



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and
Family Centres

Changing futures with our children and families

Queensland: August 2018

Acknowledgments

SNAICC thanks the staff of each participating service for their time in providing information for the development of these profiles and recognises that the data is owned by the services who have kindly shared it with SNAICC for the purposes of these profiles.



About SNAICC

SNAICC – National Voice for our children is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfillment of the rights of our children, in particular to ensure their safety, development and wellbeing.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was established to engage in activities that promote and accommodate a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC's efforts has resulted in many key milestones and achievements both in policy developments at state, territory and federal levels and in developing innovative and useful resources for the sector.

SNAICC is governed by an influential Board of Directors made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.



Acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACFC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centre
CCB	Child Care Benefit
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DE	Department of Education
DECD	Department of Education and Child Development
DET	Department of Education and Training
DH	Department of Health
ELC	Early Learning Centre
FACS	Family and Community Services
FaFT	Family as First Teachers
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
NPA IECD	National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development
OOHC	Out of Home Care
PM&C	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
SCfC	Stronger Communities for Children

Introduction

The establishment of 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) across Australia was a major initiative in the development of integrated services that respond holistically to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and their families.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) entered into the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NPA IECD) in support of achieving Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their early years. Under the NPA IECD, the Australian Government and state and territory governments committed \$564 million over six years for a range of Indigenous early childhood initiatives.

ACFCs seek to redress low rates of Indigenous participation in early years services, which requires a 70 per cent increase to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are on par with their non-Indigenous peers. The flexible, inclusive and community-based approach of ACFCs has been successful in facilitating the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to access high-quality early childhood education programs, many for the first time. Engagement with early years services is recognised as critically important for educational and developmental outcomes later in life.

ACFCs connect vulnerable families to an array of integrated services designed to meet locally determined priorities and needs. As a trusted 'one-stop shop' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who would otherwise be unlikely to access any other service supports, ACFCs have a significant impact in improving the safety, health and wellbeing of families and communities. ACFCs are uniquely placed in their delivery of culturally strong services, designed in a manner where a focus on the employment and training of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff further facilitates the sustainability and empowerment of local communities.

Federal funding for the 38 centres was discontinued in July 2014. The services were then caught in the cross-fire of State-Commonwealth politics and have still not managed to be seen simply as integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services. The Queensland Government continued funding for its ten centres and New South Wales provided temporary funding. Other states, such as South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, managed the centres directly. The Victorian Government continued to see the ACFCs as a Commonwealth responsibility. From July 2018, the ACFCs will face new challenges under the Child Care Package, as detailed further in the SNAICC Policy Brief on that issue. Above all, they still just require recognition as integrated culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families experiencing particular disadvantage.

Despite the struggles, the services have flourished, developing deep bonds and strengthening cultural pride within their communities. Many have achieved the highest possible rating of 'exceeding' under the national quality standards. They are playing a central role in ensuring a good start for some of the most vulnerable children across the country, changing their life trajectory.

SNAICC is developing a series of profiles to provide an overview of the 36 services still operating. The profiles detail the key features of each participating service, namely: programs offered; governance structure; funding; engagement with families and communities; and some highlights on outcomes for children and families. The profiles aim to deepen understanding of the work of these services and their impact, as well as to foster sharing and exchange amongst services themselves.

These profiles will be released on a state-by-state basis, and will then finally be compiled into one report.

Queensland Services

In Queensland:

- 10 ACFCs were established
- All centres are still operating
- 1 centre (Ngukuthati) did not participate in SNAICC's survey

Name	Location	Parent organisation
Qld		
Wuchopperen Children and Family Centre	Manoora	Wuchopperen Health Service Ltd
Dumaji Children and Family Centre	Doomadgee	Save the Children Australia
Ipswich Children and Family Centre	Ipswich	Kambu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Corporation for Health
Waterford West Children and Family Centre	Waterford West	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Brisbane Limited
Mackay Children and Family Centre	Mackay	Creche and Kindergarten Association Ltd (CandK)
Mulungu Children and Family Centre	Mareeba	Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation Primary Health Care Service
Ngakulwen Nyerrwe Children and Family Centre	Mornington Island	Save the Children Australia
Ngukuthati Children and Family Centre	Mount Isa	
Palm Island Children and Family Centre	Palm Island	Palm Island Community Company Ltd
Rockhampton Children and Family Centre	Rockhampton	Bidgerdii Community Health Services

These services serve a very high proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in their communities and have high levels of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, up to 100 per cent for some.

