

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.

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