

Closing the Gap forum no wash-out

Not even Brisbane's wildest weather could dampen the enthusiasm of organisers and participants at the GPpartners and Education Queensland Closing the Gap health forum held at Mitchelton State High School on October 11.

While roads flooded and dams overflowed, 'Mitchie High' students gathered in the school library to hear how local healthcare professionals and community leaders were working to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families living in the city's north west.

The day's success owed much to local community leader and Aboriginal elder Uncle George Couchy, who had thrown his considerable support behind the event, ensuring the participation of key stakeholders and event speakers.

School teacher Merle Cashman and Closing the Gap Project Coordinator Nancy Collins were also involved with organising the event as members of a working committee formed in collaboration with the North West Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Association (NWAICA).

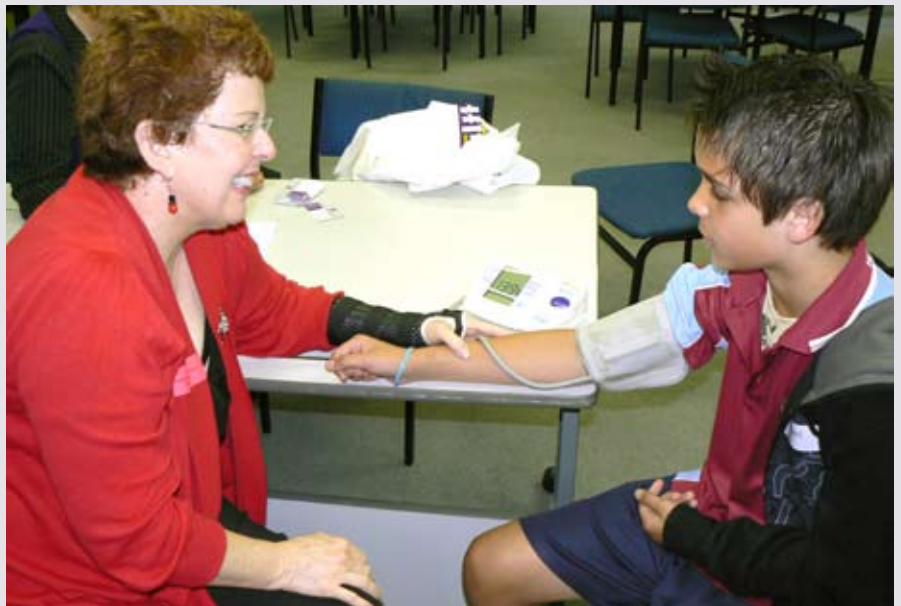
Ms Collins praised the school, Uncle George and Ms Cashman, for having the foresight and commitment necessary to bring together various federal and state government departments, health services and not-for-profit organisations.

"I would particularly like to acknowledge Uncle George as a significant link within the north west community whose driving force to improve health outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been critical," Ms Collins said.

"In this local area, I don't know of any other occasion when we've had representatives from Medicare Australia, the Queensland Department of Communities, and Queensland Health in the same room together talking about Aboriginal health with the community," she said.

Among the services highlighted was a fortnightly Indigenous health clinic at Keperra Family Practice and Skin Cancer Clinic.

The clinic has the support of NWAICA, which operates a free transport service for patients



Keppera Family Practice's Dr Trish Baker and her staff provided blood pressure and blood glucose screening at the Closing the Gap health forum at Mitchelton State High School (top). Rugby League great Steve Renouf also attended and spoke about his personal experiences living with diabetes. Above from left Caitlin Stewart, Steve Renouf Tyra Icelly, Dr Trish Baker, Nancy Collins, Alisha Fletcher and Tahlia Chippendale.

using a bus provided by Centacare Enoggera Day Respite Centre.

GPpartners director and practice principal of Keperra Family Practice, Dr Trish Baker attended the forum, saying the Indigenous health clinic was a good example of cooperation between health providers, community organisations and government.

"It was exactly that same cooperative spirit which has presented us this rare opportunity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to learn from healthcare professionals," Dr Baker said.

Also attending the event was Rugby League identity Steve Renouf, who spoke candidly about his achievements and shared some inspiring insights into living successfully with diabetes.

He represented the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health and was joined by colleague Keiron Lander, who also took the time to address the audience.

Also speaking at the event was pharmacist Blaine Woods from Keperra Chemmart, who explained how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families could take advantage of the new PBS Co-payments measure.