	Number of Aboriginal children participating in an early learning program (p.a)	What proportion is this of all the children participating in an early learning program (p.a)	Number of Aboriginal parents/carers receiving a service from the ACFC (p.a)	Percentage of Aboriginal staff in the ACFC
Wuchopperen	149	100%	315	100%
Dumaji	165 (6 months)	98%	247 (6 months)	100%
Ipswich	366	89%	296	85-100%
Waterford West	256	95%	155	100%
Mulungu	110 (3 months)	91%	132 (3 months)	64%

Ngakulwen Nyerrwe	60-70	unknown	70-80	100%
Palm Island	253 (6 months)	99%	90	82%
Rockhampton	113	89%	unknown	71%
Mackay	590		482	50%

Governance

Six out of the nine centres participating in this research are run by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. These are:

- Wuchopperen ACFC – Wuchopperen Health Service Ltd
- Ipswich ACFC – Kambu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Health
- Waterford West ACFC – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Brisbane Limited
- Mulungu ACFC – Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation Primary Health Care Service
- Rockhampton ACFC – Bidgerdii Community Health Services
- Palm Island ACFC – Palm Island Community Company

In contrast, Mackay is run by Creche and Kindergarten Association Limited, and Ngakulwen Nyerrwe and Dumaji are run by Save the Children Australia.

All centres have strong partnerships with other service providers and receive regular input and guidance from parents, the community and local Elders groups.

Funding

	State (DET)	Federal (PM&C or DSS)	Other
Wuchopperen	✓		
Ipswich	✓	✓	
Dumaji	✓	✓	
Waterford West	✓	✓	
Mulungu	✓		
Ngakulwen Nyerrwe	✓	✓	
Palm Island	✓	✓	✓ Primary Health Network
Rockhampton	✓		
Mackay	✓		

Most services have sufficient funding for current operations but little security or capacity for expansion. Gaps in service delivery are generally covered by good

working agreements with other mainstream service providers (Ipswich ACFC noted this particularly).

Many centres describe the need to constantly look for extra funding, with Palm Island ACFC highlighting a shortage of funds to cover medical services in particular. In some cases, programs have been discontinued or reduced due to funding shortages. For example:

- Wuchopperen pre-Kindy literacy program was defunded;
- Mulungu homework club and driver licencing lessons are no longer running due to lack of funding; and
- Palm Island psychologist visits are now less frequent due to funding shortages.

Ngakulwen Nyerrwe ACFC experiences a significant funding gap, particularly concerning staff training, with an identified need to provide all staff with access to formal training qualifications. According to the Centre Manager Susan Sewter: “No, we don't have enough...I think training is a major issue that they really need to address, and get all our workers schooled and to be able to do their role properly and safely. That's my main concern that we're looking after the safety of our workers.”

Services

	Wuchopperen	Dumaji	Ipswich	Waterford West	Mulungu	Ngakulwen	Palm Island	Rockhampton	Mackay
Early childhood education and care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Early childhood learning programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visiting health professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allied health services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family and parenting support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing, Centrelink and/or legal assistance	✓		✓			✓			✓
Elders group	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Cultural programs	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
Community events	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Wuchopperen service highlights

The centre provides an early childhood education and care service, parenting and family support service, child health services and play-based early childhood activities. The Kindy Connect support service also offers transport and financial aid for children attending Kindy in the region.

Dumaji service highlights

The Dumaji Children and Family Centre provides integrated services under the key service delivery components of early childhood education and care; family and parenting support; and child and maternal health through strong partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and local service providers. The services support care-coordination and continuity for children and families with referrals to specialist services as required. The centre also provides access to a number of projects and services including financial counselling and capability, youth development, cooking classes, garden competitions, school readiness, Men's Group, environmental health support (including cleaning packs and gardening equipment), youth justice, HIPPY, mobile book and toy library, a Grannies Group and a Young Mum's Group.

Play2learn (playgroup) runs three days per week and a Transition Play2learn runs with pre-Prep students each Thursday. After school activities and a school holiday program also reach children birth-16 years. The Elders are regular visitors to the centre and share their stories with the children.

