



Therap[®] | Person-Centered.
Data-Driven.

Pacific Rim Spotlight: Weaving a Fabric of Support

www.nasddd.org | @NASDDDSTA

 **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



HILOPAA



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

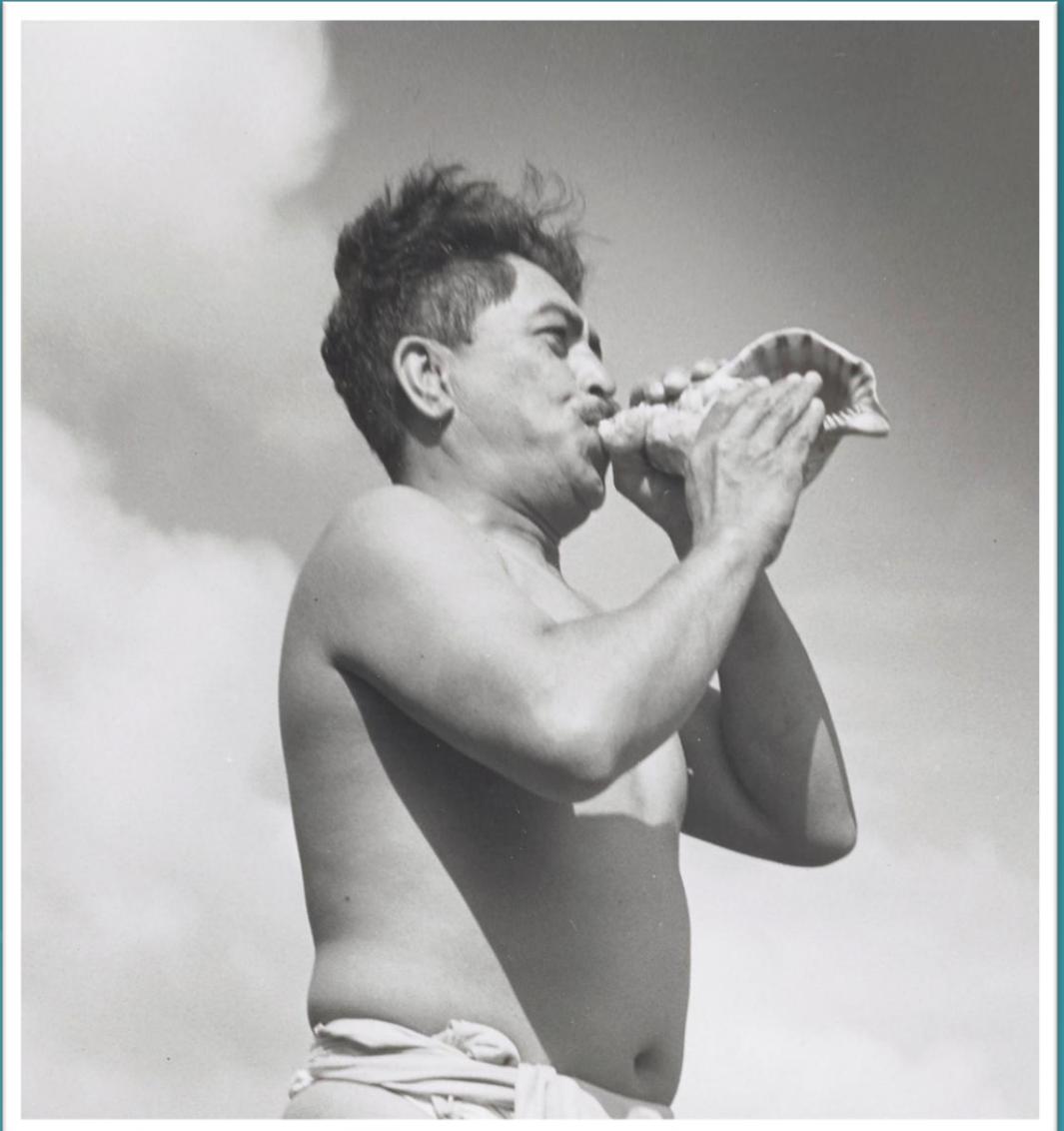
Louisa
Kuaea

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

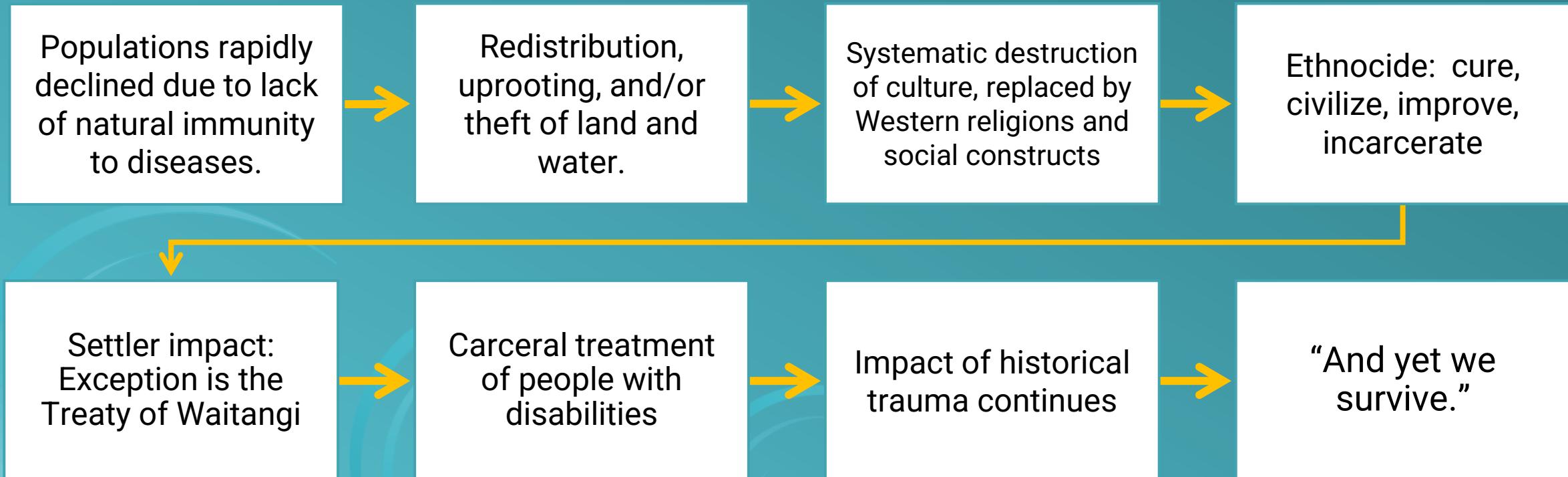
NASDDDS Blog: Global Leadership Exchange 2024

