

## 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