Regional Coordinator for the Dumaji ACFC Terri Ridgeway shares, "One of our highlights has been our 'Getting Ready for School Family Camps' held four times a year at Adels Grove in Lawn Hill National Park. Nearly 100 children have participated in the camps, which include a program of creative and interactive activities focused on early literacy and numeracy, and social and emotional readiness for school. The families enjoy the outdoor learning environment and the fishing, canoeing and bush walking. It is wonderful to see so many happy children spending quality time with their parents over three days on beautiful Waanyi Country."

Ipswich service highlights

Based within the Kambu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Health (Kambu Health), Ipswich ACFC offers comprehensive primary health care as well as a wide range of allied health and specialist health care beyond the fantastic early years long day care and kindergarten and transition to school programs.

Kambu Health CEO, Stella Johnson, shares that: "The programs of the CFC ensure that parents are supported throughout their pre- and post-natal journey, in particular with the maternal and child health programs that include midwives, paediatricians, child health nurses, health workers, occupational therapy and speech services, and child psychologists who can do specialist assessments for children with specific needs."

The centre provides a space for the whole family, with its Deadly Mums and Dads Programs, Elders and Grandparents Horticulture Program in partnership with TAFE, and Ipswich Education and Youth Sports Program (IEYSP) in collaboration with USQ.

“Elders play a vital part of the teachings in these groups and we are seeing lots of cross over now with cooking the produce of the grandparents gardens a key theme in the mums and dads groups, for example,” shares Stella Johnson.

They host a range of events, including (but not limited to) provision of outreach playgroups in Laidley, Goodna and Lowood, water safety programs, music therapy through Sing and Grow, Cultural playgroups, community forums, Elders’ quarterly morning teas, Community Health Check Days, NAIDOC Day Celebrations and school health checks. Kambu Health is now also a provider for NDIS services and is working with families to make applications as needed.

Stella Johnson highlights, “Early years learning opportunities are vital and we aim to ensure that parents are given all the correct information and that their child is supported through good health care and learning activities that will see the child prepared and ready to enter all levels of the early years space and school.”

Kambu Health is in fact undertaking a longitudinal study with a university partnership to identify the longer term outcomes for children and families, all starting from the Children and Family Centre.

Waterford West service highlights

As a part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Brisbane (ATSICHS), Waterford West ACFC features a wide array of integrated services responsive to the needs of its community, including a playgroup, a maternal health service, family and parenting support programs, an early dental intervention and identification program, speech pathologists, a foster and kinship care program, an emotional resilience program for 4-7 year olds, and an intensive family support program.

Waterford West also runs a program in the local school that builds the reading, language and literacy skills of pre and year 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In addition to this they run a homework club for families at the ACFC, with staff from the local school reporting that they have noticed significant improvements in students who attend the club.

Another highlight of the service is the Jajumboora program, which provides family and child health service support to Aboriginal women and their children from birth to two years old. Through the program women attend all midwife appointments at the CFC and are joined by their midwife at the local hospital for support during birthing. The program also includes access to pediatric coordinators and Aboriginal Health Workers who support the women through the early years of parenting. Programs such as this ensure that families are connected with and supported by the service from as early as possible.

Mulungu service highlights

Mulungu ACFC provides a diverse array of services to their community, including:



- Early childhood education and care
- Playgroup
- Outreach mobile service
- Toy Library
- Town Library visits
- Transition to school
- Parenting and Family Support
- Workshops to build parent and carer strengths
- Early learning support programs
- Elders gatherings
- Child and maternal health services
- Mums and Bubs healthy lifestyle programs
- Health Promotions – including immunisations and health checks

Ngakulwen Nyerrwe service highlights

The Ngakulwen Nyerrwe ACFC programs focus on early childhood, health, family support and financial wellbeing. They do a lot of work with the little ones, including through a long day care with 39 places, a successful pre-kindy early learning program (4 days per week) designed to support children and their families to become school ready, as well as an out-of-school program for 5-8. The centre also has a new Play2Learn program that supports play-based learning for children and their parent/carers, and is used as a soft entry base for health providers.

However, the service feels it is also really important to work with positive behaviours of the older kids too, through their 10-15-year-old youth programs with a youth support worker and a summer school holiday program. These children have a lot of support needs and these programs help to keep them free from direct contact with the youth justice system, while also being really central for the little siblings who look up to them. Similarly they work with mums and dads through a soft entry community engagement officer, so they have all these positive behaviours surrounding the birth-to-8-year-olds.

