



# Community Early Learning PROGRAM

Improve school attendance and community safety in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through a 10 year commitment to adequately resource a Community Early Learning Program within the Families Package.

Access to Indigenous integrated early years services is central to getting kids to school, and Closing the Gap in education and employment outcomes.

The Community Early Learning program would fund:

- services in Indigenous communities where children have a high probability of being developmentally vulnerable
- centre based services (including mobile services) with an evidence-based early childhood education and care program under 3 year plans. This includes the Budget Based funding Services and the Indigenous Child and Family Centres.
- a coordinating role for effective integrated service delivery identified by community need
- 20 new services annually to start to redress the 15,000 place gap

Cost: \$250 million annually

“ [Through the work of Bubup Wilam Early Learning] we have gone from one Indigenous student in 2009 to last year we had 20 and we are now 5 per cent Indigenous .... So the transition for the students and their families is really great because it can be tricky ... to work with the Aboriginal community, understanding what do you want. Bubup Wilam have been fantastic as an advisory board particularly to me as a Principal.

Leon Bell, Principal, Thomastown West Primary School



# Why invest IN THE COMMUNITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM?

## SERVICE NEED

The Productivity Commission has identified a gap of 15,000 places in early childhood services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Further however, those services that do exist are under significant threat of closure or inaccessibility to Indigenous children.

Federal funding for the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres (ACFCs) across Australia was discontinued in July 2014. Some states, including Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales have provided temporary funding, with many ACFCs being forced to operate at a significantly reduced rate. Others, such as South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, are managing the Centres directly. Victorian ACFCs have not received any state funding and are operating on substantially reduced budgets.

The 270 services funded under the Budget Based Funding (BBF) program remain in limbo on inadequate year-to-year funding.

Currently only 2.1% of Indigenous children participate in early years services, despite making up 4.7% of the population. This requires a 70% increase to ensure Indigenous children are on par with their non-Indigenous peers. Redressing low rates of Indigenous participation in early years services then offers a significant opportunity to genuinely Close the Gap for the next generation of children.

Indigenous integrated early years services provide the best vehicle to do this. 80% of children participating in the early childhood education program within a NSW ACFC between June-December 2014, for example, had not accessed any program previously. Similarly for 65% of the 3150 adults accessing an integrated support program.

## COMMUNITY SAFETY

As their local community hub, these services provide a trusted one-stop shop for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who otherwise won't access any other service supports. This reduces the risk of violence and crime in community. It means that families who most need support can access housing and legal services, parenting programs, youth programs, maternal health services, family violence counseling, drug and alcohol counseling, men's groups, grandparent support groups and other critical supports identified based on community need.

Evidence also confirms that engagement in early childhood education reduces risk of harm to a child, and subsequent involvement with statutory child protection authorities, as well as reductions in remedial services and criminal behaviour in the longer term.

In a short time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres have been able to have significant impact on community safety and well-being with 11036 Indigenous children and 10,408 Indigenous adults accessing integrated support programs through five WA Centres in the past 12 months alone.

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Integrated early years services are increasing school attendance across Australia. Evidence clearly establishes that the early years of a child's life are a critical predictor of transition to school as well as future education outcomes. This is enhanced for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Indigenous integrated early years services not only provide quality early childhood programs but also run transition to school programs that see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children socially and developmentally ready for school. They build relationships between the family and the school, and prepare the school to receive the children, factors which are both critical for an effective transition to primary school. Given that first relationships with school shape a child's educational journey, this is a fundamental role for ensuring school attendance of Indigenous children. School principals highlight service impact on increased school participation (see quotes).

## EMPLOYMENT

Indigenous integrated early years services generate employment opportunities and enable communities to get work ready and secure jobs. They build confidence and skill up mums – many who have never been in the workforce – providing a stepping-stone into paid work. They train up local workers within culturally appropriate, supported environments.

Ballina Aboriginal Child and family Centre alone has 28 Aboriginal staff and the Logan Centre has 27. There are 13 Indigenous staff in the Ngukurr Centre and 39 Indigenous people employed in the five WA centres. With 38 ACFCs and 270 Budget Based Funding program services offering integrated early years services, they are significant Indigenous employment providers in communities.

I've worked with a lot of early childhood centres ... what makes Berrimba stand out is that these kids are getting the best possible start in a culturally appropriate setting, and then they're coming to us at school with that confidence.