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

6/24

1/25

10/24

6/25

Leading Change: Flourishing Communities and Wellbeing for All

NASDDDS Blog: Global Leadership Exchange 2024

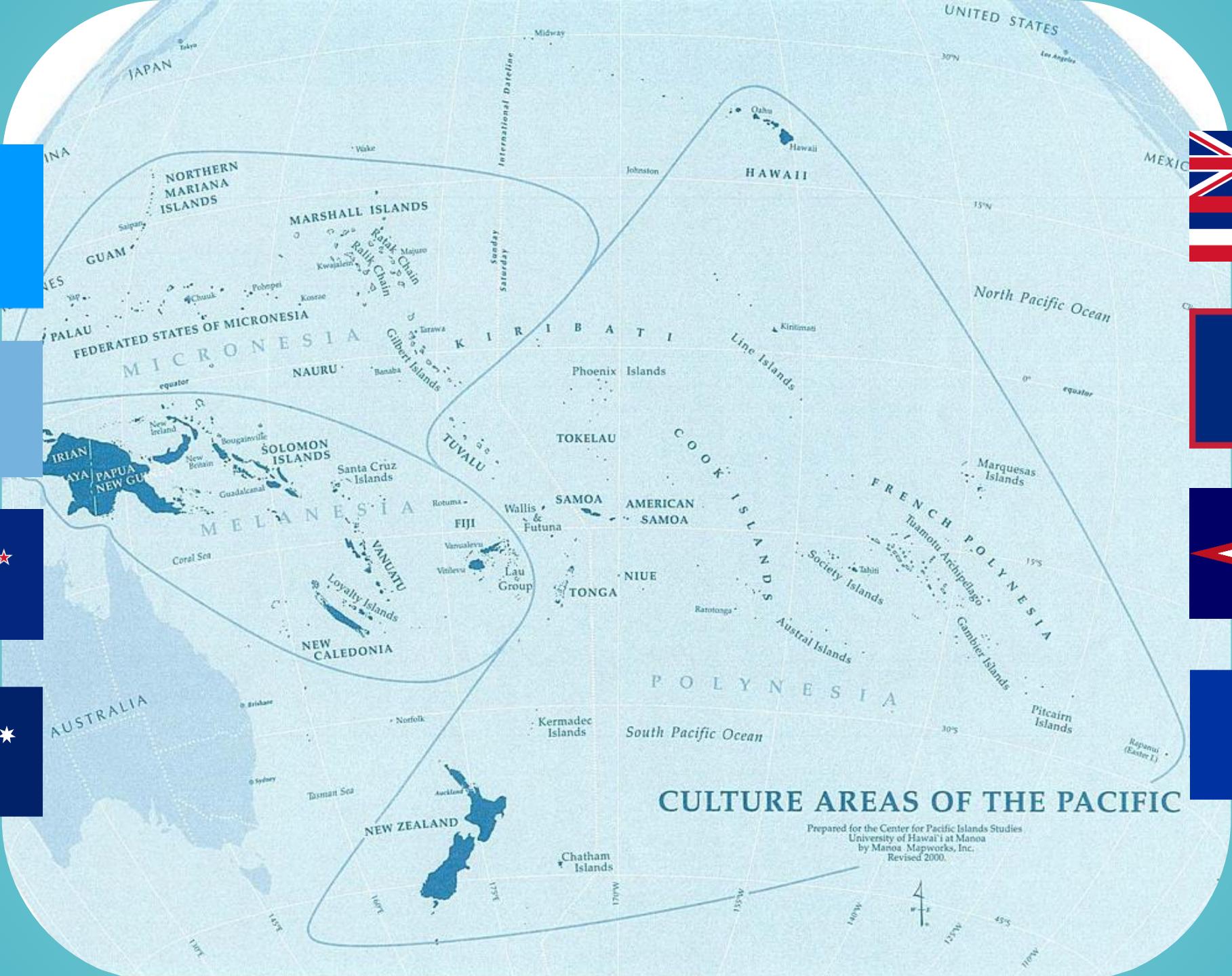
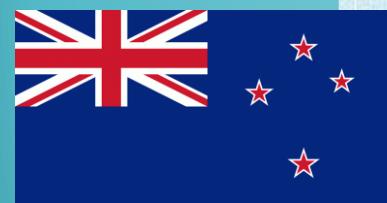
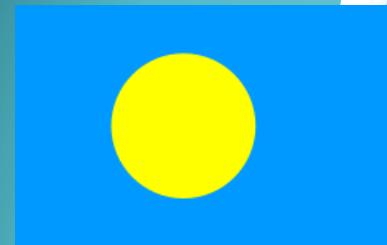
By Mary Sowers, NASDDDS Executive Director



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.



Global Leadership Exchange
SMILE
South Carolina
NASDDDS



Prepared for the Center for Pacific Islands Studies
University of Hawai'i at Manoa
by Mānoa Mapworks, Inc.
Revised 2000.

PACIFIC REGION FORUM



Learning as a Community

PACIFIC REGION FORUM

PALAU MINISTRY OF EDUCATION/SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM



2025 Pacific Region Forum Fact Sheet for:

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS



Located just north of Guam in the western Pacific, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is a 300-mile archipelago with a population of about 45,000. The principal inhabited islands are Saipan, Rota, and Tinian. Home to two main indigenous people, the Chamorros and the Carolinians, CNMI maintains a rich and diverse culture despite its history of colonization and occupation by other larger countries (Spain, United States, Germany, Japan).

Youth Mental and Behavioral Health in Schools

- CNMI School Counseling Program, CNMI Public School System Project Halig, and the System of Care (SOC) provide supports to students to increase mental health awareness and access to care, although these supports are not broadly available across the entire archipelago. Although many adolescents struggle with mental health and illness, only about 21% of children ages 3-17 with a mental or behavioral health condition receive treatment or counseling (MCHS, 2023).
- There are ongoing efforts from community organizations, WHO, and others to improve awareness of and access to care for mental health in CNMI.

Youth Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

- Along with protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there are several supports in place within schools and the broader community for students with IDD (i.e., Head Start, Early Head Start, The CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities).
- The CNMI Public School System (PSS), considered an outlying area under the IDEA Part C Early Intervention service, is the Lead Agency for the Early Intervention Educational Agency (LEA) for providers.

- Currently, PSS serves 1,059 children in schools—14% of the public schools.
- Of the 1,059 children with an IEP, 21% have a specific learning disability and autism.