The centre works with families on a wide range of issues impacting them – like health, housing, family violence, finances – and coordinates other support services, bringing them in when the family needs them. They also run two community cafés monthly: one for community to get together, and one for services to get to know each other and what services others run.

Finally, key partnerships see several events co-facilitated, including, Welcome to Country for babies, graduation to pre-prep, get ready for school celebrations, child health checks and home visits, parents nights – dinner and dance, my kitchen rules, end-of-term fashion parade, family camps, birth certificate application day, and big Thursday day out. Importantly, culture is embedded across all these programs, aiming to build pride in community and culture, while at the same time supporting children and their families.

Palm Island service highlights

Palm Island ACFC is early-childhood focused with particular emphasis on the wellbeing of the whole family. The centre has a fully accredited medical practice with four doctors, Aboriginal health workers and a number of allied health services that operate from the centre.

The early years work revolves around the playgroup, bringing in additional programs to get kids and families ready to transition to school and have a good start. The early childhood health and parental wellbeing, for example, runs health checks for parents and kids, working with parents to identify any concerns for the kids and make referrals or bring in services to redress any issues early. The centre is also setting up a mobile playgroup to reach out to other areas with a health worker and midwife.

From Monday to Thursday, the centre has a night café for older kids to have a meal, play some games and do activities. Twice weekly, they hold a yarnning circle for women. They have a lot of celebrations and community days. Service Manager, Narelle Gleeson-Henaway, explains, “It’s trying to have an overall approach that picks up kids and makes sure families are supported.”

Rockhampton service highlights

Rockhampton ACFC focuses on *getting ready for school*, a homework centre, immunisations and twice-weekly playgroup sessions in partnership with QH to provide child developmental checks and referral pathways.

Mackay service highlights

The Mackay Child and Family Centre delivers a holistic approach to integrated health, early childhood education, and parenting and family support services. A full-time long day care centre, with transport support, is accompanied by a weekly family support playgroup, open community playgroup, and homework club twice-weekly.

Marion Collison, the Acting Manager of Mackay ACFC, notes, “We embrace and recognise that the parent/guardian are the child’s first teacher and our qualified and knowledgeable team support this journey.”

The team implement the Early Years Learning Framework, Building Waterfalls and the 8 Ways pedagogy framework, which empowers the wellbeing of the child while increasing connections with culture, home, school and community.

Through positive partnerships with a variety of referral agencies, the family support program is able to assist families with:

- Hearing
- Sight
- Speech
- Occupational Therapy

- Dental
- Paediatrician access
- Children’s psychological services
- Children’s health checks
- Immunisation
- Parenting programs
- Crisis care and emergency relief
- Antenatal and postnatal health

A few more programs are in the pipeline for 2018, including: women’s educational programs on issues defined by local women; a men’s yarning group; a young mums’ playgroup; sewing and cooking classes; and a health and fitness program.

Marion Collison, the Acting Manager of Mackay ACFC, shares, “The Mackay Children and Family Centre is a place where our whole community is welcome and where all cultures are respected. Our activities, programs and events are the core for children, families and young people to grow and learn together.”

Engagement with families and communities

All ACFCs ensure their centres are friendly, accessible and non-threatening so that clients feel at ease when engaging in programs. Ipswich ACFC tries to engage families through working in areas that they are already interested in, such as sport and cultural activities. Palm Island ACFC has found that having activities down at the beach has provided an opportunity to involve more families who would otherwise be unlikely to come to the centre directly.

Most ACFCs report having new families access the centres, both through self-referral and referral from other services. Mulungu ACFC reports that an increase of home visits has led to more new families accessing services. Rockhampton notes that it takes a longer time to engage new families to due transience and mobility, however, “once they are engaged they tend to access all services”.

Director of Early Childhood at ATSICHS Brisbane, Kirsten Holland, stresses the importance of Waterford West providing a wide range of supports to families and conducting quality and supportive referrals, “As much as possible we try and keep referrals within our organisation, so that we become a one-stop shop for families.” They also have strong links with local Aboriginal Elders group, who hold some of their meetings at the ACFC. This helps with ensuring they are embedded in their community and develop trusting relationships with local families.