Christina Drummond. Principal Lockington Consolidated School, Echuca

## Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Child and Family Centre MT DRUITT, NEW SOUTH WALES

**In the past year 34 Aboriginal children enrolled at Yenu Allowah ACFC, supported by an all-Aboriginal staff.** The centre offers a range of allied health programs, including:

- speech and occupational therapy
- immunisations
- dental health and hearing screenings (screenings are conducted for all Aboriginal children in the local community, not just those who attend the centre)
- maternal health and a visiting health nurse
- disability services.

An array of family support programs enable a wraparound service for all the family. Playgroup services are delivered to 30 families through two mobile playgroups. In addition, the service offers behavioural management, parenting support and a catering and nutrition program. Cultural and arts programs, offered to children and families, are a fundamental aspect of the service. With a high proportion of children in Out of Home Care (OOHC) the cultural program

Strong, Proud and Deadly Kids Club is essential to support kids in care to remain connected to their culture. Support is also provided to kinship carers.

Local community involvement has been embedded from the start – in the centre design, approach and programming – making Yenu Allowah a truly Aboriginal owned and guided service. The service is now initiating a custodianship role for Elders, so that their wealth of knowledge can guide decision-making.

To cater for the high proportion of children in OOHC or within families at risk, staff are highly experienced in and sensitive to childhood trauma and child protection issues. An essential point of difference for the service is that staff know how to support children with higher needs, and the service structure supports the more intensive levels of care required. Their approach is simple, Centre Manager Christine states, *"We take them in and then we worry about what needs to happen."*

Word of mouth is spreading across the community about the value of the centre – with new families continually visiting,



and some families even enrolling their children before they are born. Christine estimates that 95 per cent of children in the preschool group have not previously accessed formal child care, and that numerous children are accessing health services they previously wouldn't have benefitted from.

Despite all the gains, the future of the centre beyond 2015 continues to remain uncertain. Closure of the centre would, Christine says, *"mean utter devastation [and] impact generationally on today's children and children in the future."*

## LUKE'S Story

This is the story of just one of the many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who have benefitted from the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres.

**LUKE'S\* educational journey had a rough start. Beginning kindergarten at the public primary school in 2014, Luke was asked to leave due to his 'disruptive behaviour', and inability to cope with the school environment. His mother, a single parent, was incredibly distressed by this, and not knowing what to do. She was incredibly stressed by this and turned to her local Aboriginal Child and Family Centre because she knew and trusted the staff there.**

The ACFC Manager attended meetings with the school and Luke's mother, and a mutual decision was made to give Luke another year at home with the support of the ACFC. An assessment revealed that language delay was hindering Luke's successful transition to school. This assessment enabled Luke to be referred to the supports he needed – a speech therapy service and a playgroup for children with disabilities, both facilitated by and hosted at the local ACFC. In mid-2014 Luke was then able to progress on to a long day care program at the ACFC, at the same time as continuing with in-house individual and group speech therapy. Support was provided

by the speech therapist to Luke's mother and educators to ensure that the care he received was consistent in reinforcing his therapy. As a result, Luke's language development has improved significantly, confirmed by increased vocabulary and comprehension test results.

At the end of his year at the ACFC, preparation started for Luke to re-attend primary school. Discussions were held with the speech therapist and the school, to ensure the school was prepared to receive Luke. The school applied for additional funding to ensure that Luke could receive one-on-one support. The ACFC hosted a preparation for school workshop, which Luke and his mother attended.

At the start of 2015, Luke recommenced at the local primary school. His mother reported that he was warmly welcomed into the school environment and settled in well, and that she has seen fantastic improvements in Luke's ability to communicate at home. She directly attributes these gains to the support Luke received at the ACFC.

\* not his real name



# Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

## NOWRA, NEW SOUTH WALES

**With 400 children and adults participating each year in allied health and family support programs, Cullunghutti ACFC is a community service in high demand.** In addition to this, the service has 70 children enrolled in the early childhood program – and another 45 on the waitlist. These high numbers can be largely attributed to the fact that Cullunghutti delivers a culturally centred, holistic response to the needs of Aboriginal families. After only 18 months of operation, Cullunghutti ACFC has dramatically changed the way Aboriginal families are supported in Nowra.

Child and family health is supported through an extensive range of freely available on-site allied health services delivered through strong partnerships with other service providers. These include:

- speech and occupational therapy
- psychology
- paediatric services, including child hearing assessments, 'blue book' health checks and coordination of GP assessments for allied health plans
- antenatal maternal health assessments.

