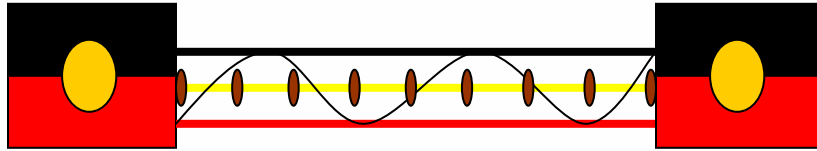


SYDNEY WEST
AREA HEALTH SERVICE

NSW HEALTH

BLUE MOUNTAINS
DIVISION OF GENERAL PRACTICE



*2008 Blue Mountains
Aboriginal Community
Sharing and Learning Circle*

12 March 2008



In the spirit of recognising the past and looking forward with optimism and confidence, the Sydney West Area Health Service and the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice has a vision for improving access, service and ultimately outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Acknowledgments:

The Sydney West Area Health Service (SWAHS) and the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice (BMDGP) wish to express sincere thanks to:

- ❖ Attendees to the Aboriginal Sharing and Learning Circle Health Workshops.
- ❖ Aboriginal Elders.
- ❖ Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre.
- ❖ General Practitioners.
- ❖ Community Participants.
- ❖ Community Health Staff.
- ❖ Community agencies and organisations (government and non government).
- ❖ SWAHS Multi Media Department.

Sharing and Learning Circle

Dedication:

The Learning and Sharing Circle is dedicated to two past Community leaders, Elders Auntie Joan Cooper and Auntie Betty Locke and to the people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who strive to improve Aboriginal health and well being.

“Aboriginal people carry a disproportionately high burden of chronic disease. The uneven burden of social, economic and environmental circumstances in which many Aboriginal people live (poverty, poor housing and inadequate food supply) place Aboriginal people at greater risk for chronic conditions. The health disadvantage begins early in the life cycle continuing into childhood and throughout adult life.”(Aboriginal Chronic Conditions, Activity profile summary report, Meyer, J. 2007)

- 945 people have identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the Blue Mountains.





Aboriginal Sharing and Learning Circle

The Sharing and Learning Circle format allows each participant to speak, listen and exchange ideas

The sharing and learning circle, an Aboriginal oral tradition for sharing information and stories, was proposed as a culturally appropriate format for a focus group. It was a new and unique experience for many participants, such as the Sydney West Area Health Service, the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice and community members.

Although the concept of a sharing circle is a traditional Aboriginal custom, an open invitation was sent to all who have an interest in improving the health and well being of Aboriginal people. The circle is designed so that, where possible, no one has their back to another and every one is equal, that all opinions are respected and all stories valued. It allows all participants to speak, listen and exchange ideas. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak and to be heard; only one person has the authority to speak at any given time. This communication technique provides support and empowerment in a manner that is inclusive and respectful to those who attend. The circle assists Aboriginal people to maintain culture and tradition in mainstream Australia.

Everyone is equal, all opinions are respected



Community participants involved in sharing circle



Lenny Frail stating his opinion



The Process

In planning the provision of services to a community, or to improve and redesign services it is imperative that the community themselves are involved and have a voice. The Aboriginal Community have a distinct voice that needs to be recognised within the specific geography of the Blue Mountains.

The unique geography, ribbon development and availability of services, and transport limitations means that access to services is limited, often costly requires extended periods of time to access due to distance.

Therefore, both individual Aboriginal Community members and service organisations were invited to attend the forum. Various methods of distribution of Invitations were employed. A large coloured advertisement was placed in the Blue Mountains Gazette (attached). This advertisement was made prominent through the use of Aboriginal colours, reinforcing the connection to the Aboriginal Community and strategic placement within the newspaper.

Invitations were also extended verbally to Aboriginal focused organisations, Aboriginal Community members, General Practitioners, Community health staff and other service providers within the Blue Mountains.

Response notification was via Lawson Community Health Centre. The response was overwhelming and well over expected numbers and therefore the capacity of the booked and advertised venue. The large response was vastly different from previous forums whereby much fewer people attended. This indicated that the Aboriginal Community wanted to have their voices heard.

Due to the limited size of the venue and the desire to have a large representation from across the Mountains, and primarily from the Aboriginal Community, the decision was made to approach organisations that had nominated numerous representatives to limit numbers to one.