Perspective of Culture and Identity

- The CNMI is a melting pot of diverse cultures from Asia, including China, Russia, USA, and other Pacific Islander countries. The culture is peaceful; Family-oriented communities are highly valued.



Take Aways



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



Former Marshallese National Anthem “Ij Iqkwe Łok”

**“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

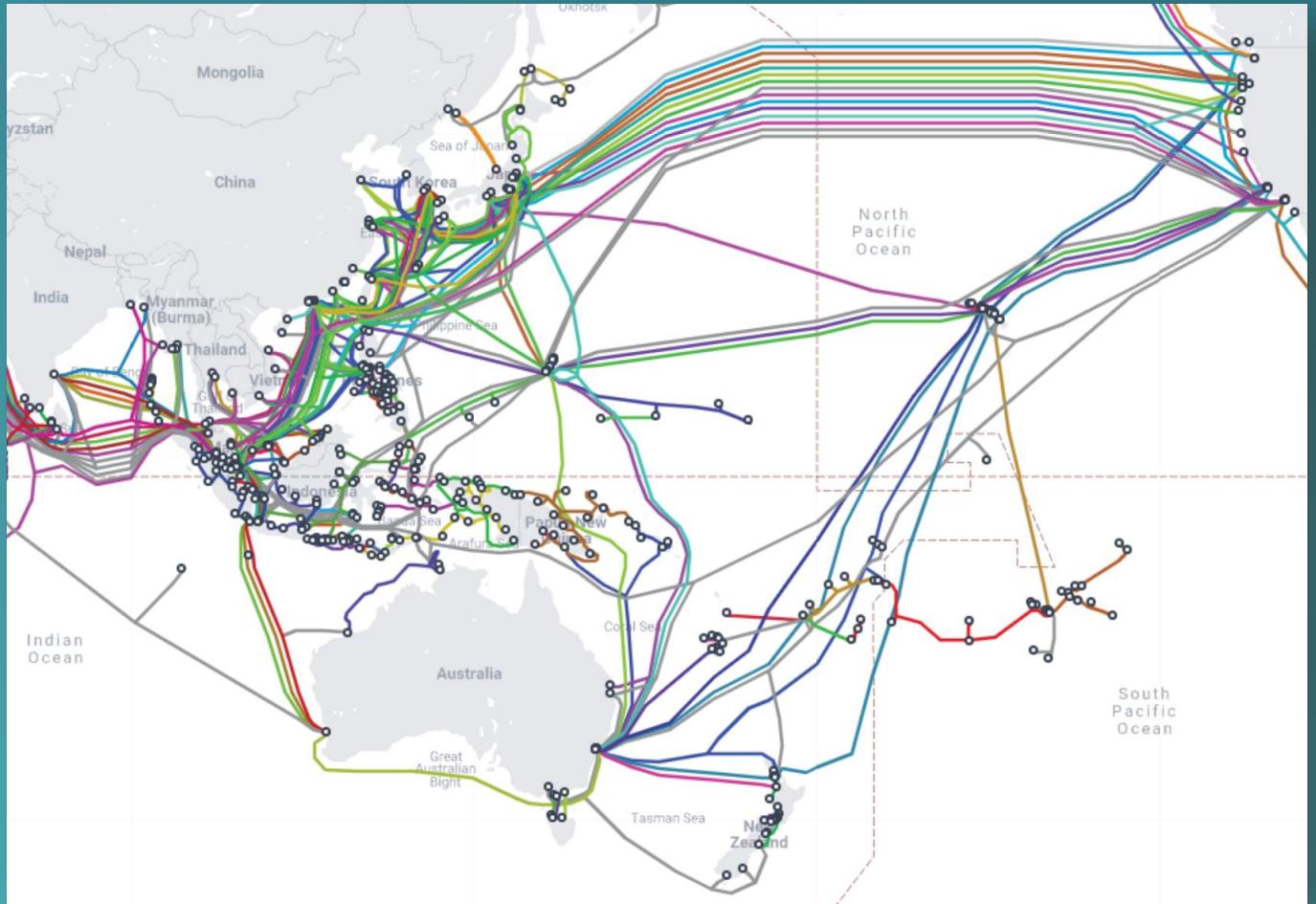
Centrality of Culture & Community in Supporting Children and Families



Importance of Relationships



Improved Infrastructure Will Help Deliver on the Promise of Technology



Why was this so Important?

Hokūpa'a –
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!

