

## MONITORING THE GAP

### OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation has released a new report which monitors the health, development and well-being of Aboriginal children and young people in far west New South Wales. The report is an important indicator for Maari Ma and all service providers in the region regarding the work being done to close the gap for Aboriginal people when it comes to children. The report is the second in an intended on-going series. As well as looking at the work being done across the region to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people it also highlights those areas where further work is required. Since 2005, Maari Ma has been implementing its Healthy Start program, aimed at improving the health of Aboriginal children in the Maari Ma region by focusing on care to pregnant women, their children and families. In 2009, Maari Ma started its Early Years Project which looked to improve aspects of early childhood development such as literacy, language, emotional well-being and social development. When the Early Years Project started Maari Ma published the first report in this series, bringing together all the data related to children, and in particular Aboriginal children and their families to monitor the work being done. Five years on, there have been some improvements.

*"I believe this report, and the series going forward, will be an invaluable legacy documenting the work that we are doing, in conjunction with other service providers and in partnership with our Aboriginal communities, to truly close the gap for our kids"* Maari Ma CEO, Bob Davis.

#### Indicators which have improved significantly:

- The rate of Aboriginal women smoking in pregnancy is dropping (down from 78% in the first report to 45% in this current report).
- Aboriginal children as victims of crime have dropped from 72 per 1000 in the first report to 23 per 1000 in this

current report. While this rate is still 3.4 times higher than for all children in NSW, it is a significant improvement since the first report.

- Children's dental health is improving as shown by the number of decayed, missing or filled permanent teeth decreasing and the proportion with decay decreasing to match the state's rates.

MAARI MA HEALTH  
ABORIGINAL  
CORPORATION REGION OF  
SERVICE



# EDUCATION FROM THE EXPERTS

With a strong emphasis on smoking cessation and a very comprehensive Smokers Program that is promoted to communities, Maari Ma has dedicated staff who are trained to help people to quit. Staff undertake regular education sessions to keep up to date with latest research and trends. Recently they took part in a question answer session with Maari Ma visiting specialist, **Donna Harrison** – co-founder of

the Australian Association of Smoking Cessation Professionals and visiting senior lecturer at the University of Sydney's Brain & Mind Research Institute. Donna also undertook an education session titled "*Clinical Practice Guidelines – use in tobacco dependence*" with staff, local GP's, clinic teams, case workers and primary health workers from across the region.



Smoking cessation expert, Donna Harrison, conducts a question answer session with Maari Ma staff.

## INNOVATIVE NUMERACY RESEARCH PROJECT



Maari Ma is working with Macquarie University, Sydney in a project aimed at helping to close the numeracy gap in Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Menindee in children in the years before they start school. Maari Ma will team up with Associate Professor Marina Pasic and early childhood education colleagues to assess the impact of a range of initiatives to improve Indigenous children's numeracy achievement, including an innovative mathematics and science program. The project will establish a sustainable and ongoing partnership between educators, Maari Ma's Healthy Start teams and Indigenous families in the region. Marina was a member of a consortium of early childhood experts contracted to develop the national Early Years Learning Framework and a member of a multi-site team involving eleven universities investigating the mathematical thinking of preschool children in rural and regional Australia.





## WHITE RIBBON ACCREDITATION

Maari Ma is committed to being a workplace that prevents and responds to violence against women. It's currently working towards White Ribbon accreditation and is one of only a handful of nationwide groups taking part in the work based program aimed at reducing violence against women. As well as working towards accreditation Primary Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Worker, Peter Crossing has been accepted as a White Ribbon Ambassador and Primary Health Worker, Jamie Billing has been selected to be on the national panel for the White Ribbon Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group for their Diversity Program. The program aims to make the White Ribbon Campaign more inclusive - enhancing engagement with Australia's many culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



Maari Ma's White Ribbon Steering Committee is working towards accreditation. Members, Jamie Billing (pictured left) has been appointed to a White Ribbon national panel and Peter Crossing is a White Ribbon Ambassador.

## WORKING WITH SCHOOL STUDENTS



Students taking part in the school based Crossroads program received an education session from Maari Ma's Healthy Lifestyle Worker on nutrition and smoking.

Maari Ma's relationship with the region's schools continues to strengthen and this year staff have already been involved with a number of school programs. Healthy Lifestyle Worker, Shannon Oates, conducted an education session for Years 11 and 12 high school students from Wilcannia, Menindee and Ivanhoe taking part in the Crossroads program. The program aims to support senior students as they address issues related to identity, independence and the changing responsibilities they face. Maari Ma was also invited to assist a Year 7 orientation day at both Broken Hill and Willyama High Schools which was conducted by the Youth Services Schools Interagency (YSSI). Jenny Walters and Pia Brady, from Primary Care Specialist Services, worked with students on a 'construction' project which drew on skills to promote resilience such as negotiation, cooperation, positive social interaction, conflict resolution, reflection, problem solving and creativity.

# CLOSE THE GAP DAY

Close the Gap Day held in Broken Hill's Town Square this year attracted a good crowd despite a very hot March 19 day. Maari Ma was joined by other organisations including Mission Australia, NRL, YMCA, Medicare Local and Warra Warra Legal Service. There was a wide selection of health information and resources for the community, and Maari Ma's Keeping Well team did more than 30

blood pressure and blood glucose checks. The dental team had a stand displaying a set of teeth and lots of toothbrushes and toothpaste to give away, and tobacco monitoring of carbon monoxide levels were taken and asked for by the community using the Smokerlyzer. The Mental Health Team had a great display of hands and the explanation of what Close the Gap meant to the community.



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