The centre will also shortly be certified as a provider for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Families are encouraged to drop-in to the centre when they need – for advice, support or just a friendly yarn and cuppa. A comprehensive case management approach ensures that families receive wraparound services, including:

- behavioural management support and Early Links Inclusion Support Service
- drop-in housing support
- parenting programs, including a supported playgroup that sees regular attendance from around 15 adults and 20 children
- cultural and arts programs, as well as separate Men's and Women's groups
- a catering and nutrition program
- support for kinship carers.

Cullunghutti also supports the development of a strong Aboriginal workforce, employing 12 Aboriginal workers out of 16 staff, with the other 4 staff members having strong connections and acceptance in the local Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal General Manager, Aboriginal Teaching Director and eight-member community and parent Board ensure strong Aboriginal management and leadership. In addition to this, families report feeling that they have a strong voice at the centre.

The very real differences brought about in the lives of Nowra's children as a direct result of the service are staggering:

- There has been an significant increase in early childhood diagnosis of additional needs and learning delay, with the Aboriginal specific stream of the Early Links program assessing over 30 children annually.
- A minimum of 80-85% of the children and families accessing the early learning and supported playgroup did not previously access any early learning service before attending Cullunghutti.

- Numerous children who previously experienced limited access to health professionals have now received health checks, visited health professionals and are receiving additional support.

Changes are not just visible for the kids, but also for their families and the community as a whole. Adults are supported to undertake TAFE level study in work readiness, community services and micro-enterprise. Due to the success of its nutrition program, Cullunghutti has established its own catering business as a social enterprise, as part of its sustainability strategy, which is staffed by 3 women from the nutrition program. General Manager Cindy Holmes describes how, *"The changes for those women are phenomenal....now they are running a catering business and out in the community selling raffle tickets to raise money for Cullunghutti. The changes are flowing through into their families... it's part of the way that we provide whole of family support."*

The centre is now supporting the women to study small business management.

Cullunghutti ACFC delivers a vital service to the Nowra region – with numerous benefits for children, families and the community as a whole. The Nowra community is working over-time to raise funds for their Centre after its income was halved by the withdrawal of Federal funds in 2014 and it awaits confirmation of state funds beyond June 2015. It is more than apparent that it is time for the Federal government to re-invest in Cullunghutti's success.

*Cullunghutti is a family – our families are part of us*



# Ningkuwum-Ngamayuwu Halls Creek Children and Family Centre

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**Ningkuwum-Ngamayuwu Halls Creek CFC operates in the remote Kimberley region, providing a reliable space for children to build relationships, learn and to be strong in their culture and identity.**

Participation rates are high, with 113 children and families accessing Little Nuggets, the long day care centre, and 505 children participating in Lilwuns playgroup over the last 6 months.

Operating as the only children and family centre in Halls Creek, the centre delivers a large array of allied health services, including:

- growth and development assessments by the Yura Yungi child health nurse, who is permanently located in the CFC
- Neuro-Development Clinics
- Allied Health (speech, physiotherapy and occupational therapy), which delivers workshops and attend Early Years Network meetings at the centre
- nutrition and dietary advice from visiting specialists, including collaboration with the CFC and Yura Yungi on one-off community events
- a sexual health program delivered weekly
- regular visits from a psychologist; and
- specific workshops delivered according to local demand – with past workshops covering topics such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and the ‘breathe blow cough’ program.

Centre Manager Maria Lovison believes it is crucial to provide families with a range of programs to expose them to new knowledge and empower them to take a leading role in their child's development.

The range of family support services provided at the Centre include:

- Parenting support, including a fortnightly men's circle to discuss health and community issues.
- Daily literacy and numeracy support. The centre is also in discussion with the Australian Parents Council around training local staff to conduct the Indigenous Parenting Factor program.
- Cultural and community activities – including fortnightly programs through the Kimberley Language Resource Centre and local community members.



- A money management program delivered by the Jungarni Jutiya Aboriginal Corporation.
- A weekly radio slot to promote the Centre's programs, upcoming events and partner service providers, as well as a special feature on 'children's stories'.

The community uses the centre as a hub for a range of activities from birthday parties to a shared garden initiative. Maria describes how *"No matter where you come from, what your languages are, it is everyone's centre. This is the most empowering aspect."* Community members are encouraged to share their thoughts and suggestions on the operation of the centre and the programs provided.

A cultural advisory group, comprised of Elders and community members, meets monthly to provide staff with advice and guidance on cultural and community matters. Culture forms part of the *"life and breath"* of the centre, and Carolyn, Manager of Little Nuggets, describes how the flow-on effects of this are visible in increased community pride in their culture and centre. The establishment of a strong cultural identity is seen as particularly crucial as school-age children move on to attend mainstream primary schools. Supporting this transition, the centre maintains a strong partnership with the two local schools. A weekly story-time program is run for kids in Lilwuns Playgroup at the Halls Creek District High School, and a kindy program at Warlawurru (Red Hill) Primary School.

