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Pacific Rim Spotlight: Weaving a Fabric of Support

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 **NASDDDS**
National Association of State Directors
of
Developmental Disabilities Services

Pacific Rim Spotlight: Weaving a Fabric of Support

NASDDDS 2025 Directors Forum & Annual Conference
November 4, 2025



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina



SMHILE
School Mental Health
International Leadership Exchange



Global
Leadership
Exchange

HILOPA'A



OLI ALOHA

Greeting Chant

Onaona i ka hala me ka lehua

Fragrant with hala and lehua

He hale lehua nō ia na ka noe

A house of lehua for the mist

‘O ka’u nō ia e ‘ano’i nei

It is mine to cherish

E li’a nei ho’i o ka hiki mai

Longing for your arrival

A hiki mai nō ‘oe

For when you come

A hiki pū nō me ke aloha

Love comes with you.

Aloha ē...Aloha ē...Aloha ē.

Panel

Mary
Sowers

Mary Brogan

Tafaimamao
Tua-Tupuloa

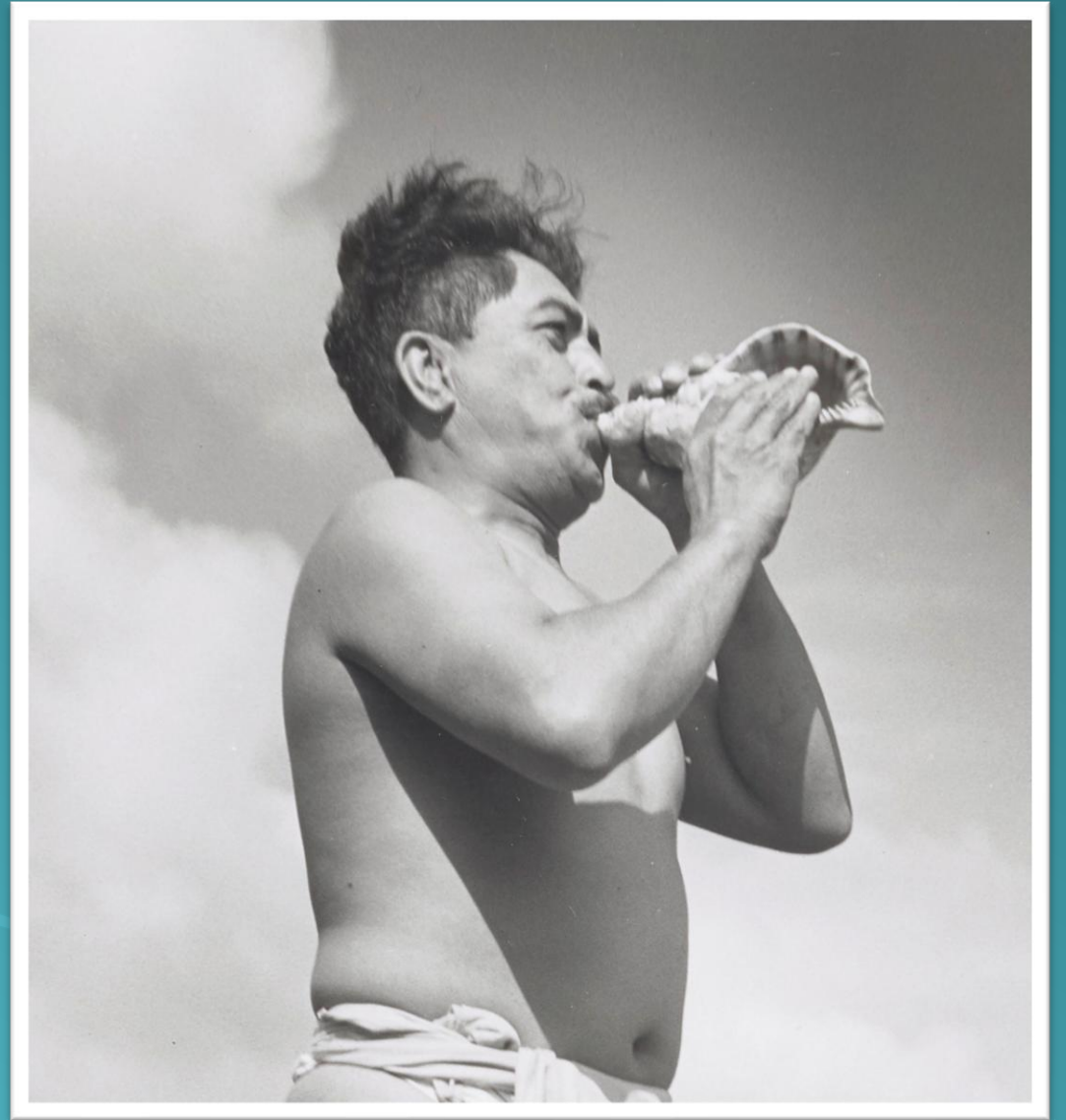
Louisa
Kuaea

Leolinda
Iokepa

Session Objectives

- Recognize the importance of creating spaces for discussion and innovation
- Provide current context of services in the U.S. Pacific Territories & Jurisdictions
- Extrapolate the power of convening and sustaining the Pacific Region Forum

Call to Action



Origin Story

6/24

Leading Change: Flourishing Communities and Wellbeing for All

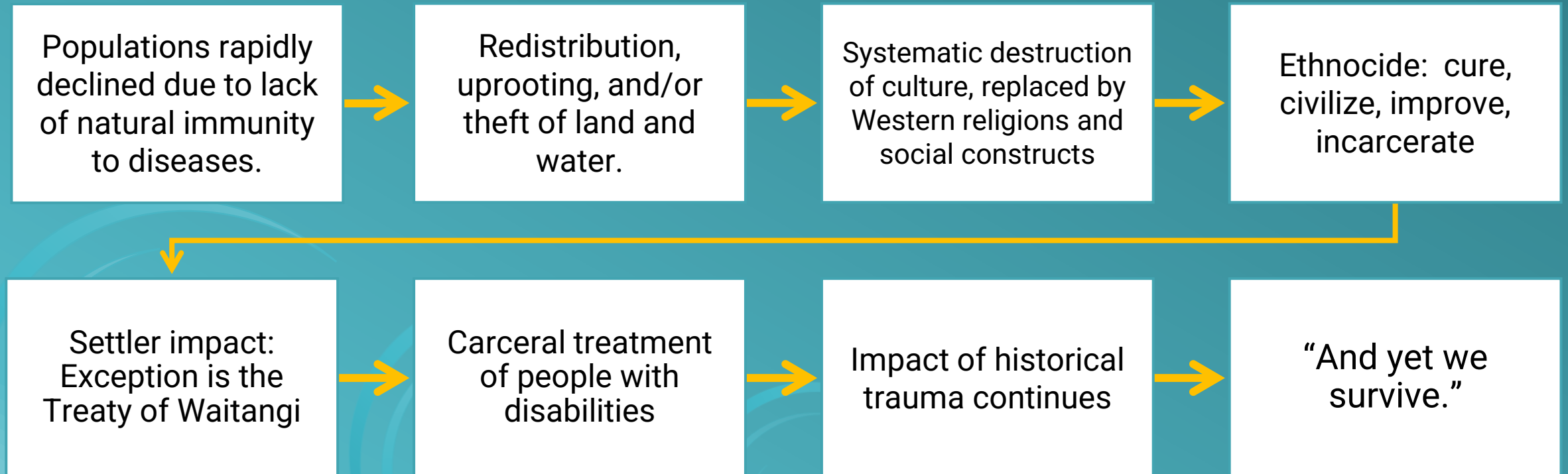
NASDDDS Blog: Global Leadership Exchange 2024



