

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 a 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

