



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
17-19 July 2026

## Abstract Submission Template

Thank you for your interest in submitting an abstract for the 2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference - A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy, held from Friday 17 to Sunday 19 July 2026.

Please complete all relevant sections below of this, two-part Abstract Submission and email before or by 5pm Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2026 to [info@sydneycentreforcreativechange.com.au](mailto:info@sydneycentreforcreativechange.com.au).

When you submit this, please use email title **Conference Submission**.

### PART ONE

Category	Guidelines	Your Conference Abstract Proposal
<b>Abstract Title</b>	Create a concise (Maximum 12 words), informative title that clearly conveys the main topic or focus of your project, presentation, or workshop.  <i>Example: "Art Therapy with Traumatized Children in a School Setting: A Case Study"</i>	Engagement First: Play and Creative Counselling in Positive Behaviour Support
<b>Presentation Type</b>	<i>Presentation type</i> (choose one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 30 minute paper presentation</li><li>• 90-minute workshop</li><li>• 3-hour workshop</li></ul>	30-minute paper presentation
<b>Conference Stream</b>	Choose from <i>one</i> of the streams below for your abstract from the list below <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Neurodiversity Stream - "Curious Minds, Unique Paths"</li><li>• First Nations Stream - "The Path Back Home: Story, Culture &amp; Connection"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Neurodiversity Stream - "Curious Minds, Unique Paths"</li></ul>



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
 A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
 17-19 July 2026

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma &amp; Healing Stream - “Finding Safe Ground in Unfamiliar Lands: Creative Healing Journeys”</li> <li>• Gender Diversity Stream - “Wonderfully Ourselves: Journeys of Identity &amp; Becoming”</li> </ul>	
<b>Author/s Professional Affiliations</b>	<p><i>Professional Affiliations:</i> Enter your professional affiliations, such as a membership or relationship to a specific organisation or association within the Mental Health sector</p> <p><i>Guidelines:</i> List all contributing authors, including their full names, institutional affiliations, and contact information. Indicate the presenting author with an asterisk (*).</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Jane Smith, School Psychologist at ABC College, <a href="mailto:janesmith@abc.edu">janesmith@abc.edu</a></p> <p>Jo Brown*, Expressive Therapies Clinic, <a href="mailto:jobrown@xtc.org">jobrown@xtc.org</a></p>	<p>Josie van der Wal*, PACFA Reg. Clinical 30619          Professional Lead - Specialist Behaviour Support &amp; Psychology at Berry Street Yooralla - Allied Health  <a href="mailto:Josie.vanderwal@yooralla.com.au">Josie.vanderwal@yooralla.com.au</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Advanced Positive Behaviour Support Practitioner</i>  <i>NDIS Practitioner number: P1210988</i></li> <li>• <i>Clinical Counsellor (PACFA)</i></li> <li>• <i>Educational &amp; Developmental Psychologist (MSc. University of Leiden – The Netherlands)</i></li> </ul>
<b>Author/s Bio</b>	<p><i>Bio:</i> Enter your short bio (for all presenters), 150-word limit</p>	<p>Josie is a clinician with over 15 years of experience supporting children and young people with disability, neurodevelopmental differences, and complex support needs. She provides Positive Behaviour Support across the lifespan using a neurodiversity-affirming and trauma-informed approach that prioritises connection, emotional safety, and meaningful quality-of-life outcomes.</p> <p>She is a PACFA-registered Clinical Counsellor and a graduate of the SCCC Graduate Certificate in Play and Art Therapy, integrating play and creative therapy principles to support communication, regulation, and relational capacity within complex family systems.</p> <p>Josie also delivers professional learning and training in trauma-informed practice that recognises diverse neurodevelopmental profiles, and is an experienced clinical supervisor supporting practitioners through reflective and relational supervision.</p>



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
 A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
 17-19 July 2026

<b>Additional Information</b>	Any potential conflict of interest to disclose? Any necessary ethics approval to obtain?	The author declares no financial or personal conflicts of interest. Formal human research ethics approval was not required as this presentation is based on de-identified, practice-based clinical reflection rather than research. Informed consent will be sought from the family for the use of a de-identified case example.
<b>AV Provided</b>	As a standard for your presentation, the room will be equipped with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screen and video projector</li> <li>• Remote control</li> <li>• Laptop (with your presentation loaded)</li> </ul>	Standard AV provision as listed is sufficient for this presentation.

**PART TWO**

**Please select from one of the two below for your submission (i.e. A or B).**

Please use the one relevant template below to complete your submission, noting:

- Maximum 3 pages.
- Font: 10 points.
- No figures, no tables, no images.
- Abbreviations should be kept to the minimum and defined at first use.



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
 A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
 17-19 July 2026