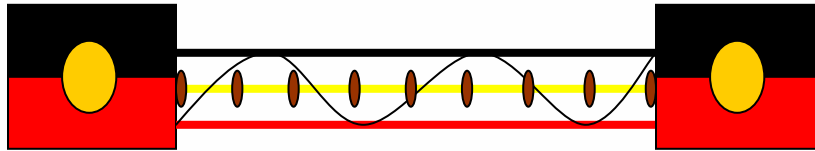
The number of attendees still numbered over 60.



SYDNEY WEST
AREA HEALTH SERVICE

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DIVISION OF GENERAL PRACTICE



*2008 Blue Mountains
Aboriginal Community Sharing and Learning Circle*

The Division of General Practice and Community Health will host the 2008 Blue Mountains Aboriginal Community Sharing and Learning Circle
Blue Mountains Hospital, Katoomba
9:30am to 2:00pm 12th March 2008

Local Aboriginal residents, Aboriginal Organisations and Organisations that provide services to the Aboriginal Community are invited to attend and participate in this vitally important event, which will consider many of the health issues and challenges confronting the Aboriginal Community.

Key health issues and challenges will include: Building a healthier Aboriginal Community, identifying issues relating to access and service provision, developing culturally appropriate strategies, responding to Aboriginal health and well being needs, listening to the voices of the Elders and the Community, working together to improve existing services.

The organisers of the sharing and learning circle wish to stress that the intention is that it will be more than a talk – fest. Rather the sharing and learning circle is structured to allow the local Aboriginal people to honestly and openly identify the issues and challenges existing in their community but more importantly, to discuss how these issues and challenges can be better addressed.

A feature of the sharing and learning circle will be the participation of key Area Health staff, General Practitioners and Community members, sharing knowledge and information.

RSVP 27th FEBRUARY 2008

Bookings are essential

Aboriginal Community members, organisations wishing to receive detailed information and would like to discuss registration, transport and other related matters should contact:

Registration and Transport:
Lawson Community Health Centre

Enquires: Clarke Scott
0413005324 OR 47598700

Forum Program

Blue Mountains Aboriginal Community Sharing and Learning Circle

*Blue Mountains Hospital, Katoomba
 12th March 2008*

9:30 am to 10:00 am	Arrival /Registration Tea and Coffee Informal Networking
10:15 am to 10:20 am	Welcome to Country Carol Cooper
10:20 am to 10:45 am	Introductions Sharing-Learning Circle aims and objectives Clarke Scott
10:45am to 11:00 am	Summary Of Community Health Services Kath Harrison, Acting Network Director Access and patient logistics
11:00 am to 11:15 am	Background GPs Dr Andrew Knight Board Member BMDGP
11:15 am to 12:00 am	Large sharing Circle: Issues and Priorities
12:00 am to 13:00 pm	Lunch
13:00 pm to 13:45 pm	Small sharing Circles: Challenges and Strategies
13:45 pm to 13:55 pm	Feedback: Where to from Here
13:55 pm to 14:00 pm	Close

