INSIGHTS FROM WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA'S FIRST NATIONS EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS

Conditions for effectively establishing early years services and programs and transitioning them to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations

Contents

Acknowledgement

SNAICC shows respect by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. SNAICC head office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and SNAICC operates nationally. SNAICC acknowledges Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across this continent, and pays respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their continued connection to Country, care for community and practice of culture for generations uncounted.

Purpose

Through work undertaken by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to establish the THRYVE initiative, it has become clear that much of the work and learnings of the early years community-controlled sector has not been documented or analysed. World Vision Australia (WVA) has undertaken significant work in this area.

The lessons learned from this work have the potential to benefit many others working in the early years sector enabling the building of an evidence base of what works and what doesn't work for establishing new early years programs in regional/remote communities and transitioning early years services and supports to an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation (ACCO).

In 2022, under the guidance of SVA, SNAICC and WVA, SVA Consulting developed two case studies of work undertaken in the early years space by WVA in northern Australia (in the West Kimberley and Central Desert) to understand two key aspects of WVA's journey:

1. the establishment of early years services in remote/regional communities, and
2. the process of building partnerships with communities and transitioning ownership and governance of services over to ACCOs.

World Vision's approach to early years First Nations projects

World Vision's approach is characterised by extensive engagement and relationship building with communities and organisations; a focus on parent empowerment and ownership; capacity building; social transformation; and a gradual and sustainable transfer of project management to community members through strong partnerships.

The values that guide WVA's work, as outlined in its Australia First Nations Program prospectus revolve around the following key elements:
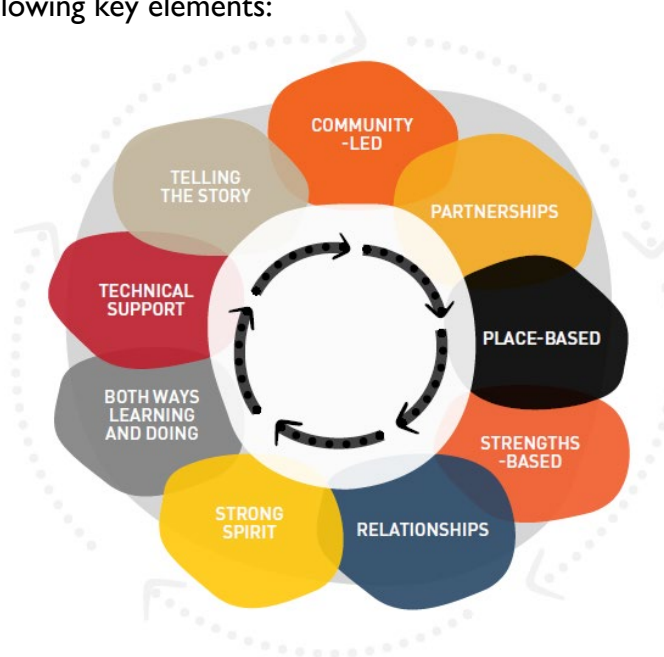
WVA's approach to its Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Program is based on a community development approach and contains five key elements:
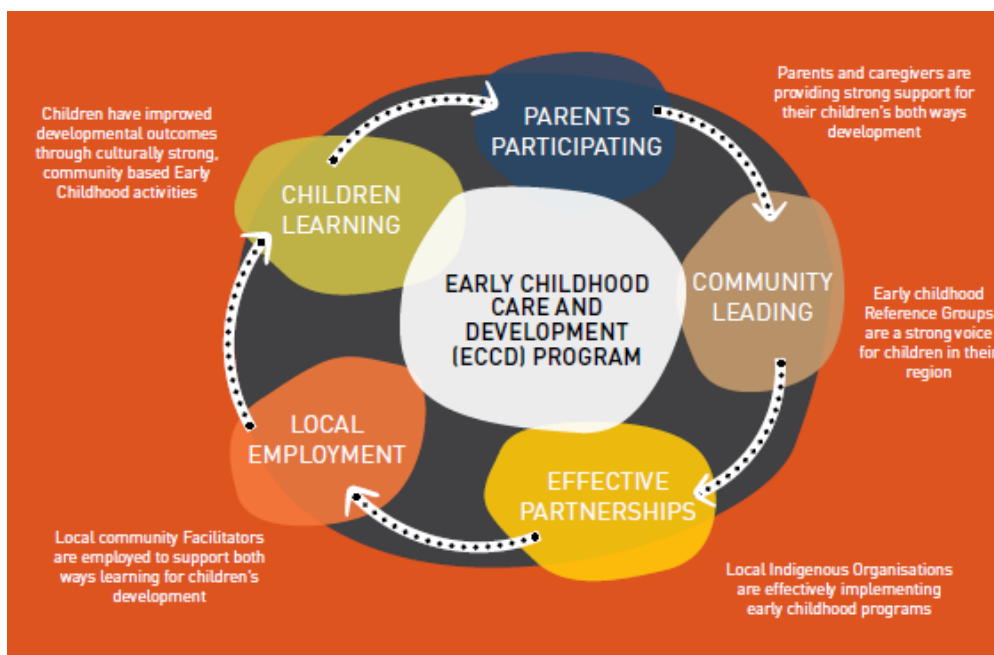
Key findings