By Mary Sowers, NASDDDS Executive Director

In June, NASDDDS Board President, Mary Brogan, and I had the privilege of traveling to The Netherlands to participate in the [Global Leadership Exchange \(GLE\)](#). The GLE is an international organization representing 13 countries that creates opportunities for people to share their leadership experiences and insights to help find solutions to overcome challenges and improve health; well-being; and, services for people with disabilities, mental health, and/or substance use support needs. Through small and large meetings, we learned about the shared challenges and strengths each country encounters in supporting people with disabilities. We had the opportunity to engage in deep conversations on elevating the voices and roles of people with lived experiences in our service systems, recognizing that representation not only matters but is essential. Mary Brogan led a discussion on values, culture, and inclusion pertaining to indigenous people. I was honored to join Jennifer Johnson from the Administration for Community Living on a panel related to supporting people with co-occurring I/DD and also experience mental health conditions are included in shaping mental health policies and practices.

Disrupting Forces of Colonization



Origin Story

Leading Change: Flourishing Communities and Wellbeing for All

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6/24

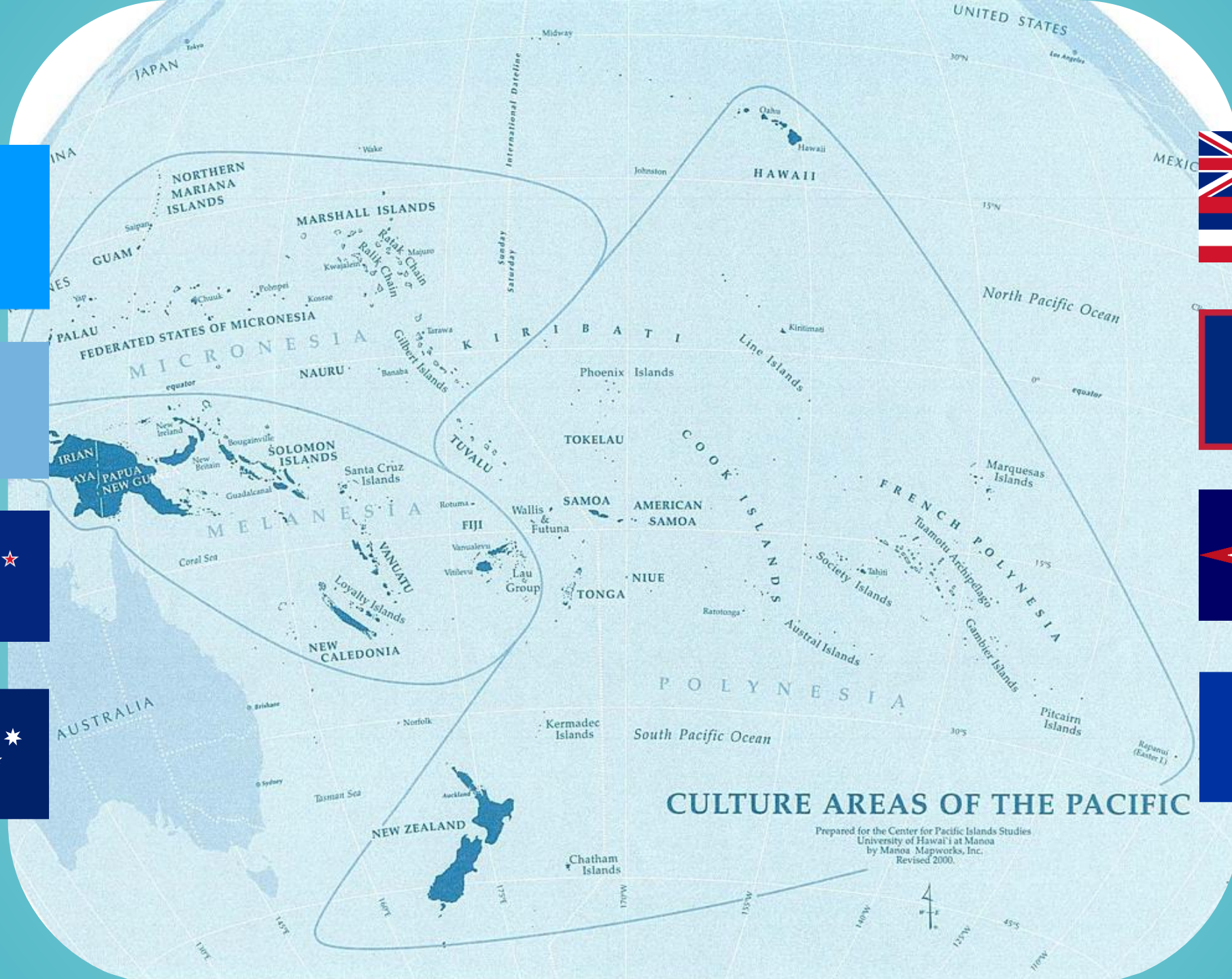
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Learning as a Community