The Sharing and Learning Circle

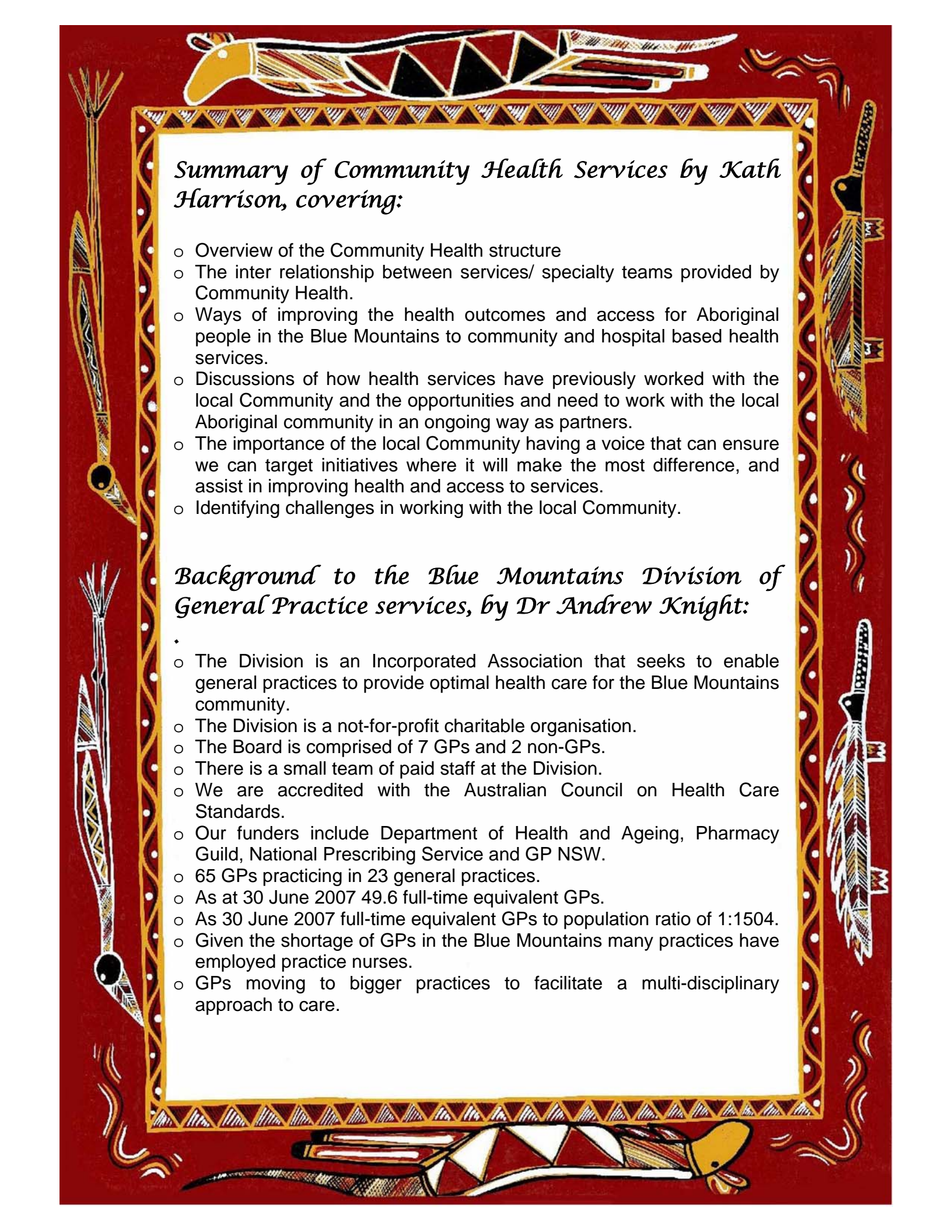
The format of the forum reflected the joint partnership between SWAHS Primary Care & Community Health and the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice.

The program commenced with:

- **Welcome to Country by Carol Cooper recognising the Aboriginal heritage of the land, the Blue Mountains.**
- **Introductions and Sharing and Learning Circle aims and objectives by Clarke Scott, who:**
 - Welcomed all participants to the Aboriginal Sharing and Learning Circle, explaining the cultural significance of the circle.
 - Identified current challenges faced by the often forgotten Aboriginal community, particularly relating to the limited Aboriginal resources and positions in health services.
 - Acknowledged that against adversity, the Aboriginal community are still able to provide champions amongst their people. It has been the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Blue Mountains of the past and present who have taken on the struggle.
 - Dedicated the day in honour of the two past Aboriginal elders, Auntie Joan Cooper and Auntie Betty Locke, acknowledging their good work. He challenged participants to embrace the elder's direction and enthusiasm to continually improve health and well being of the Aboriginal community.



Clarke Scott- SWAHS Aboriginal Liaison Officer



Summary of Community Health Services by Kath Harrison, covering:

- Overview of the Community Health structure
- The inter relationship between services/ specialty teams provided by Community Health.
- Ways of improving the health outcomes and access for Aboriginal people in the Blue Mountains to community and hospital based health services.
- Discussions of how health services have previously worked with the local Community and the opportunities and need to work with the local Aboriginal community in an ongoing way as partners.
- The importance of the local Community having a voice that can ensure we can target initiatives where it will make the most difference, and assist in improving health and access to services.
- Identifying challenges in working with the local Community.

Background to the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice services, by Dr Andrew Knight:

- The Division is an Incorporated Association that seeks to enable general practices to provide optimal health care for the Blue Mountains community.
- The Division is a not-for-profit charitable organisation.
- The Board is comprised of 7 GPs and 2 non-GPs.
- There is a small team of paid staff at the Division.
- We are accredited with the Australian Council on Health Care Standards.
- Our funders include Department of Health and Ageing, Pharmacy Guild, National Prescribing Service and GP NSW.
- 65 GPs practicing in 23 general practices.
- As at 30 June 2007 49.6 full-time equivalent GPs.
- As 30 June 2007 full-time equivalent GPs to population ratio of 1:1504.
- Given the shortage of GPs in the Blue Mountains many practices have employed practice nurses.
- GPs moving to bigger practices to facilitate a multi-disciplinary approach to care.

