

## WORLD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE - CASE STUDY

<b>Conference Name:</b>	World Community Development Conference
<b>Dates:</b>	19-22 June 2023
<b>Host Organisations:</b>	Joint hosts: International Association for Community Development / Jeder Institute / Australian Community Workers Association/ Community First Development/Catalyse (NZ)
<b>Organisations by type:</b>	Association/Institute/Community Development Agency
<b>Number of delegates:</b>	425 delegates
<b>Delegate origin:</b>	22% international delegates; 65% Australian delegates
<b>NT location:</b>	Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
<b>Conference venue:</b>	Darwin Convention Centre

### **Event Overview:**

The *2023 World Community Development Conference (WCDC)* was delivered in collaboration with the *International Association for Community Development (IACD)*, the *Jeder Institute*, the *Australian Community Workers Association*, *Community First Development*, *Catalyse (NZ)* and *Community Housing Ltd.*

The most recent conferences were staged in Maynooth, Ireland in 2018 and Dundee Scotland in 2019, whilst the last conference held in Australia was in Brisbane in 2009. Prior to the conference becoming WCDC, the IACD had hosted many international conferences across the globe for four decades.

The conference staged at the *Darwin Convention Centre* enabled attending global practitioners, academics, policy-makers, funders and other business and organisation stakeholders to share perspectives on challenges and contexts for community development and community work.

The conference program embraced global First Nations communities, provided cutting edge inputs, creative installations and yarning circles. Speakers at the conference included leading community development academics, writers and thought leaders from Australia and around the world.

The Conference theme *“From the Edge”* honoured the spirit and wisdom of First Nations peoples.

### **Why was Darwin and Australia’s Northern Territory (NT) chosen as the host location?**

The Northern Territory successfully competed against the USA and Latin America to be the host destination for 2023. The bid to attract the conference was a collaborative effort by the *Darwin Convention Centre* and *Northern Territory Business Events (NTBE)*, which sits within the Northern Territory Government’s Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade.

Organisers indicated that Darwin’s proximity to Asia, as well as the city’s climate, multiculturalism and Aboriginal culture were all factors of relevance to the destination being selected for WCDC 2023.

### **Triumphs & Outcomes:**

Darwin was a strong draw card for national and international delegates who were especially interested in Darwin's community-based initiatives and projects. Via their local knowledge and networks, the *Darwin Convention Centre* and NTBE teams assisted the WCDC23 planners to connect with a range of relevant, local community-based speakers and organisations.

The conference reaffirmed the importance of First Nations community-led development and provided an opportunity for delegates to deepen connection to community, culture and country.

### **The Execution:**

The opening session of the conference was preceded by a formal Welcome to Country delivered by Aunty Bilawara Lee, on behalf of the Larrakia Nation, who are the Traditional Custodians of the Darwin region.

Over 100 presentations were delivered during the conference by global community development organisations, universities and governments.

The extensive facilities of the *Darwin Convention Centre* ensured multiple event spaces were available for the various activities in the diverse conference program. The Auditorium was utilised for plenary sessions and film screenings, concurrent presentations were delivered in the Centre's three Waterfront Rooms, whilst workshops were staged across the Centre's four Meeting Rooms. The *Darwin Convention Centre* has permanently re-named the Centre's four Meeting Rooms and outdoor Porte-Cochere in traditional Larrakia language, with the name-change timed to coincide with the staging of WCDC23, an initiative which was especially significant and meaningful for delegates and organisers.

The Hall area at the Centre was set up with tiki-style tents displaying traditional arts and crafts available for purchase, with unique art installations also featured. This area became the catering and meeting space where deeper delegate connections could be made.

Another special cultural feature was the traditional 'Yarning Circle', which was also set up in the Hall area for additional discussions and activities. These circles play an important role within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and provide an opportunity to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships and pass on cultural knowledge.

### **Social Programme:**

The International Reception and Conference Welcome was held in the Frangipani Plaza area of the *Darwin Convention Centre*. It included a Welcome to Country by Larrakia Elder, Aunty Bilawara Lee, which was then followed by the official address delivered by The Honourable Selena Uibo, who holds multiple portfolios in the NT Government as the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Essential Services, Housing and Homelands, Renewables and Energy plus Treaty and Local Decision Making. The Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Darwin, Councillor Jimmy Bouhoris, was also in attendance.

After the formalities, delegates experienced a cultural performance by *Garramilla gulwa*, traditional dancers and musicians representing the Larrakia Nation.

The Conference Gala Dinner was a joint occasion to also celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of the *International Association for Community Development*. It was staged at the award-winning *Wharf One Food and Wine* restaurant which is located overlooking the Darwin Waterfront Precinct parklands, and just a short stroll from the *Darwin Convention Centre* - the restaurant specialises in local NT produce and cuisine.

**Corporate Social Responsibility, local community engagement and sustainability elements:**

First Nations delegates were able to attend the conference at a reduced registration rate, which encouraged many of Australia's Land Councils to bring teams of community members.

The *Connellan Airways Trust* also provided travel grants to enable attendance by people residing in isolated, rural and remote outback Australia. *The Trust* enables people of the outback to overcome geographic barriers through the provision of assistance to enhance education, health and innovation.

