

18 April 2016

Country Kids bang the drum for better health outcomes!

An impressively broad range of experts from child protection, health, medical and education sectors gathered in Alice Springs yesterday for the opening of the Caring for Country Kids Conference.

After a warm Welcome to Country from local elder Pat Ansell Dodds, delegates were treated to a memorable drumming performance that saw audience members take the stage alongside the spectacular local all-female drumming group, Drum Atweme.

Highlights from Day 1 of the 3-day Conference included a welcome to Alice Springs from local champion and Mayor, Damien Ryan; a heartfelt and personal address to delegates from NT Minister for Health John Elferink and keynote presentations from Megan Mitchell, National Children's Commissioner, and 2015 Young Australian of the Year, Chantal Ober.

Megan Mitchell stressed the particular vulnerability of isolated and rural children, presenting data demonstrating how self-harm, suicide and family violence are having a devastating impact on rural and remote children. The Commissioner said "It must be a priority to ensure there is a national framework devoted to the unique needs of rural and remote children".

Chantal Ober highlighted the capacity of young people to lead and champion their health and community needs with the support and encouragement of their local community. She described how children as young as 12 years old have been involved in designing programs and services to meet their community's unique needs.

Over the next two days delegates will hear from around 30 keynote speakers and 75 concurrent speakers whose in-depth knowledge and experience will help shape the final set of priority recommendations that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of children in rural and remote Australia.

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Conference website: www.countrykids.org.au