- The Division runs programmes in:
 - Mental Health.
 - Aged Care.
 - Home Medicine Reviews (HMR).
 - Immunisation.
 - Nursing in General Practice.
 - National Prescribing Service (NPS).
 - Practice Support.
 - Chronic Disease Management.
- The Division is conducting broad consultation with members, practices, consumer and community groups and key stakeholders to understand the health issues of the Blue Mountains develop our next 3 year plan.
- In November 2006 the Sydney West Area Health Service surveyed GPs across the area about a number of specific Aboriginal health issues.
- 53% of Blue Mountains GPs indicated that they record patient indigenous status.
- Blue Mountains GPs reported a low numbers of Adult Health checks (people 15-54 years).
- Blue Mountains GPs reported lower numbers of Child Health checks
- What can we do to improve this?
- What does the research say are the health issues for Aboriginal communities?
 - Smoking.
 - Cardiovascular disease.
 - Diabetes.
 - Respiratory disease.
 - Diet.
 - Exercise.



Participants at the large sharing and learning circle.

Small Sharing Circle challenges and strategies

The afternoon session focused upon issues and challenges for the Aboriginal Community: accessing services and better health care. A large 'Sharing and Learning circle' was formed to identify key issues. This provided people attending with an opportunity to openly discuss their experiences both good and bad and their ideas about both needs and barriers.

The discussions raised many varied issues and were then prioritised into 3 key areas.



Collin Locke looking for solutions.



A summary all issues raised follows:

- More Aboriginal workers in health services.
- Visible recognition of Aboriginal Community (Welcoming and Aboriginal friendly).
- Transport to out of area services.
- Health issues dental, obesity, mental health, hearing, smoking, use of drugs.
- Aboriginal representative on Boards of Health Services/Division.
- Develop better links with existing health services.
- Aboriginal GP to join local practices.
- Holistic approach to health.
- No attention from reception staff at general practice.
- Attitude of staff at GP.
- Aboriginal health clinic in the Blue Mountains.
- User friendly health service – especially for the Aboriginal community.
- Culturally appropriate training for all health providers.
- Opportunity for immediate feedback at GP.
- Local Aboriginal people to train staff at GP.
- Awareness of local services.
- Barriers to access of local services.
- Feedback from this consultation.
- Aboriginal identity papers.
- How to ask the question of identity/cultural background.
- High need for culturally appropriate training for health staff.
- Mainstream health services to recognise difference in life expectancy.
- Money for GP Super Clinics to include Aboriginal health.
- Aboriginal Health worker employed through allied health.
- Need for immediate solutions not just in the future.
- Takes time to take down the barriers.
- How to welcome and encourage Aboriginal community to use existing services.
- Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre need more accessible and visual location (support from BMCC).
- Justification of why Blue Mountains Aboriginal Community needs the funding.
- Health services need to ask if Aboriginal (trained how to ask).
- Lack of local dental services.
- Large tobacco issue.

- More info needed on drugs, recognition of medication already being used and contraindications of other medications.
- “ One stop shop” for Aboriginal services not necessarily with Aboriginal doctors.
- Age range issues for services that do not consider the different and shorter life span for Aboriginal people e.g. breast screening.
- GPs do not know if there are any Aboriginal health workers in the Blue Mountains.
- Services need to be available all of the time not just on set days.
- Need for a safe place in a central location that can be reached and is accessible.



Everyone contributed to openly identify issues

Priorities

The key issues and challenges were divided into immediate, short term and long term solutions identifying barriers to be considered and strategies identified to address the challenges. The small sharing and learning circles provided not only the opportunity to discuss issues but also the opportunity to exchange information, network and learn from each other about real issues effecting access to services and health care in the Blue Mountains, SWAHS Primary Care and Community Health and the SWAHS Aboriginal Health Unit to work with the Aboriginal Community to progress and monitor implementation of the strategies.