In describing the strengths of the service, Centre Manager Maria says simply, *"people love coming here"*, and this results in consistent participation and attendance rates. She attributes this to the trust that the community

have in the centre – the community *"have started to take ownership of the centre, and you can really feel that when you walk in."* The employment of local staff is crucial in this. Seven of the nine Ningkuwum-Ngamayuwu staff, and eight of the 11 Little Nugget staff are Aboriginal, and Maria describes how *"when the people see locals working here, they feel more comfortable. They have their trust. When they see family working at the centre, they are more likely to come to the centre than [to a] mainstream service."*

However, like most remote communities, qualified local staff are hard to find. The Centre has responded to this through a strong focus on staff capacity building. Seven local women are currently being supported to undertake Certificate and Diploma level training, and a high school student is undertaking a school-based traineeship. The Kimberley Training Institute visit fortnightly to discuss training options with staff and community members. Additionally, the service mentors young parents through study enrolment processes and options.

Ningkuwum-Ngamayuwu has been delivering strong outcomes for children and families since its inception. However with no certainty of funding beyond June 2015, it is hard to plan for the future. A mobile playgroup service operating out of the "Mums & Bubs" building gained just enough momentum to begin to show strong outcomes and high family participation, before funding ceased and the program was forced to close.

Programs at the centre are at risk of ceasing if future funding is not secured. Simply put, without Ningkuwum-Ngamayuwu, there would be no child and family services available in Halls Creek.

Culture forms part of the *"life and breath"* of the centre...



# 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.

# Logan Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

## QUEENSLAND

### Logan Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (ACFC) provides an invaluable range of services to Indigenous children aged 0-8 and their families.

Support begins early, with Logan staff paying hospital visits to families with newborns to share an information package on the ACFC and other support services. This connects families into an integrated service system from the outset. Partnering with Queensland Department of Health, the ACFC is a referral point for baby health checks – conducted through home visits or at the centre. Partnerships with Health and the Logan City Council enable the ACFC to run a health clinic and immunisation program. A speech pathologist is also provided by the Centre itself.

Logan manages the operations of nearby kindergarten *Burrakah* to deliver an educational program to 23 children daily. The ACFC also hosts a playgroup, in which 182 parents participate annually, and a Baby Playgroup. This runs alongside the nurse clinic to enable mums to join in whilst they wait for the nurse.

An extensive array of family support programs are provided:

- With a high number of children cared for by grandparents, Logan ACFC's Grandparents Program provides invaluable respite care and support, offering weekly sessions for which transport is provided. A partnership with Foodbank Queensland has enabled a thriving community kitchen, supported by a nutritionist. The kitchen provides food parcels to community members in need, and has produced a cookbook and fact sheets on nutritious meals and lunch box ideas. The Kitchen also hosts cooking programs for Elders and young mothers, and runs popular community cook-offs!

- The *Deadly Dads* program is facilitated by a passionate local man and focuses on fathers' attachment and family relationships. The program has been an incredible success with up to 27 men attending the group weekly. Some fathers are referred in via parole officers or through family violence programs. Collaborating with local service providers the program ensures that fathers are receiving the support they need. The group recently initiated a father's day function which attracted over 100 male participants from across the region, and hosted a cook-up for mother's day, decorating the centre's walls with messages about the importance of mothers.
- Annually up to 60 parents participate in programs such as *Circles of Security*, *Incredible Years*, *1-2-3 Magic* and the *Abecedarian approach*, with staff upskilled to support program delivery.
- A successful school holiday program sees 3,500 Indigenous children participate annually, with the Centre providing program staff, a bus and meals. Centre Director Karen Dawson describes how this program is vital to take the pressure off families during what can be a stressful time.

Last year alone Logan worked with 560 children at risk of entering the child protection system. The Centre is not funded to carry out child protection work, but focus on supporting families at risk of entering, or who have voluntarily entered child protection services, as well as family reunification. The newborn visiting program is key to this preventative approach, with a number of child protection interventions still taking place on the maternity ward.

Additionally, Logan sees approximately 110 weekly crisis walk-ins, coordinating these through an efficient intake process and a quick response from the Family Support Team. Karen highlights that their link to parent organisation Ganyjuu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation is vital, as it provides a one-stop shop for holistic family wellbeing, with access to a range of services from court support to family mental health programs.

