

Yappera Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

In 2012, 74 children, all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, were enrolled at Yappera. 12 staff are Aboriginal, with one quarter new to the workforce or returning to the workforce.

Yappera runs a range of childcare programs, including: long day care; early start (family grouping); early start and preschool kindergartens; and two school holiday programs. The kindergarten programs have a pick up and drop off service, and 11 new families have joined the service through outreach. Nutrition, physical activity, drama, science, cultural, traditional dance, and parenting/carer programs and workshops are also offered at no additional cost.

In the past year,

- 58 children have participated in health checks, including audiology, optometry, paediatric assessments, dental, immunisations, and general health checks.
- Specialist health services have also been sourced for children, namely speech therapy, occupational therapy and cognitive/developmental support.
- several children with additional needs, including language/speech delays, cognitive delays, social/emotional delays and Autism spectrum disorder, have received additional support.

- 12 children were identified as requiring further assessment;
- 9 referrals were made for families to services including specialist children's services, counselling, family violence support, maternal care and health,
- 13 children have child protection involvement and 7 were in an out of home care placement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture underpins all program planning, delivery and learning at Yappera, in recognition that children learn best with a strong connection to culture and robust support network of family and community. Family are considered to be the primary educators of children and with 50% of staff being local Aboriginal community members, a sense of trust between families and the service underpins its strong outcomes.

Every year, Yappera experiences significant budget gaps between received grants and projected expenditure. In the 2012/2013 financial year, DEEWR funding received was \$615,0590. Projected salaries alone for this period were \$698,894. Yappera has raised fees, however the collection rate is only 50 – 70%. Despite fees, \$9500 fundraising monies and DEEWR wage incentives, a huge budget shortfall remains.

Yarrabah PCYC School Age Care YARRABAH, QUEENSLAND

Yarrabah PCYC School Age Care opened in 1998 as a drop-in centre and in 2003, with BBF funding it commenced vacation and after-school care. Yarrabah was transitioned to mainstream child care benefit (CCB) funding in 2005. Since then, numbers have reduced from 130-150 children attending daily to 40-50 children.

Many children have become ineligible under CCB, because of:

- Inconsistencies between a child and carer's Centrelink details and Yarrabah's records (often caused by misspelt names or incorrect birthdates);
- Lapsed immunisation or missing immunisation records;
- Children living with multiple families – meaning that the adult claiming child support for the child changes frequently without information being passed on to Yarrabah; and
- Exceeding allowable absences for the year.

This has left Yarrabah unable to claim CCB for these children.

Based on the community context, Yarrabah PCYC does not charge fees. Although 45 kilometers from Cairns, Yarrabah is an isolated community with a 100% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community with high unemployment and low personal wealth. Most families do not have their own transport, and so obtaining and sustaining work outside the community is challenging. The centre's management know that to charge

even minimal fees would deter almost all families from sending children to the centre.

Other consequences of the reduced income from the shift to mainstream CCB funding have been:

- staff cuts;
- reduction in opening hours;
- cut backs to program; and
- sale of their larger bus, relying now on one small bus to pick up and drop children.

Yarrabah still experiences a \$300,000 deficit between funding received and funding required to operate. The centre is currently heavily subsidised by the Queensland PCYC Head Office. Whilst Yarrabah does apply for and receives some grant funding, most grants are not available for operational funding, which is the most pressing need. Yarrabah has sought in many ways to counter these challenges. Since 2006 Yarrabah has run two annual open days to sign up new children and correct enrolment and Centrelink details for enrolled children. However, the higher numbers of children registered under CCB quickly fades.

Yarrabah PCYC operates to provide disadvantaged children with a safe, secure and supervised environment in which they can participate in a range of enriching and stimulating activities. Yarrabah is the only service within the community that provides after-school and vacation care. The service cannot however continue operating on the current model.