Small Sharing and Learning Circle group work

Outcomes

Immediate

ISSUE	STRATEGY	BARRIER
1. Culturally appropriate training for GPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contact ACRC ➤ Market the need ➤ Link into existing education ➤ Ensure GPs see the training as a priority ➤ Educate all services and workers not just GPs 	Staffing relief Cost if training is after hours Transport Stats & identification-data
2. Making Aboriginal health services friendly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Awareness campaign ➤ Pamphlets available with flag/ sticker of Aboriginal colours ➤ ALO at facilities ➤ Copies of Koori Mail or health workers journal ➤ Surveys /feedback with colours ➤ Health professionals education 	Friendly identification must be at the entrance Attitudes of scrutiny if attending programs
3. Increase awareness of what services are available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use community radio ➤ Aboriginal newsletter – add list of services ➤ Pamphlets ➤ Interface strengthened ➤ Bulk billing signs ➤ GP list of who will bulk bill for the aboriginal community 	

Medium term

ISSUE	STRATEGY	BARRIER
Importance of Aboriginal health workers in services- Aboriginal health workers to be well networked into community	Review workers roles and look at opportunities to employ more Aboriginal workers	Funding Recognition of need
How to justify the numbers for funding of positions	Encourage identification at hospitals, GP practices etc	Discrimination
Health programs in the mountains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Funding (AMS) ❖ Flexible appointments system 	Look at services extending to Mountains e.g. AMS	Service resources and recognition of BM community
GP training through Division	Engage Aboriginal services/workers to provide education to both GPs and their staff	Time required
Transport		
Special fitted out bus – mobile bus service	To address one stop shop and accessibility for the community. Needs to be accessible across mountains and not just in one location	Funding Engagement and organisation with other services , GPs etc

Long term

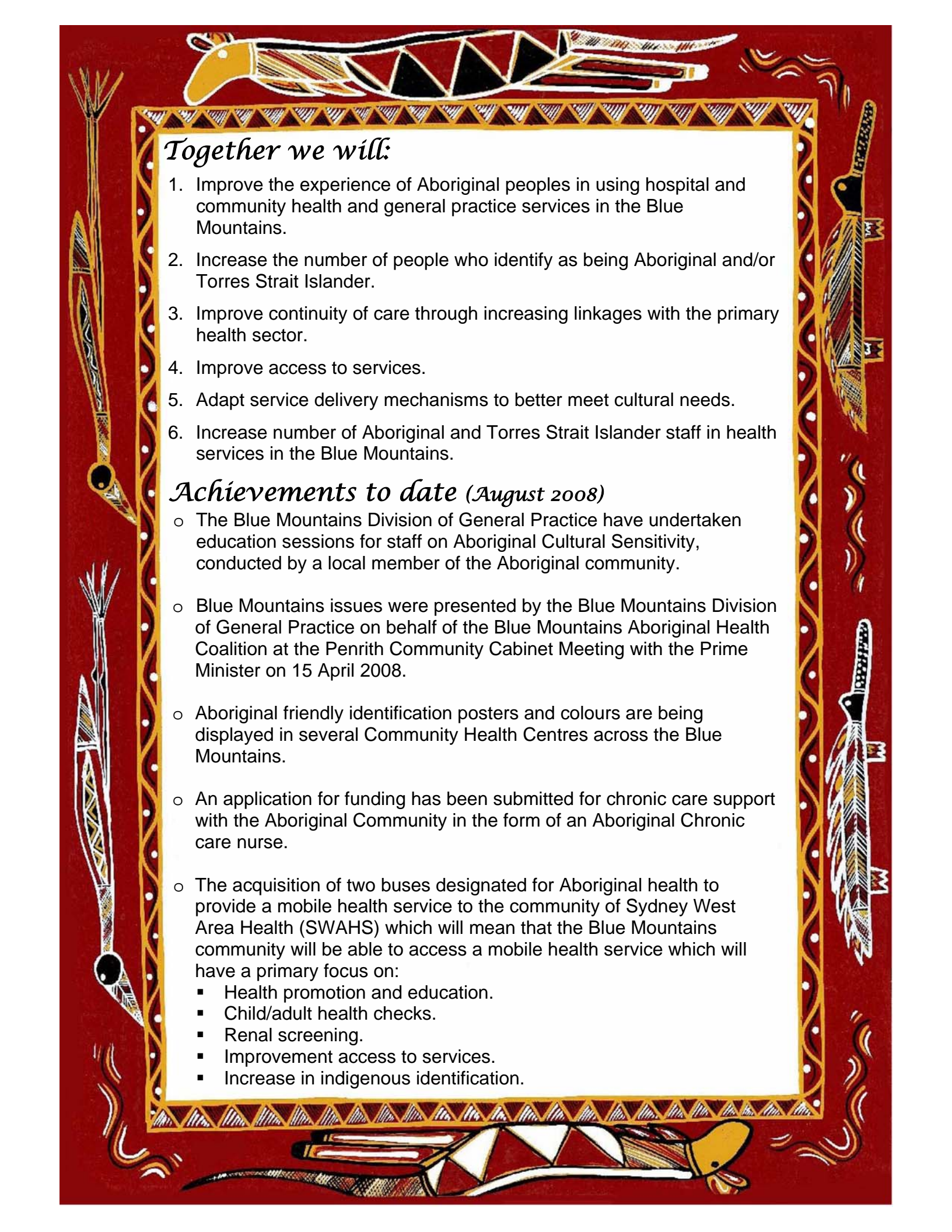
ISSUE	STRATEGY	BARRIER
Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre relocated	Lobby council for location in an accessible location	Availability of building
One stop shop for Aboriginal Health	GP clinic proposal	
Aboriginal health worker at Katoomba Hospital	Lobby for worker/ 24 hours	
Holistic approach to health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Housing • Medical • Cultural/spiritual 	Enhance recognition of needs in the BM/increase numbers through identification	Being seen as a large number requiring services and a priority
Blue Mountains identified funding	As above	As above
Collective approach to lobbying for change	Voice through joint planning – committee with BMDGP and SWAHS to coordinate a united voice	