Ngakulwen Centre Manager, Susan Sewter, similarly stresses that engaging with families takes time, and it is important to spend time and energy building relationships of trust between staff and families.

“Rather than rush in and say, ‘We’re here to help you’, it’s really about getting to know the family. I think it works for us because all our workers are from here and we know how the community operates.”

At Mackay ACFC, 23 per cent of children across all services are in out-of-home care. The centre therefore offers special childcare benefits for families who are at risk of being engaged with the child protection, or for children already in foster care, in order to make its services as accessible as possible to children and families experiencing vulnerabilities.

Regional Coordinator of Dumaji ACFC, Ms Ridgeway shares “Much of the work we do is mirrored by the comments of the other centres. Importantly our team is dedicated to driving change from the community level and building on the strengths of culture and local level leadership to ensure children in Doomadgee have the best start in life.”

Partnerships and integrated service delivery

Kambu Health CEO, Stella Johnson, emphasises the importance of providing ongoing and integrated support for children, which is only made possible through partnerships across different services and organisations. Following the programs delivered through the Ipswich ACFC for birth-to-8-year-olds, children are followed up in school with health and dental checks, as well as homework programs, through the Ipswich Education and Youth Sports Program in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland. This is an ongoing initiative that is evaluated and adjusted to meet the needs of the community. It demonstrates the commitment of Ipswich ACFC toward linking health and education.

Mornington ACFC notes that while a lot of funding is centred on school attendance, this can be a real challenge for some families due to an array of other issues including family violence, drugs and alcohol, or overcrowding. It is therefore crucial for ACFCs to not only provide early childhood education but also to support parents and families to access appropriate services.

Other centre managers likewise stressed the importance of case-coordination and integrated service delivery, while avoiding over-servicing clients. Palm Island ACFC Service Manager Narelle Gleeson-Henaway says, “They can have access to a range of services, so there’s not really any distinction between whether you’re here having a cup of tea with someone, or you’re going to the playgroup, or you’re here to see the doctor, the health worker, the physio, or whether you are there for your child to be seen by the child development team. So it just helps breaks down all those stigmas and the challenges that families face when they may have to access the centre for an appointment. It’s just a lot more comfortable, natural and engaging for people.”

Ms. Gleeson-Henaway also notes, “Often people just don’t even get to the point of being seen [by a specialist], let alone the challenges to keep up the appointments

after that. It's very difficult to navigate that alongside other children, other demands and other family obligations when you're the one in the middle having to organise everything for the whole household.”

Ngakulwen Centre Manager Susan Sewter reinforces this position: “Families are just getting tired of so many people rocking up on their doorstep, so by having a coordinated effort we know who's going into that family [and] why they're going in there.” To this end, developing family profiles helps to streamline services to be more efficient and less overwhelming.

Waterford West is able to use its six medical clinics and vast allied health and human service programs to ensure it is providing coordinated support to families without overwhelming them. Staff provide supported internal referrals from the ACFC to a clinic, and from the clinic to the ACFC, ensuring that families who may be in positions of isolation are provided with a wide range of supports. Director of Early Childhood at ATSiCHS Brisbane Kirsten Holland explains, “For example, a vulnerable family might present at one of our health clinics and be referred to a child psychologist at our Waterford West ACFC.” They have also become a major pathway for access to kindergarten programs. When a family joins Waterford West the staff will determine whether any of the children are eligible for kindergarten and, where necessary, support them to enrol in approved kindergarten program.

Workforce and community development

Many services note the lack of education and employment opportunities for adults within communities. Centres therefore play a key role in providing employment opportunities for local community members. As noted above, services employ a high proportion of locals, with Wuchopperen, Dumaji, Ipswich and Ngakulwen Nyerrwe employing up to 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Centres seek to harness opportunities to support community members into the workforce.

Building staff qualifications is always a central objective, but many struggle to find the funds. Mackay ACFC offers support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members to engage with the Remote Indigenous Professional Development Program. The *8 Ways* Early Years Learning Framework has a great impact with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators.

Ngakulwen Nyerrwe believe that local recruitment drives the success of the centre in Mornington Island. C&K have seen the quality of the service improve alongside increased capability of the workforce. All early years staff are enrolled in their Cert. III in Early Childhood, attend regular residential skills-based training and are supported by QCOSS on the ground and remotely. The regional coordinator and centre manager have also been supported with leadership and strategic development training.