The conference Procurement Policy prioritised purchasing from local Indigenous-owned businesses and organisations. Examples included speakers' gifts sourced from *Aboriginal Bush Traders*, a not-for-profit organisation committed to selling ethically-sourced and sustainable products which directly support local Indigenous communities. Additional gifts came from *MK Eco by Starwin*, a community collective which showcases local artisans.

Delegate bags came from *Paperbark Woman*, a store which specialises in fabrics designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The conference program was designed by *Moogie Down Productions*, a creative agency delivering graphic design, video production and storytelling services.

The marketplace zone created in the Hall at the convention centre showcased locally-based NT social enterprises and community initiatives such as *Songlines* and *MK Eco by Starwin*. The Northern and Central Land Councils also showcased their projects, whilst *Darwin Community Arts* provided an interactive art space where delegates could participate. The marketplace provided an invaluable opportunity for these local organisations to network with global community development leaders.

**About the Darwin Convention Centre:**

Organisers advised that the Convention Centre staff were a great source of information, connection and support throughout the conference, always friendly and helpful. Special mention was made of the Centre's catering which was deemed "amazing". Delegates particularly noted the convenient proximity of the Convention Centre to the Waterfront Precinct areas, restaurants and cafes, along with availability of hire scooters for those wishing to venture further afield.

**How did Northern Territory Business Events and the Darwin Convention Centre assist with the conference journey?**

A joint bid was prepared and submitted by the *Darwin Convention Centre and Northern Territory Business Events* (NTBE) in 2021 to attract the conference to Darwin – the bid highlighted the significant support on offer from NTBE, on behalf of the NT Government, as well as support available from *Business Events Australia*.

NTBE and the *Darwin Convention Centre* jointly hosted a site inspection in 2022 to enable several conference committee members to make a first-hand assessment of Darwin's capacity and capability, before the final decision was made. The NTBE team escorted committee members to view various city locations and meet with community-based organisations during the site visit. Organisers said they felt the visit could not have been conducted as efficiently on their own and indicated that this invaluable support contributed to the success of the whole conference and associated events.

### **Most memorable aspect of the event?**

WCDC2023 provided many memorable moments for the organising team and conference delegates. One of the more outstanding experiences occurred at the conclusion of the final keynote presentation, when the entire conference audience was led to the nearby Waterfront Precinct lagoon. Dr Richard Fejo, a highly-respected Larrakia Elder who is also Chairman of the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, conducted a traditional Saltwater Ceremony during which he warmly invited delegates to enter the lagoon at ankle-depth and make a truly meaningful connection with the Larrakia People and their 65,000-year-old culture.

### **Pre and post conference touring undertaken:**

Many delegates stayed on after the conference to participate in pre-organised IACD Practice Exchanges during which delegates gained first-hand experience of community development across the broader Darwin region, in Kakadu, the Tiwi Islands and in the town of Katherine.

Other delegates chose to explore the NT at their leisure, with some international delegates choosing to travel to Darwin via Uluru and Alice Springs. Feedback provided to organisers indicated that delegates were in awe of the NT's beauty, culture and history. A link on the WCD Conference website had enabled delegates to directly connect with the official local tourism authority, *Tourism Top End*, for general destination information and to make bookings for accommodation, car hire and touring in the NT.

### **The Verdict:**

From the outset, organisers said they felt well supported by the NTBE team who readily provided contacts and information to assist with the event. It was felt that Darwin provided a beautiful backdrop to the conference, particularly given the three over-arching conference themes were Culture, Community and Connection. The 2023 World Community Development Conference was considered a resounding success, with positive feedback received from presenters, supporters, and delegates alike.

### **In their words:**

#### **From the organizing committee:**

*"On behalf of the organizing committee of the 2023 World Community Development Conference held in Darwin, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Northern Territory Business Events (NTBE) for their unwavering support and invaluable contributions. Your partnership was instrumental in making this conference a resounding success despite the challenges we faced."*

*“The guidance and wisdom shared by the local Aboriginal organisations enriched the conference program, infusing it with cultural sensitivity and authenticity. Their contributions highlighted the importance of a community-led approach and showcased the rich cultural heritage of the Northern Territory.*

*“This collaboration created an inclusive and respectful space, fostering meaningful exchanges between international attendees and local Indigenous leaders. We extend our gratitude to NTBE for their strong support and dedication.”*

**Dee Brooks**

**Co-Chair, WCDC Organising Team**

**From the host organisation:**

*“On behalf of the lead host organisation, the International Association for Community Development, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the Larrakia people for such a warm welcome to the region and express our appreciation to NTBE, Darwin Convention Centre, Northern Land Council and Central Land Council for their support in enabling us to host a conference packed with enriching learning experiences.*

*“The 2023 World Community Development Conference in Darwin was an exceptional gathering of professionals, experts, and community advocates from all corners of the world, united by their dedication to fostering positive change and sustainable development.*

*“The Darwin community, the venue and logistical arrangements were excellent, creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. The conference showcased an impressive lineup of speakers, each bringing their unique insights and expertise to the forefront. From renowned academics to grassroots community leaders, the diverse range of perspectives provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by communities globally. Thank you to NTBE for their support in assisting the organising team.”*

**Michelle Dunscombe**

**Vice Chair, International Association for Community Development**



**The Garramilla gulwa dancers performed at the conference welcome ceremony**