Take Aways

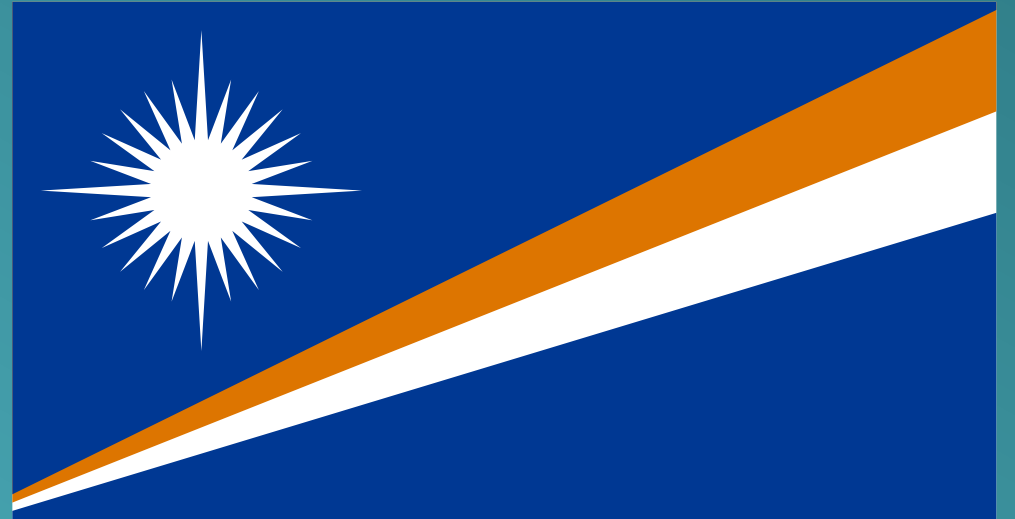


Island life: People Physically Need to Leave the Island for Services



Former Marshallese National Anthem “Ij Iokwe Løk”

“I love my islands,
Where I was born,
The surroundings, the paths,
And the gatherings.
I cannot leave here,
Because this is my rightful place,
My family heritage is forever here.
It is best for me to die here.”



Funding:
Typically
underfunded
& capped
requiring
coordination
across
agencies



Pacific Challenges

1. Federal Policies

- Cabotage Law (Restricts Foreign Air Carriers)
- Jones Act (Restricts Foreign Flagged Maritime between two-US Ports)
- International Air, Sea, and Postal Services

2. Citizenship

- U.S. Citizenship: Guam, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands
- U.S. National: American Samoa