**A. For 30-minute paper presentation**

Category	Guidelines	Your Conference Abstract Proposal
<b>Background</b>	Provide context and background information. Explain the topic being addressed and its significance.	<p>Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is intended to be person-centred, capacity-building, and grounded in quality-of-life outcomes. In practice, however, PBS is often interpreted and funded through a behaviour reduction driven lens, with fluctuating attention to the relational, emotional, and engagement processes required to support children and families with complex needs.</p> <p>For neurodivergent children and families experiencing layered vulnerability and system complexities, including home-based care arrangements, caregiver disability, mental health concerns, and reduced parental capacity, traditional engagement approaches may be insufficient or inaccessible. In these contexts, meaningful PBS work depends not only on identifying behavioural functions, but on establishing safety, connection, and participation across the whole family system.</p> <p>Play and creative therapies offer developmentally responsive, neurodiversity-affirming ways to support engagement, regulation, communication, and relational capacity. While these approaches are well-established within counselling and therapeutic settings, their role within NDIS-funded PBS remains less clearly articulated. The presentation examines their role as legitimate mechanisms for both child engagement and parent capacity-building in complex neurodivergent family contexts.</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	Clearly state the goals or aims of your project or presentation with key learning points.	<p>This presentation aims to illustrate the role of play and creative counselling approaches as legitimate and effective components of NDIS-funded PBS. In this presentation, play and creative counselling approaches refers to the intentional use of play-based, visual, and creative processes within a PBS framework to support rapport building, engagement, regulation, and relational capacity.</p> <p>Using a de-identified case example, it will demonstrate how creative modalities can support engagement, regulation, and participation for a neurodivergent child with co-occurring Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, characterised by significant avoidance and a home-bound presentation associated with sustained stress and overwhelm. The presentation also explores how creative approaches can support relational capacity, skill building and reflective space for the child's parent with disability and mental health needs.</p> <p>Key learning points include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding how creative approaches can function as engagement pathways within PBS</li> </ul>



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
 A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
 17-19 July 2026

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying practical ways to integrate creative approaches that support engagement, emotional regulation, and the development of mastery, self-esteem, communication and positive relationships within neurodiverse child and family systems</li> <li>Recognising the alignment between creative counselling approaches and core PBS principles, including person-centred practice, quality-of-life outcomes, relational safety, and family capacity-building</li> </ul>
<b>Methods/ Approach</b>	Describe the methods or approach used in your work. This could include case studies, program evaluations, literature reviews, or practical interventions.	A de-identified practice-based case study is used to illustrate the integration of play and creative counselling approaches within NDIS-funded Positive Behaviour Support.
<b>Findings</b>	Summarise the key insights or outcomes of your work. Highlight important data or information that supports your conclusions.	<p>This case demonstrates that engagement within PBS cannot be assumed through either directive or child-led therapeutic approaches. Practitioner-led input was experienced by the child as intrusive demand, while open-ended, child-centred play environments were overwhelming and led to withdrawal. Engagement did not emerge through choice alone.</p> <p>Once relational safety was established, creative approaches supported engagement by offering contained, negotiable structures that balanced agency with predictability. Creative processes allowed the child then to direct themes, rules, and roles while reducing overwhelm. Through shared game-making and imaginative play, the child experienced control, mastery, and participation within a relational context, without relinquishing autonomy.</p> <p>These findings suggest that within PBS, creative therapies function as a middle ground between directive and non-directive approaches, providing flexible frameworks that support engagement, self-efficacy, and relational connection for children who do not tolerate traditional clinician-led or open-ended models.</p> <p>Parallel creative approaches were required to support caregiver capacity. Traditional insight-based psychoeducation and parent behaviour-change conversations were not accessible due to emotional overwhelm and fluctuating regulatory capacity. Instead, creative, visual, and scaffolded approaches supported reflection, emotional regulation, and incremental change while reducing cognitive load. These changes coincided with reduced frequency and intensity of behaviours of concern, reduced caregiver burden, and increased Family Quality of Life, as reflected in routine practice-based and standardised measures. Over time, the child resumed leaving the house and participating in community environments, reflecting improved functional engagement and quality of life. These outcomes aligned with improved nervous system regulation within the family system and sustained therapeutic engagement.</p>



2026 Sydney Centre for Creative Change Conference  
 A World of Wonder: Celebrating Diversity with Play, Art and Drama Therapy  
 17-19 July 2026

<b>Conclusion</b>	Discuss the implications of your findings and their relevance. Suggest potential applications or future directions.	This case demonstrates that play and creative therapy approaches have an under-utilised, but legitimate role within NDIS-funded PBS when traditional directive and non-directive therapeutic methods are not accessible. Grounded in a humanistic stance, creative therapies support engagement, agency, and family capacity by providing flexible structures that prioritise safety, autonomy, and relationship. These approaches extend PBS beyond behaviour change toward ethical, person-centred practice.
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	If applicable, disclose any financial support, institutional assistance, or personal contributions that facilitated your work.	No external funding was received for this work. The author acknowledges the support of the service organisation in which this practice occurred, and the child and family whose lived experience informed this presentation.
<b>References</b>	<p><b>Minimum of 5 references</b>          Include citations of key literature or sources that support your work. Follow the specific citation style as per example.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carr, E. G., et al. (2002). Positive behavior support: Evolution of an applied science. <i>Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions</i>.</li> <li>• Schalock, R. L., &amp; Verdugo, M. A. (2012). <i>A leadership guide for today's disabilities organizations: Overcoming challenges and making change happen</i>. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.</li> <li>• Heestand, C. (2024). <i>The development of an 8-week neurodiversity-affirming caregiver co-regulation coaching program</i> (Unpublished capstone project). Western Michigan University, ScholarWorks at WMU.  <a href="https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&amp;context=capstone_projects">https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&amp;context=capstone_projects</a></li> <li>• López-Escribano, C., &amp; Orío-Aparicio, C. (2024). <i>Creative arts therapy for autistic children: A systematic review</i>. <b>The Arts in Psychotherapy</b>, <i>91</i>, 102224.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2024.102224">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2024.102224</a></li> <li>• Schweizer, C., Knorth, E. J., &amp; Spreen, M. (2014). <i>Art therapy with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders: A systematic review of qualitative case studies</i>. <b>The Arts in Psychotherapy</b>, <i>41</i>(5), 577–593. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2014.10.001">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2014.10.001</a></li> </ul>
<b>Optional Supporting Documents</b>	Any extra description can be included as supporting document.	N/A
<b>Room Set Up</b>	<b>Please be aware that room set up will be in theatre style</b>	