A collaborative initiative working towards closing the education and health gap in remote Aboriginal communities

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Abstract
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Abstract: Vulnerable children and families with minimal support networks are often excluded from health services due to complexities and barriers to inclusion and engagement. This presentation will discuss a transdisciplinary model that focusses on active engagement to support the life outcomes for children with hearing loss. The journey towards this framework will be discussed through the experiences of a not-for-profit early intervention service. Case studies will be used to examine how this model works to enhance outcomes, reduce disincentives to access services and creative service delivery models which can be adapted for providers at all points along the early intervention pathway. Challenges to this model of cross collaborative service for organisations and families will be identified and explored. Experiences of reaching vulnerable families by addressing the whole family system as partners has resulted in increased engagement and overall progress towards improved outcomes. The inflexibility of the traditional medical model creates barriers that families often cannot readily overcome resulting in a perpetuating cycle of non-accessed opportunities and reduced potentials. By changing services to promote social connections and support to families, gains can be made towards changing these families lives. Significant changes in early intervention service provision have demonstrated how families can make a transition from passive recipients of outcomes to active decision makers in their own journey. A collaborative framework between families, services, the community and policies which encourage consideration of the whole family environment leads to the shaping of positive health and wellbeing outcomes for all children and those around them that scaffold their growth.

Presenter: Cathrine Neilsen-Hewett  
Organisation: University Of Wollongong  
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Stream: Stream A: Social Inclusion  
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Abstract: The Australian political and social context has borne witness to numerous socially driven initiatives over the past decade, none more pronounced than the focus on Indigenous peoples and communities. This presentation provides an overview of the research that informed a collaborative and integrated community-based early childhood educational project designed to address Indigenous disadvantage in Australia and work towards closing the gap in Indigenous health and educational outcomes. The program is unique in design in that it is built on a history of relationships established over a four-year period with early childhood and health practitioners, integrates both health and early childhood educational services, is collaborative and flexible in design responding to community needs, and is culturally sensitive and inclusive of children and families. The presentation examines a research-based model on how organizations in remote communities can collaboratively plan and implement an effective education program focused on mathematics and science that simultaneously improves the quality of early education, connects families with their children's education, and provides vital access to health information and services.