



In recognition of those who have made
an outstanding contribution to
suicide prevention within Australia

Raelene Ward, Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health, University of Queensland
for her work on the *Building Bridges: Learning from the Experts* project

Building Bridges: Learning from the Experts is a three-year project, funded by the *National Suicide Prevention Strategy*, to establish effective, sustainable, community-based approaches to building individual, family and community resilience, reducing suicide risk and self-harming behaviours, and supporting community recovery processes among four Indigenous communities in Queensland. Specifically, the project draws on the positive experiences and knowledge of one community, Yarrabah, in developing community strengths in the face of the negative impacts of a number of past suicides as a model for the development of similarly effective and sustainable community-based approaches towards reducing suicide risk and self-harm in other Indigenous communities.

Drawing on the risk and recovery experiences of Yarrabah, the project has been able to facilitate the implementation of community empowerment processes associated with the Family Well Being Program and Indigenous Men's Groups (developed in Yarrabah following a cluster of suicides in the 1990s) to build resilience; replacing self-harm as an option with positive life promoting skills.

A unique feature of the project is its focus on shared learnings between communities, while recognising that each community has individual needs and priorities.

As project coordinator of the *Building Bridges* project, Raelene has played a major role, in particular, in forging links between the communities of Yarrabah and Dalby; implementing a range of strategies in Dalby that had previously proven successful in Yarrabah.

A forum of Indigenous men from Queensland and Northern NSW, involving over 80 participants, and organised by Raelene, proved so successful that the men have agreed to organise another forum themselves in the future.

Raelene's tireless perseverance and ongoing commitment to the implementation of *Building Bridges* has undoubtedly been a major contributor to the project's success.