	Key success factors in WVA's journeys
1	Developing a local understanding of early childhood development and the importance of early childhood programs amongst the communities where WVA is working
2	Developing strong community governance: WVA has fostered the development of early childhood reference groups (ECRGs) it has worked in. These ECRGs are made up of predominantly local community members, who meet regularly to discuss anything related to early childhood in their respective communities. Over many years (since 2008 in the Central Desert and since 2014 in the West Kimberley), WVA has provided governance training and skills training to these groups, building up the community's knowledge on early childhood and governance capabilities. Having strong, established ECRGs in place has allowed WVA a mechanism through which to obtain community input into its programs, enabling community ownership of program design.
3	Developing strong relationships with the community: this is imperative - trust, communication, time and a clear commitment to a long-term partnership is necessary to establish early childhood programs and support positive relationships with ACCOs. What this looks like in practice might look different in each community.
4	Successfully working with ACCOs and other First Nations organisations/bodies requires developing a shared understanding of each party's roles, perspectives, experience and expectations
5	Investing in the development of a local community workforce sets programs up for long-term success
	Key challenges
1	WVA took a community development approach to its work across both case studies, which did not always sit consistently with other organisations'/funders' experience of service delivery approaches, where "community development" had not necessarily been part of "service delivery" contracts
2	Funding – both the lack of, and the lack of certainty for ongoing funding – provides an ongoing challenge for getting programs up and running, securing infrastructure for the programs and maintaining the programs
3	Lack of a deep and shared understanding of the respective roles, perspectives, experience, and expectations of WVA and ACCOs and other First Nations organisations/bodies can lead to miscommunications and a breakdown of trust. This is a significant barrier to working collaboratively and successfully
4	Capacity-building may be needed to ensure ACCOs are equipped to do this work in the long term. However, capacity-building is complex and time-consuming work which is not currently funded by government

Case Study 1 – West Kimberley

Overview

The West Kimberley case study considers:

- the establishment of facilitated playgroups by WVA in six communities in the West Kimberley
- the transition of those 6 facilitated playgroups to Ngunga Women's Group Aboriginal Corporation (Ngunga)
- the establishment of three facilitated playgroups by WVA in a further three communities in the West Kimberley, funded by the Ian Potter Foundation and the proposed transition of those playgroups to the communities/an ACCO in late 2024.
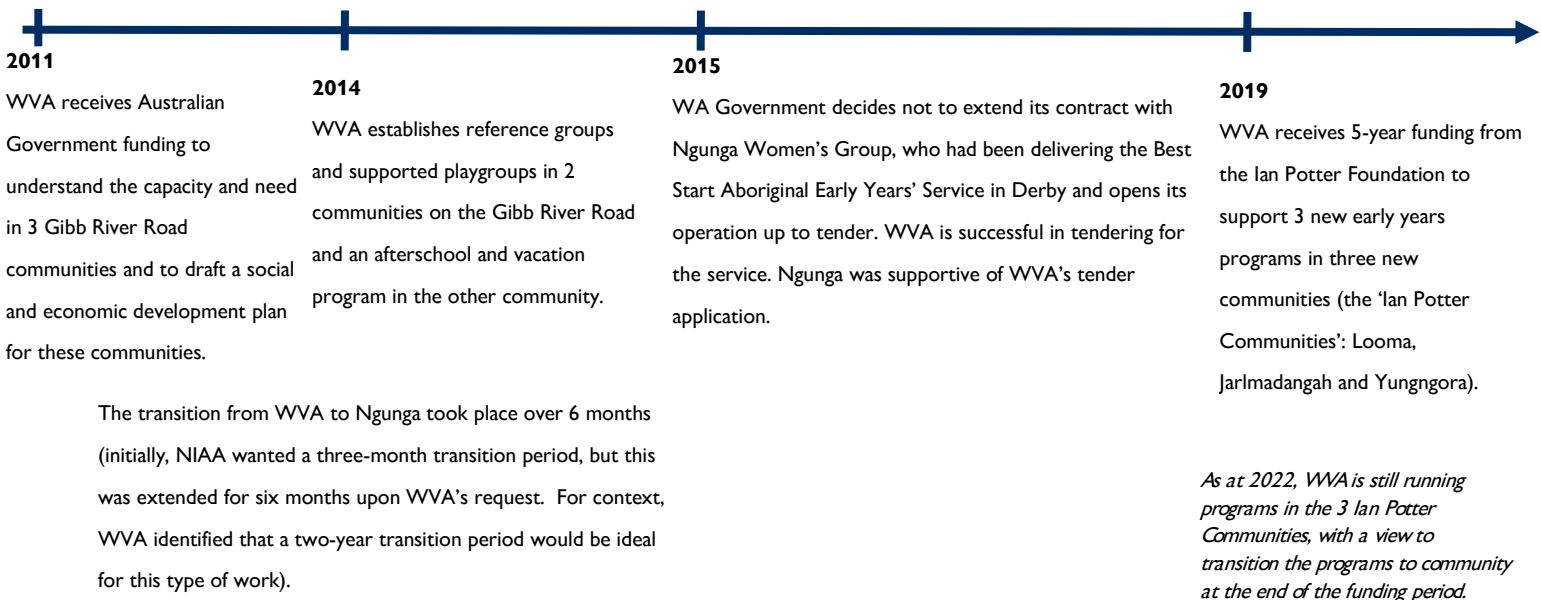
Timeline

2011–2013

WVA drafts the plan, which includes community-run early childhood programs. WVA spends a year driving regularly to each community, building relationships.

2015–2016

WVA extends its program to three new communities – Derby, Pandanus Park and Mowanjum, bringing WVA's footprint to a total of 6 communities.

2019

The Australian Government informs WVA of a planned transition of services to Ngunga (see details below).

2011

WVA receives Australian Government funding to understand the capacity and need in 3 Gibb River Road communities and to draft a social and economic development plan for these communities.

2014

WVA establishes reference groups and supported playgroups in 2 communities on the Gibb River Road and an afterschool and vacation program in the other community.

2015

WA Government decides not to extend its contract with Ngunga Women's Group, who had been delivering the Best Start Aboriginal Early Years' Service in Derby and opens its operation up to tender. WVA is successful in tendering for the service. Ngunga was supportive of WVA's tender application.

2019

WVA receives 5-year funding from the Ian Potter Foundation to support 3 new early years programs in three new communities (the 'Ian Potter Communities': Looma, Jarlmadangah and Yungngora).

The transition from WVA to Ngunga took place over 6 months (initially, NIAA wanted a three-month transition period, but this was extended for six months upon WVA's request. For context, WVA identified that a two-year transition period would be ideal for this type of work).

As at 2022, WVA is still running programs in the 3 Ian Potter Communities, with a view to transition the programs to community at the end of the funding period.

2019

the Australian Government informs WVA that funding for the early childhood programs in the six original communities would only be forthcoming if the programs were transitioned to an ACCO. WVA and Ngunga begin working together on a transition process.

End 2020

WVA completes the transition of the 6 original communities to Ngunga Women's Group.

May 2021

It was planned that WVA would have an ongoing role in supporting Ngunga around a regional strategy (to include the 9 communities), but this paused in June 2021 due to change in WVA leadership. Ngunga continued to progress the work. As of 2023, the partnership is in progress again.