3. Supplemental Security Income

- Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

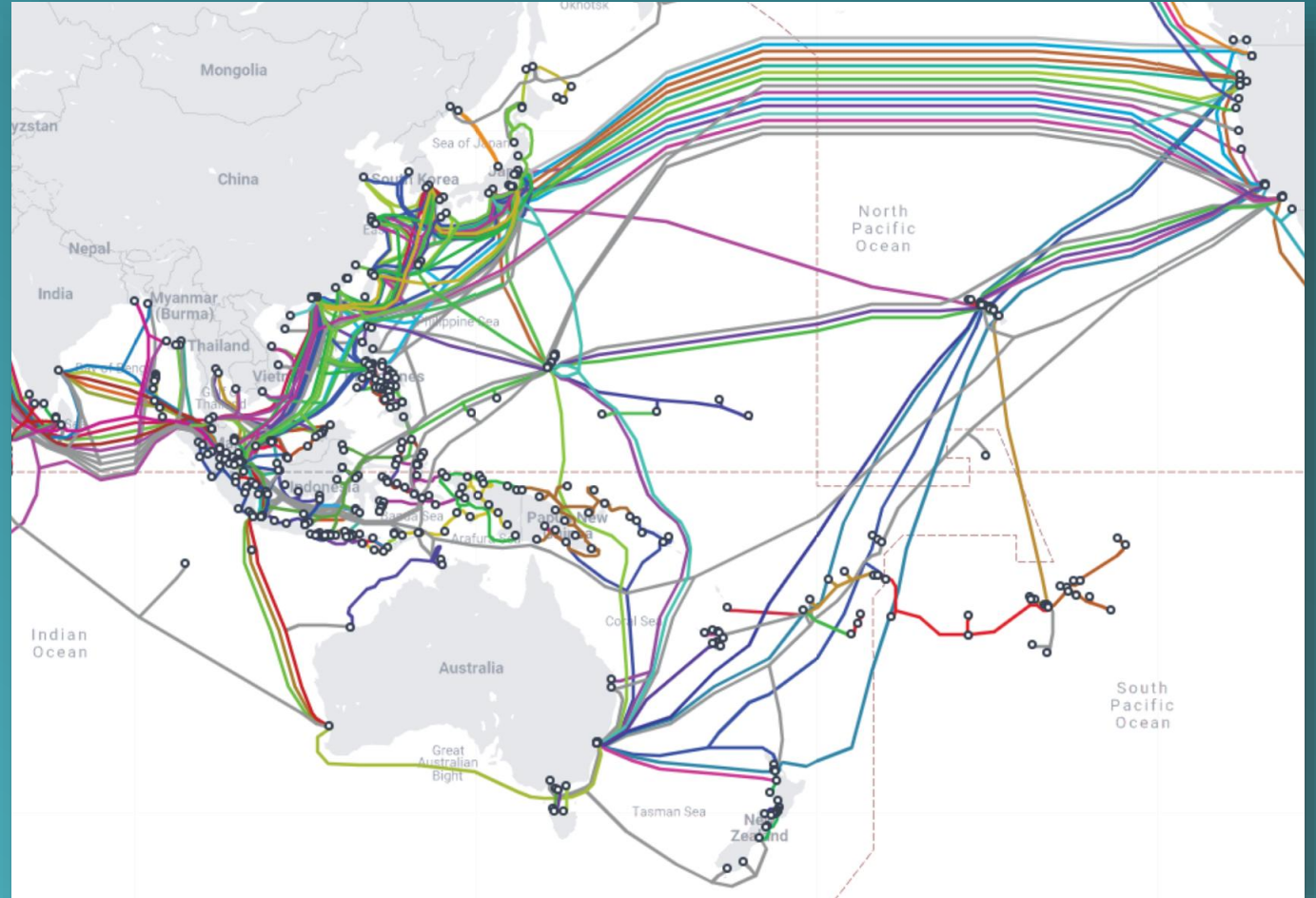
Centrality of Culture & Community in Supporting Children and Families



Importance of Relationships



Improved Infrastructure Will Help Deliver on the Promise of Technology



Why was
this so
Important?