A large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff team (27 workers or 95% of the total team) ensures that the centre is deeply connected to culture and community, which Karen feels are core strengths. Many families come from contexts of high intergenerational trauma, and won't access mainstream services where they don't feel culturally safe. Logan is often the first service of its kind that they have accessed. Karen believes that this soft entry point is vital, highlighting "We often have the children in first, and then the parents start to slowly engage."

Logan ACFC is focusing on collective community impact through a partnership approach to deliver streamlined, holistic services. The high levels of community engagement, and their ability to innovate and respond to the emerging needs of their families, are key success elements. Karen describes the simple truth that genuine outcomes only emerge when you directly respond to community needs.

Yet despite their innovative and successful approach, Logan faces an uncertain future – with no funding beyond June 2015. The first signs of budget cuts are already being felt – with the bus service threatened. Without this, many children will not be able to attend. Whilst Logan has received some money under the Indigenous Advancement Scheme to fund an 'outside the school gates' program, this program will, ironically, not be possible unless the ACFC remains open.

Logan ACFC is not merely a child and family centre, it is an invaluable support framework for Indigenous children and their families. As Karen shared, "If the centre wasn't there we would not have a safe place for our children and families to come to."



Creating an environment which is culturally safe is the first step to close the gap.

# Wynbring Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) WHYALLA STUART, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

We are a valuable part of the community, we provide a service that employs local Aboriginal people, and are an advocate for the families that we serve.

In the past year, 74 children were enrolled at Wynbring Jida MACS, with 70% identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Wynbring Jida employs 10 Aboriginal staff, with four new or returning into the workforce.

Wynbring Jida offers long day care, as well as a *Lets Read* and *Think Feet First* program. Previously, there was a bus service to support families, however due to financial constraints this is no longer operating. Wynbring Jida work closely with Nunyara Aboriginal Health Service to support families with immunisations, maternal and child health checks, and any areas of development of concern. In the past year, approximately 24 children participated in these checks. Wynbring Jida also refers families to other specialist support, like speech therapy.

In the past year:

- 9 children have additional needs, including visual impairment, language/speech and physical delays;
- 8 children have been referred to the special care unit for additional support;
- 6 children have been referred for speech therapy;
- 2 children have been referred to occupational therapy;
- 1 family to grief counselling;
- 3 families to financial support;
- 4 families to respite care;
- 4 mothers to maternal care;
- 8 families have been provided with housing support;
- 5 children were involved in an out of home care placement; and
- 10 child protection notifications were made.

**Wynbring Jida is the longest community-run Aboriginal service in Whyalla Stuart.**

It is a respected and valued part of the community, which is imperative to relationships with families. Current funding does not cover basic costs of service operation, nor the development of new needed programs at the centre.

## STACEY'S Story

STACEY, a local Aboriginal lady from Roebourne, has been working at the Gurlu Gurlu Maya Aboriginal Children and Family Centre since it first opened in May 2014. With scarce employment opportunities in Roebourne, working at the centre has been a life-changing opportunity for Stacey. When she initially started working with the Centre, Stacey and her young son were sharing a house with 15 others. This challenging domestic environment – with so many people coming and going - made getting a good night's sleep difficult. Through her work at Gurlu Gurlu Maya, Stacey and her son have been allocated a house to live in. Their home life has become much more settled and calm, and Stacey knows that she is now providing a safe, comfortable place for her and her son.

Initially working as an Educator, Stacey's hard work has been recognised through a promotion to the position of Kinder Room Leader. Stacey is also being supported to complete her Diploma in Early Education and Care. Working at the Gurlu Gurlu Maya ACFC has empowered Stacey to take control of her life, feel proud and be a strong woman for her family and community.

## SARAH'S Story

SARAH works for a local Aboriginal Corporation in Roebourne, which is a partner with Gurlu Gurlu Maya. Sarah is a young local Aboriginal woman who lost her child at 14 months after many health complications. When Gurlu Gurlu Maya opened Sarah started speaking with the staff and getting involved in the programs that Gurlu Gurlu Maya was offering. Sarah started working closely with the Community Engagement Coordinator and together they have developed the Solid Program, which helps local women find their own strengths and develop their parenting skills.

Sarah says that this gives her a huge sense of purpose and has helped her to begin to feel more positive about life. She also plans to start 'Sarah's Group' – which will be a place for parents of children with additional needs to come together with their children and talk as a group about the challenges they face, draw support from each other and share information on available supports they can access.