Key lessons learnt

	Establishing early year programs in the West Kimberley communities
	Key success factors
1	Taking the time to develop relationships with the community, build trust and to educate both the community and parents about what early years education is, the different types, the role of parents in the programs and the benefits. For example, in the West Kimberley WVA program staff spent 12 months developing a relationship with the relevant communities before programs could be established.
2	Developing a community reference group to provide oversight, direction, and local governance to WVA for the programs.
3	Employing local First Nations staff at WVA to enable the building of relationships and trust with community.
4	Developing a local workforce through training and development of local people to create a sustainable workforce for the programs.
5	Taking a regional approach to running programs which is tailored to the different needs of each individual community. This meant approaching program development from a regional perspective, rather than considering the West Kimberley communities as individual communities. Because many First Nations families travel and live between communities, creating consistent programs across communities in a region allows families to continue to be engaged in the services even when travelling or moving.
6	Honouring the cultural aspect of early years programs was extremely important, and on country trips an important part of delivering the programs, giving more senior members of the community a chance to engage and share their knowledge.

	Key challenges
1	Many communities do not have suitable facilities to run early years programs, and where they don't have suitable facilities, it is difficult to get funding for them. WVA's experience is that in several remote communities infrastructure built in the 1990s has been left without funding for repairs or service delivery for many years, making the infrastructure no longer useable.
2	Instability due to changes in community leadership and community conflict can make the task of ensuring communities are actively involved in developing and engaging with services challenging, and one of the biggest barriers to getting (and keeping) programs up and running.
3	Engaging parents can be difficult, especially without adequate infrastructure and facilities. WVA found that parents were more likely to participate out on country rather than in community if they do not have a building to call their own.

Transitioning early years programs to ACCOs
Key success factors

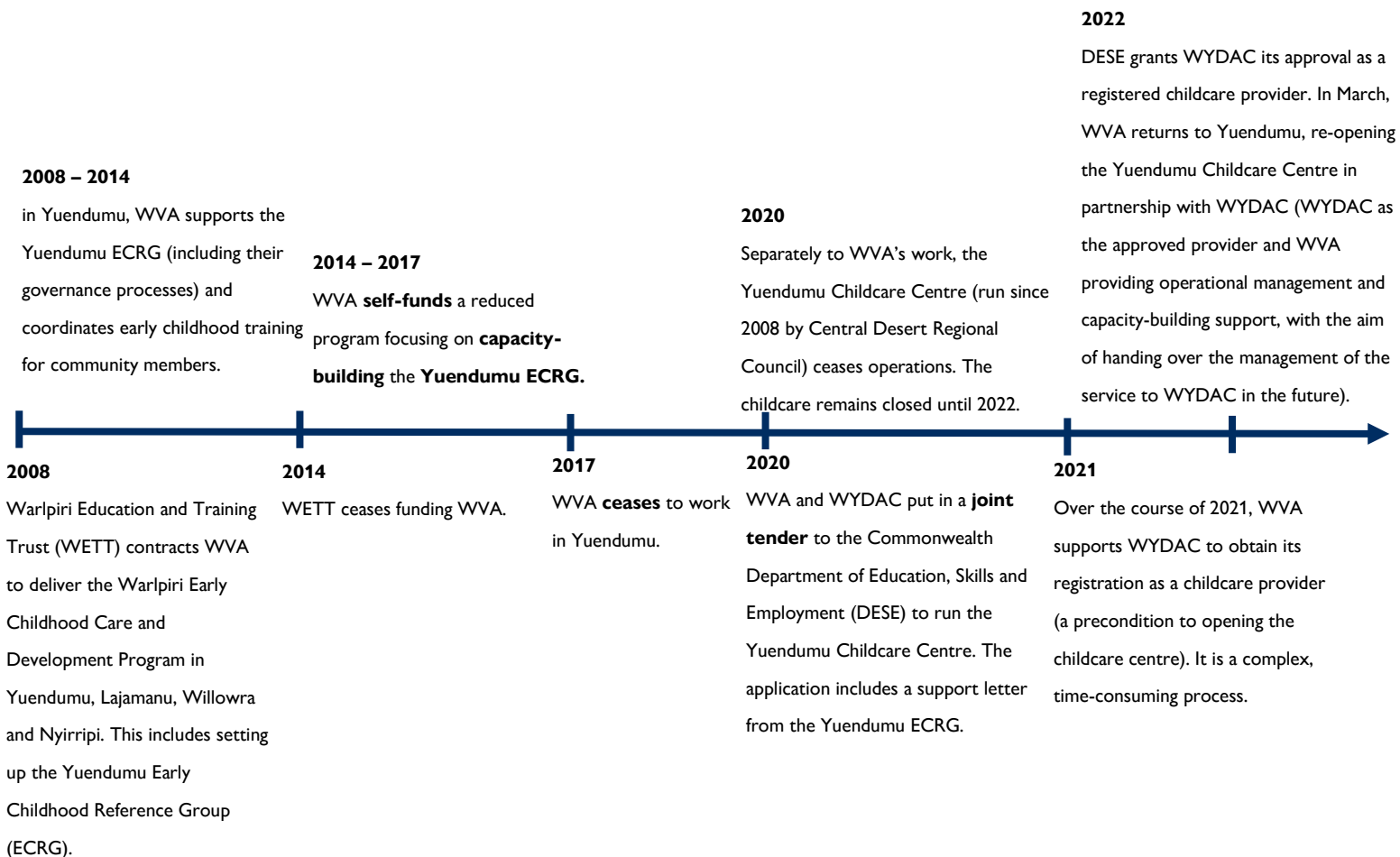|	
1	Clear communication and a shared understanding between the ACCO and non-ACCO, within the organisations themselves, and the communities. Between the ACCO and non-ACCO this looks like taking the time to deeply understand each other's perspectives and what each organisation needs out of the transition. Within organisations this means alignment and transparency between the senior management and program delivery staff to ensure consistency of delivery and that the program staff feel supported and validated. With communities, this means communities being empowered to take an active role in the transition process and being afforded the time to understand the process and transition journey.
2	Time for the community to get on board, and time for the organisations to work together to develop a shared understanding of the transition process.
3	A shared understanding between the non-ACCO and ACCO about what the roles of each organisation during and after the transition will be.
4	Developing and presenting a united front between the ACCO and non-ACCO to the community.
5	Empowering the community to own the transition – including who they want the programs transitioned to and the process.

