student).

"From the service recipients, "They were beautiful girls. They brought sunshine into my life. They took time and saw me again. They had a wider view, not a narrow focus and didn't just ask questions and then leave" (Djerrkŋu Marika, service recipient and cultural consultant).

"The students worked well with my family and within my home and it was a good experience for them coming to community. They can learn from us and we can learn from them. I did not want to reject anything they said or did. They spoke well and had good ideas" (Anon, Service Recipient).

By Susan Witt, Clinical Lead, Flinders NT, Indigenous Development and Training Award.

### Workforce - Indigenous Development and Training Award (IDATA), Cert IV Training

In 2018 I was approached by the Director of medical services at Wuchopperen Health Services and asked if I had ever considered undertaking studies within allied health services. The Director said she'd thought of me immediately because of my role within the allied health team.

My role within the team has developed a lot over the years, I started as the optical dispenser for our optometrist, I have

Workforce - IDATA, Cert IV Training

Workforce - IAHA Project, Palm Island

since started assisting the whole team through administration and other daily tasks with our clients. I was ready, I wanted to study and continue my journey in allied health.

After starting my studies, I met with representatives from Wuchopperen and James Cook University to discuss the Talking After Stroke Project and the Indigenous Training Award being offered with the project. I accepted the opportunity to be a part of this project with much gratitude; I feel so privileged to be a part of a project with the aim to increase services to those experiencing disadvantage.

Initiating the Talking After Stroke Project in a real life, and very busy, health service was quite a process! By December, the team had successfully won the grant to run the pilot project, which included funding for me to complete my Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance. We were ready to get cracking!

Speech pathologist, Natasha Barlow, and I started to get our heads around what it would take to set the project up. We are confident the project will be a success and will remain an integral part of the culturally safe and holistic services we provide at Wuchopperen.

In the background of the project, was my study! The IDATA (Indigenous Development and Training Award) allowed me the opportunity to enrol in the Certificate IV with three elective subjects, naturally I chose speech pathology and I have recently commenced my first core units and gained placement onsite in podiatry, speech pathology, and with our visiting physiotherapist.

My goal, outside of completing the pilot project, is to develop my role within the allied health team and to be able to assist the team and the community with my new skills.

By Michelle Dougan, Coordinator of Allied Health Services, Wuchopperen Health Service, Cairns. Recipient of an IDATA funded by HOT North.

### Workforce - IAHA Project, Palm Island

Indigenous Allied Health Australia Ltd. (IAHA) is a national not-for-profit, member based, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation. IAHA leads sector workforce development and support to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Improving Indigenous health means having more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people encouraged to consider, pursue and succeed in allied health careers. IAHA works closely with communities, key partners and stakeholders to

build and diversify and sustain the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce by:

- Focusing specifically on building and sustaining a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce;
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through promoting allied health careers and facilitating pathways into and through allied health roles along their professional journey; and
- Advocating for culturally safe and responsive allied and system-wide health care.

The Remote and Rural Indigenous Allied Health Workforce Development project (RIAHP) began in May 2017 under funding provided by the Department of Social Services (DSS). The scope of the project is to:

1. Stimulate the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce in two remote regions: Tennant Creek, Northern Territory and Palm Island, Queensland that can provide culturally safe, responsive and holistic allied health services to people with disability.
2. Ensure that in regions where there is no Indigenous allied health workforce, that the non-Indigenous allied health workforce is equipped with the knowledge and support to be able to deliver culturally safe and responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

It is critical that local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote and rural regions are given the opportunity to express their needs and to be a genuine part of building the workforce development solution for their community. IAHA instigated the project amid concerns about the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and continuing lack of access to allied health professionals and service availability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those living in remote communities. Relationships and considerate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are paramount. This project is driven by communities, owned by communities and therefore sustained by communities.



By Donna-Maree Towney, Project Officer, Indigenous Allied Health Australia.

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## The Leadership Team

## About NARN



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### Andy McGaw

Health systems  
Regional Manager – Country WA PHN  
WA Primary Health Alliance  
Broome, Western Australia

Andy sat on the NARN Leadership Group until early 2019 at which time he resigned. We thank Andy for his unique and valuable contribution to the team.

## NARN Vision for northern Australia

*A good life for all Northern Australians while recognising the unique culture and lifestyle and addressing health inequities for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

## Key Strategies

### Connect

- ⊙ Researchers with communities
- ⊙ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and non-Indigenous researchers
- ⊙ Allied health with broader health research arena

### Build

- ⊙ Strength-based approaches
- ⊙ Culturally responsive practices
- ⊙ More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and non-Indigenous researchers in the north

### Drive

- ⊙ Evidence-informed practice
- ⊙ Research that builds evidence to support local solutions

### Translate

- ⊙ Evidence-informed investment
- ⊙ Research into policy and practice

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What's on ...

3 DAY FORUM

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Outback Allied Health Forum "Realising potential and inspiring change"

11 JUNE 2019

Join with Outback allied health professions from the Centre for Rural and Remote Health, James Cook University, North West Hospital and Health Service, Gidgee Healing, NWRH, Education Queensland and private practice to:

- network
- share your innovative projects, practice, education or service models
- research and programs

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

[Click Here](#)

Earlybird registration \$40

*OAH Forum Enquiries*, please contact Amanda Kaminski at Centre for Rural and Remote Health, James Cook University on (07) 4745 4525, 0419 660 627 or [nwqahforum@jcu.edu.au](mailto:nwqahforum@jcu.edu.au)

## HOT NORTH & NARN Workshop

12-13 JUNE 2019



Hear from **HOT NORTH** and **NARN** clinicians, researchers and local and interstate colleagues about the latest work in northern Australia and beyond on:

- Chronic diseases
- Respiratory diseases
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Vector-borne diseases
- Functioning, disability and health (2 concurrent sessions)

Cultural Responsiveness workshop  
Indigenous Allied Health Australia  
Morning, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019 *Details to follow*



Registration opens mid March - FREE  
[www.hotnorth.org.au/events](http://www.hotnorth.org.au/events)



- ⊙ The Lowitja Institute, [International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference](#), 18th to 20th June - Darwin
- ⊙ Indigenous Allied Health Australia, [2019 National Conference](#) 23rd to 25th September - Darwin