Similarly in Dumaji, Regional Coordinator Terri Ridgeway highlights, “service delivery at the Dumaji Children and Family Centre is strengthened by our local workforce development strategy. All of the staff are Aboriginal and represent several family groups in Doomadgee. Save the Children is committed to building local capacity and local level leadership in a culturally strong learning space.”

Successful outcomes for families

Wuchopperen ACFC is delivering an integrated model of care, which exists within a larger multi-disciplinary team in a health organisation working holistically with clients.

Observed outcomes include:

- increased parental awareness and engagement
- increased parental capabilities
- increased connections to services
- improved socialisation skills for children
- access to the right services for parents and children

Kambu Health (Ipswich ACFC) provides a comprehensive program for children and families through integration of clinical, specialist, allied health and early years services. The centre reports that the following scenario occurs frequently: Mums utilise Kambu Health as their primary health care provider, prior to pregnancy – their midwife provides antenatal and postnatal care in collaboration with their GP, paediatrician and child health nurse and, where required, other allied health services including psychology, occupational therapy, audiology and speech pathology; children and families are supported by enrolling their children into their Kambu Amaroo Kindergarten, which also supports parents getting back into the workforce.

Mulungu ACFC highlights the following outcomes:

- reduced shame, barriers or stigmas attached to accessing support
- opportunity for supervised or unsupervised contact for parents with children in out-of-home care who engage in programs at the centre
- increased enrolments at early learning centres
- confident prep students with average and above average academic achievements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Mulungu stories

Mulungu has been working intensely with a high-needs Year 3 student (8 years old). He was originally referred in 2015 by Mareeba State School with a history of frequent school suspensions. He was only allowed to attend school half days and not permitted to mix with other children due to reported violent behaviours. The Family Development Officer provided intensive counselling focused on anger management and understanding boundaries. The child is happy, eager and enthusiastic to engage

in planned counselling sessions. The child has recently been attending full-time hours at school and reported to be reintegrating well.

Mulungu also continues to support a high-needs child originally referred by the Mulungu medical clinic in 2015. Early intervention detected the impact of multiple health issues, which resulted in global developmental delays. The ACFC Family Support Worker has assisted access to medical services and provided parents with strategies to implement health routines for the child. This has resulted in improved school attendance from 50 per cent to 95 per cent.

One child currently attending the Mulungu ACFC playgroup is in foster care due to domestic violence within the home. Following the engagement of the Family Support Worker, and in collaboration with DFCS, the biological mother has been able to engage with her child at the centre's Play and Learn each week and is now on a child safety plan to be reunited with her child. The Family Support Worker is providing continued support to the mother to enhance her parenting skills and access early learning to benefit her child. This process has been undertaken over the past six months.

A Palm Island story

Ellen is a young Aboriginal woman who is mother of three children under seven. She has had very little support in raising her children and was generally very isolated. Ellen had never taken her children to playgroup before. The staff of the Palm Island ACFC made an effort to engage with Ellen, and eventually she started coming to the centre with her children regularly.

At the centre, Ellen was able to get support for her children, particularly her middle child, Alex, who has severe behavioural issues. Despite the fact that Alex can be challenging at times, Ellen now feels like she has stronger parenting skills and can always find support among the staff and other parents at the centre.

Importantly, the centre not only seeks to support children's learning and development but also to provide the opportunity for "mums and dads have time to be with each other and to talk about stuff". Palm Island ACFC Service Manager Narelle Gleeson-Henaway felt that engaging with other parents at the centre gave Ellen "a whole new lease on life...and for her that's a really big deal".

A Waterford West Story

James's family were referred to the Child Psychology service at Waterford West ACFC to focus on James's emotional regulation, social skills, separation anxiety and resilience building. His mum was also suffering trauma-based mental health concerns, no access to transport, lack of support from family, and financial hardship. Through the support of the service, James's mum now actively attends additional programs and explores support pathways offered by the Family Wellbeing team. Meanwhile, James and his siblings are now all enrolled and regularly attend school and kindergarten, as well as using the before school reading program and

homework program offered by the ACFC. Since they engaged with the service, ACFC staff have noticed a significant change as the family has engaged more positively with each other and made connections with other members of the community they met while at the service. It is very clear to the ACFC team that, without the connections to the service James's mother and family would have continue to become socially isolated and in extreme risk.