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Stream D: Indigenous Futures and Cultural Response

Title: A leap of faith: intercultural constructions of safety in the NT

Abstract: Unlocked through a constructivist grounded theory PhD study is the re-imagining of a strengths-based approach to keeping Aboriginal children from the NT safe from sexual exploitation. Remote Aboriginal communities continue to be profiled for the risks to children of sexual harm, predictably followed by a mainstream discourse of cultural and community dysfunction necessitating the removal of children or the closure of remote communities. The scope is diminished for Aboriginal peoples to overtly identify the problem as it may impact their communities in favour of complaint dependent criminal justice and child protection pathways. Revealed through the research is evidence of protective effort located within communities at the personal, interpersonal, family and community levels. Underscored by a history of colonial oppression, explicit protective action at each level requires the careful navigation of a hierarchy of consequences. It is the voices of 20 research participants who courageously open a new conversation that encourages harnessing knowledge, skills and processes of both worlds to strengthen protective capacity within remote communities. It will take trust, both ways, and a leap of faith.

Bio: Sue is PhD candidate with Charles Sturt University and Snr Lecturer in Social Work at Charles Darwin University with a professional background of over 30 years as a social work practitioner in fields of practice including child and family welfare and specific expertise in child and adult sexual assault. Originally from Sydney, Sue has worked in the remote West Pilbara of Western Australia and across the NT, living and working in Darwin since 1993. Sue's research reflects drive to inform change for the safety and protection of children from sexual exploitation having seen the immediate and long-term impacts of such trauma to children, families, communities and society. Lessons learned through working with Aboriginal peoples from her early career has shaped and informed her practice demonstrating the power and possibility of finding solutions for complex social problems through listening more deeply to Indigenous knowledge and expertise.