Where to from here?

To date the Aboriginal Community/Health Coalition has been formed and has been meeting monthly to monitor progress of strategies identified at the forum.

Inaugural Committee representatives:

- ❖ Julie Wilson – Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre (ACRC).
- ❖ Brad Moore – ACRC.
- ❖ Ceane Towers –ACRC.
- ❖ Sheila Holcombe- CEO Blue Mountains Division of General Practice.
- ❖ Kelvin Lau - General Practitioner.
- ❖ Tim Agius- Area Director, SWAHS Aboriginal Health Unit.
- ❖ Clarke Scott- SWAHS ALO Primary Care & Community Health (PC&CH).
- ❖ Chris Baird- SWAHS A/ Group Manager, PC&CH.
- ❖ Helen McMullen- SWAHS Clinical Lead, PC&CH.
- ❖ Alexis Viles – SWAHS Director of Nursing, Katoomba Hospital.

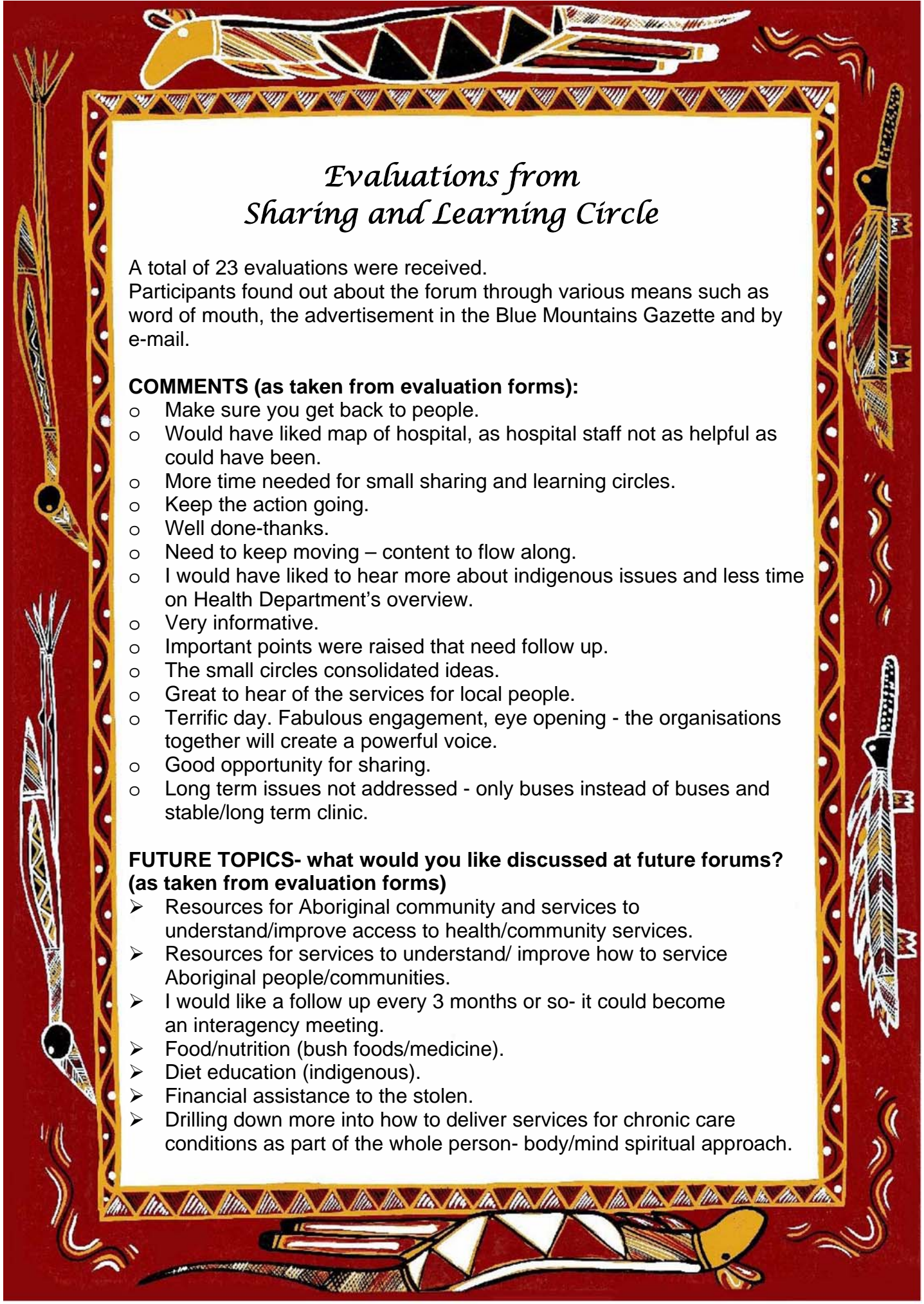


Together we will:

1. Improve the experience of Aboriginal peoples in using hospital and community health and general practice services in the Blue Mountains.
2. Increase the number of people who identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
3. Improve continuity of care through increasing linkages with the primary health sector.
4. Improve access to services.
5. Adapt service delivery mechanisms to better meet cultural needs.
6. Increase number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in health services in the Blue Mountains.

Achievements to date (August 2008)

- The Blue Mountains Division of General Practice have undertaken education sessions for staff on Aboriginal Cultural Sensitivity, conducted by a local member of the Aboriginal community.
- Blue Mountains issues were presented by the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice on behalf of the Blue Mountains Aboriginal Health Coalition at the Penrith Community Cabinet Meeting with the Prime Minister on 15 April 2008.
- Aboriginal friendly identification posters and colours are being displayed in several Community Health Centres across the Blue Mountains.
- An application for funding has been submitted for chronic care support with the Aboriginal Community in the form of an Aboriginal Chronic care nurse.
- The acquisition of two buses designated for Aboriginal health to provide a mobile health service to the community of Sydney West Area Health (SWAHS) which will mean that the Blue Mountains community will be able to access a mobile health service which will have a primary focus on:
 - Health promotion and education.
 - Child/adult health checks.
 - Renal screening.
 - Improvement access to services.
 - Increase in indigenous identification.



Evaluations from Sharing and Learning Circle

A total of 23 evaluations were received.

