



CATSINaM 2014 Conference

Student Day: Outcomes of the 'Resilience' Yarning Circles

October 2014

CONGRESS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER NURSES AND MIDWIVES

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Unity and Strength through Caring

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CATSINaM would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2014 Conference Student Day Resilience Yarning Circles for their enthusiastic participation in providing guidance on how CATSINaM can enhance its support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student nurses and midwives.

Introduction

CATSINaM has had a long-standing commitment to supporting and encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student nurses and midwives as part of its focus on recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the nursing and midwifery workforce. In 2014 this was taken to a new level by holding the Annual Conference over three days and dedicating a whole day to students, with an agenda specifically designed to address their needs and consult with students about their priorities (see Appendix 1).

The intentions for the day were to:

- explore what engages and sustains Student Members in their studies
- foster peer networking and support amongst Student Members
- identify how CATSINaM can enhance support for Student Members.

The day commenced with an overview of CATSINaM – its history, strategic directions and priorities – as well as its activity in engaging with its Members over the last year. This was followed by a 'speed introductions' activity where participants shared their personal hopes for the day. The main concepts expressed by student participants were: inspiration, motivation, encouragement, support, networking and hearing others stories. It was also apparent students were keen to feel part of a wider community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student nurses and midwives across Australia.

Prior to holding the yarning circles, an inspirational keynote address on 'Pride and identity' was given by Professor Rhonda Marriot. There was much to capture from Rhonda's presentation but a stand-out was this idea: do not put off to tomorrow what you can do today, however, it is never too late to take the next step or push the next boundary. Rhonda was then joined on stage by Janine Mohamed (CATSINaM CEO), Professor Roianne West from Townsville and Ben Gorrie from Melbourne who each shared their personal journey of 'Pride and identity within the profession and CATSINaM'. Questions were invited from the group before closing this session.

Resilience was a theme that emerged throughout the morning's session, which set a solid base for the Yarning Circle held between morning tea and lunch. There were ~45 students who participated in the Yarning Circle. Participants who were there as student support personnel held their own group and considered all questions, as did members of the CATSINaM Board who attended the Student Day. Their thoughts about resilience and CATSINaM's role are also included in the report.

Yarning Circles process

The Yarning Circles were a self-led activity where students broke into groups and worked at a table with six-ten people for about an hour. They chose their table facilitator and documenter, used the provided recording tools to go through the steps outlined below, and also selected their reporter to provide feedback to the larger group.

STEP 1 – Identify what resilience means: Use the 'Resilience' A3 worksheet to document your group's responses to this question: What does resilience mean to you?

STEP 2 – Explore supports and challenges to your resilience: Use the 'Force field analysis: Supports versus challenges' A3 worksheet to document your group's responses to these two questions:

- What challenges your resilience while at university?
- Who or what has supported you to draw on and strengthen your resilience?

STEP 3 – Reflect on CATSINaM's role: Use the 'CATSINaM role' A3 worksheet to document your group's responses to this question: How can CATSINaM play a role in supporting your resilience? Please note, CATSINaM knows that it cannot provide all forms of support that you may like or need, so what do you think fits with CATSINaM's role as a professional association?

STEP 4 - Feedback: For each worksheet, identify the two highest priority responses that you want to share with the large group as your feedback. All material on your sheets will be collated and analysed to produce an overall summary report of the Yarning Circles outcomes.

The diagrams on the recording sheets that students used to document their responses are shown in the 'Outcomes' section.