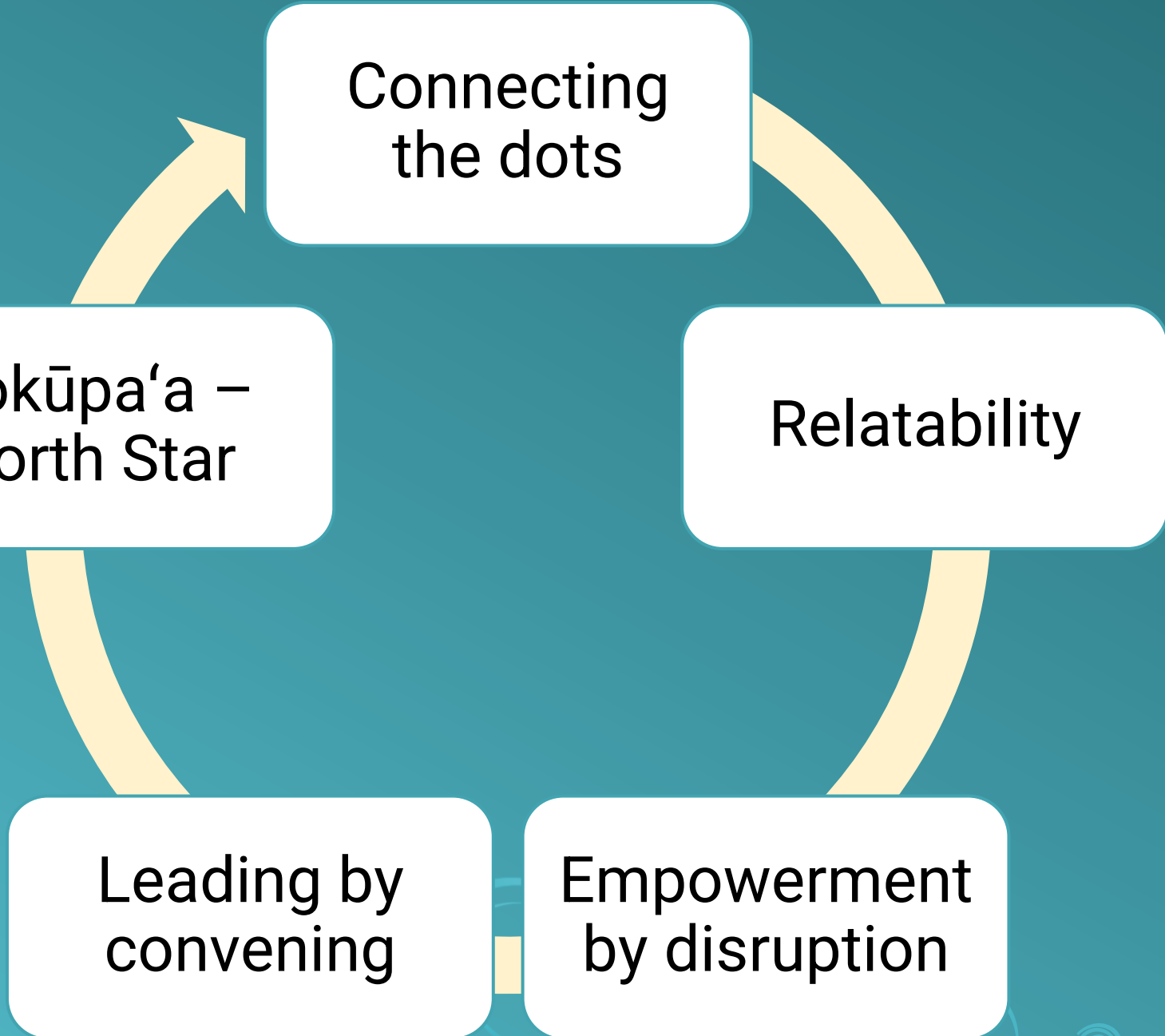
Hokūpaʻa –
North Star

Connecting
the dots

Relatability

Leading by
convening

Empowerment
by disruption



Next Steps

- Continuing to connect with the GLE
- Mapping community and across community resources
- Exploring additional financing strategies with Territories
- Bringing in the rest of the jurisdictional partners
- Continuing to convene PRF/Next Forum

Thank You!