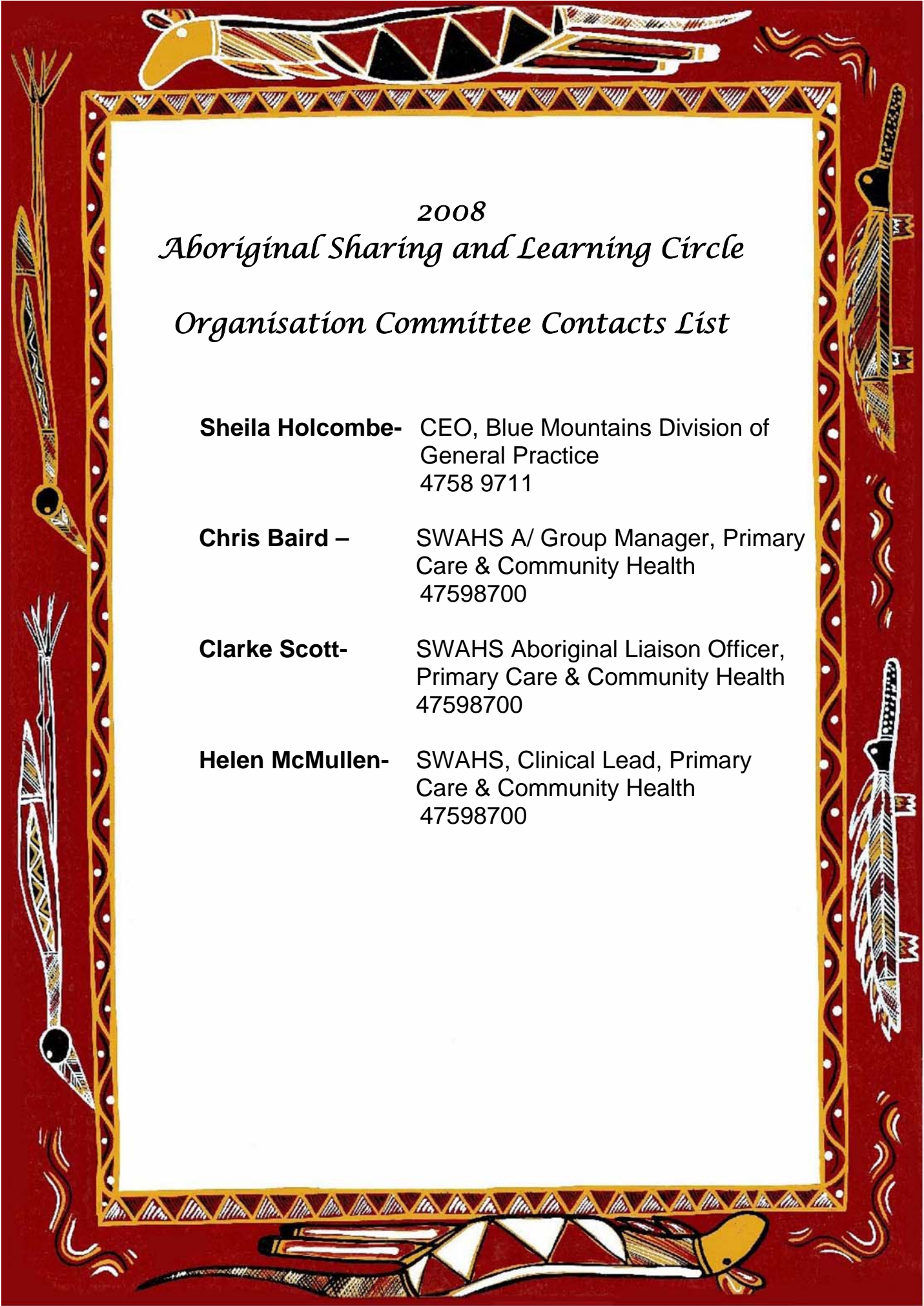
Participants found out about the forum through various means such as word of mouth, the advertisement in the Blue Mountains Gazette and by e-mail.

COMMENTS (as taken from evaluation forms):

- Make sure you get back to people.
- Would have liked map of hospital, as hospital staff not as helpful as could have been.
- More time needed for small sharing and learning circles.
- Keep the action going.
- Well done-thanks.
- Need to keep moving – content to flow along.
- I would have liked to hear more about indigenous issues and less time on Health Department's overview.
- Very informative.
- Important points were raised that need follow up.
- The small circles consolidated ideas.
- Great to hear of the services for local people.
- Terrific day. Fabulous engagement, eye opening - the organisations together will create a powerful voice.
- Good opportunity for sharing.
- Long term issues not addressed - only buses instead of buses and stable/long term clinic.

FUTURE TOPICS- what would you like discussed at future forums? (as taken from evaluation forms)

- Resources for Aboriginal community and services to understand/improve access to health/community services.
- Resources for services to understand/ improve how to service Aboriginal people/communities.
- I would like a follow up every 3 months or so- it could become an interagency meeting.
- Food/nutrition (bush foods/medicine).