Outcomes

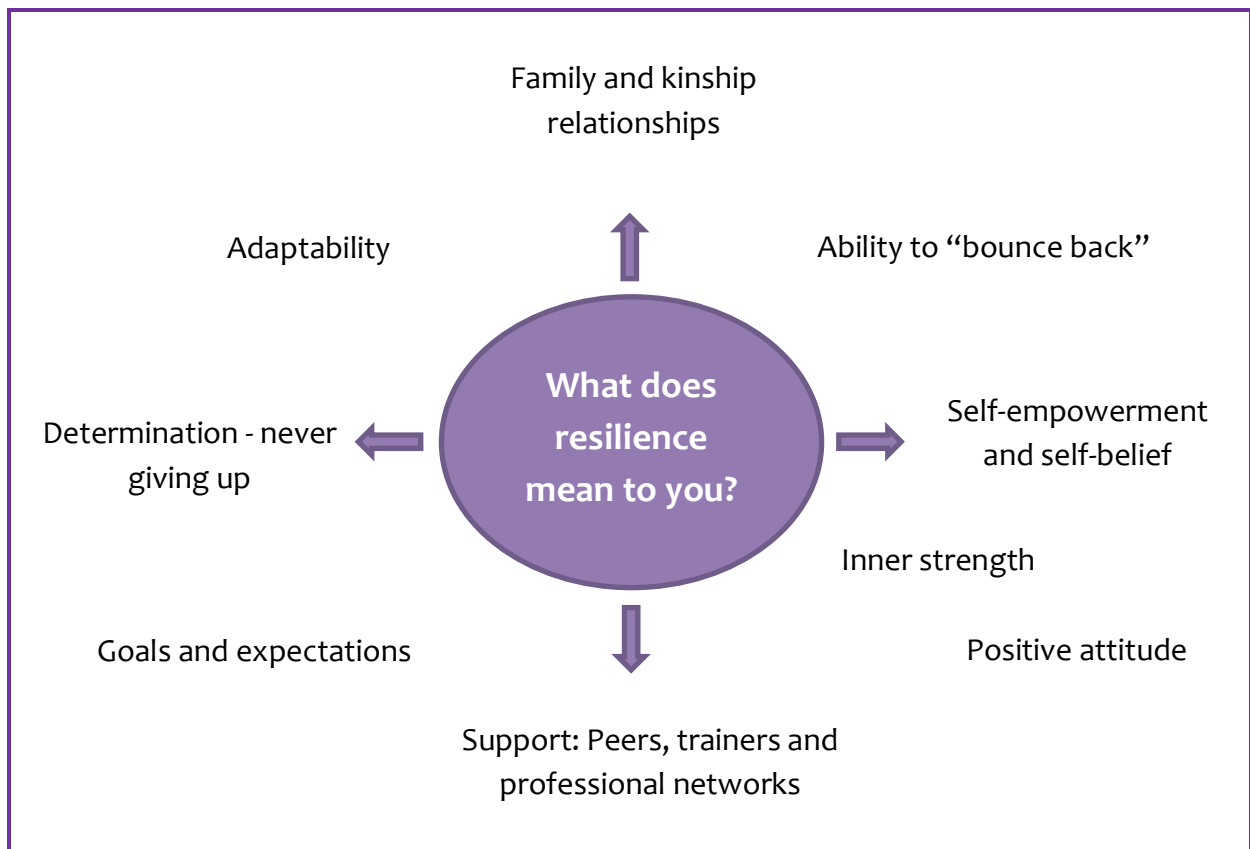
The perspectives of students are shared first under each of the three areas explored. This is followed by the perspectives of student support personnel and CATSINaM Board Members.

What does resilience mean?

Student descriptions of resilience clustered into nine main themes, as illustrated in Figure 1. Seven focused on personal qualities, while two were about external support and relationships. The specific meanings associated with these themes are outlined below.

Student perspectives

Figure 1: What does resilience mean to you?



Theme 1 - Determination - never giving up: Every group described this theme, emphasising meanings such as: "standing your ground", "determination to succeed", "never giving up", "when things seem impossible, having the ability to see the vision and continue", "overcoming challenges, fears, obstacles", "persevering", "continuing forth" and "doing it even when you think you can't". One group put it this way: "What do you do if people say 'no' to you – keep standing up for yourself, stubbornness, striving."