- Diet education (indigenous).
- Financial assistance to the stolen.
- Drilling down more into how to deliver services for chronic care conditions as part of the whole person- body/mind spiritual approach.



2008
Aboriginal Sharing and Learning Circle

Organisation Committee Contacts List

Sheila Holcombe- CEO, Blue Mountains Division of
General Practice
4758 9711

Chris Baird – SWAHS A/ Group Manager, Primary
Care & Community Health
47598700

Clarke Scott- SWAHS Aboriginal Liaison Officer,
Primary Care & Community Health
47598700

Helen McMullen- SWAHS, Clinical Lead, Primary
Care & Community Health
47598700

Sydney West Area Health Service Teamfirst Awards

2008

Sydney West Area Health Service recognition of the Sharing and Learning Circle initiative.

A **Teamfirst** award was presented to the Aboriginal Sharing & Learning Circle Organisation Committee: for organising a very successful process of engagement and discussion with Aboriginal community members, leading to a wide number of recommendations for improving service access health outcomes for Aboriginal people. This was a partnership between the Blue Mountains Division of General Practice and SWAHS Primary Care & Community Health. The community was invited to the "Sharing and Learning Circle" held in March and response was overwhelming.



*Award presented by the Sydney West Area Health Service,
CE- Steven Boyages (note: Helen McMullen was absent for photo)*