Theme 2 - Ability to “bounce back”: Closely related to determination, the ability to “bounce back” from set-backs and challenges was commonly emphasised, e.g. “bounce back from being knocked down”, “getting up when you have been knocked down” and “learning from my mistakes”.

Theme 3 - Self-empowerment and self-belief: The capacity for self-empowerment and self-belief was expressed in a variety of ways in addition to these two words, including “belief in yourself”, “knowing yourself”, “personal growth and development”, “self-reflection”, “not comparing yourself to others” and “being proud regardless of others [opinions]”.

Theme 4 - Inner strength: By inner strength, students meant the “ability to withstand”, “willpower” and “recognising our own power”. The ability to deal with guilt through inner strength was mentioned, as was the capacity to “harden up”. One group drew on a David Brinkley quote and stated that “strength is the ability to build a firm foundation with the bricks that others have thrown at you”.¹

Theme 5 - Positive attitude: Four groups supplemented the personal qualities already described by identifying the importance of having a positive attitude. For example, they described having a “positive outlook despite negativity” and “staying positive [in the face of] adversity”.

Theme 6 – Goals and expectations: Several groups highlighted the importance of goals and expectations: “set goals to achieve”, “don’t lose sight of goals”, “[have] realistic own expectations” and “keep challenging yourself”.

Theme 7 – Adaptability: The capacity to adapt to change was also recognised (e.g. adversity, the environment, stress), as this enabled students to get through different situations, including unfamiliar situations as part of their nursing/midwifery student journey.

Theme 8 - Support – peers, trainers and professional networks: Access to support was emphasised as part of resilience, with students identifying support from peers or other “like-minded people”, their trainers and facilitators at university/college, and professional networks such as CATSINaM. Through this support, encouragement is provided and knowledge is shared. It also included “being a supporter of others”, i.e. part of a support exchange.

Theme 9 – Family and kinship relationships: In some instances, students saw their family and kinship relationship as part of resilience (although this response was more frequent in response to what supported their resilience – see below). One group suggested that if they are part of a “culture of resilience – [then] others can learn from this”.

¹ The David Brinkley quote reads as follows: “A successful man/woman is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others have thrown at him/her”.

Student support personnel perspectives

The descriptions provided by student support personnel participants overlapped with several themes shared by the students, although the language used was a little different. They saw resilience as something that could be learned rather than simply pre-existing, and related to a person acknowledging how he/she responds to events. It involved “self-awareness – learning from experience, confidence and care”, having “flexibility” and “staying in the heat – not giving up”. This may involve “knowing when to ask for help”. A sign that students were resilient would be if they showed “better confidence and [were able to] cope and respond appropriately”. An evocative description of resilience offered by one of the senior Aboriginal nurses in the group was:

“Being like a plant in the wind, having strong roots and never leaving your roots, having goals and a vision, and the ability to bend but not break.”

CATSINaM Board Member perspectives

Similarly, descriptions offered by CATSINaM Board Members had links to the student themes. They viewed resilience as a mental, physical and spiritual capacity where a person is “emotionally and physically able to bounce back.” This required you to be “strong” with the capacity to “persevere”, to “overcome obstacles” and “stressful events in your life”. An aspect of their conversation focused on how resilience includes being united through connections Australian wide as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives.

Supports for and challenges to resilience

The group was asked to distinguish between what supported versus challenged their resilience, which included their capacity to remain resilient. The six distinct themes for ‘supports’ are described first, followed by the seven themes identified under ‘challenges.’ Both sets of themes are illustrated in Figure 2, which was the diagram participants used to record their responses.

Supports for resilience

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Theme 1 - Mentors (Older colleagues and peers): Without exception, each group identified the importance of having access to mentors, both older colleagues and peers/fellow nursing and midwifery students. Older colleagues may be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses or midwives they admire or have access to, as well as their teachers and lecturers. Their peers included other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that have graduated ahead of them, and connecting to fellow students through social media, not always face to face. They described how mentors offered them “positive influences”, “stories and inspiration”.