Key challenges	
1	Funders e.g., government/philanthropists often drive the transition process, instead of it being driven by capacity and readiness of communities and in line with their timelines and wishes. Further, funders are willing to fund ACCOs, but less willing to fund communities directly because communities often don't have the structures in place or experience to satisfy the funder. This can lead to programs often being transitioned to ACCOs before a community is ready (and often not at the initiation of the community), in ways or timeframes that do not create the ideal environment for a successful transition (because the transition is not community driven, and the processes are too quick to enable the community to drive the transition or to enable a thorough handover), or to programs being transitioned to a particular ACCO which the community isn't comfortable with.
2	Where funders control the process, they may also inhibit clear communication within and between organisations leading to confusion and distress amongst local staff and the community.
3	Differences in opinions and understanding between the ACCO and non-ACCOs about their respective roles during and after the transition, and the lack of time to develop this understanding, led to them not being on the same page.
4	Non-ACCOs (particularly large NGOs) often have economies of scale, and therefore access to additional resources such as dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation or Technical Program teams, which ACCOs do not have and are unlikely to obtain even if they have the same program funding as the non-ACCO post-transition. This means that when programs are transitioned to ACCOs, while they might have the same program funding that the non-ACCO did, they don't have access to those additional resources/ economies of scale to support the program.

Case Study 2 – Central Desert

Overview

The Central Desert case study considers:

- WVA's work in partnership with the ACCO Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) to deliver childcare services in Yuendumu
- WVA's work in setting up and running a facilitated playgroup in Willowra in partnership with Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT).

Timeline: opening a childcare service in Yuendumu, in partnership with WYDAC

2022

DESE grants WYDAC its approval as a registered childcare provider. In March, WVA returns to Yuendumu, re-opening the Yuendumu Childcare Centre in partnership with WYDAC (WYDAC as the approved provider and WVA providing operational management and capacity-building support, with the aim of handing over the management of the service to WYDAC in the future).

2008 – 2014

in Yuendumu, WVA supports the Yuendumu ECRG (including their governance processes) and coordinates early childhood training for community members.

2014 – 2017

WVA **self-funds** a reduced program focusing on **capacity-building** the **Yuendumu ECRG.**

2020

Separately to WVA's work, the Yuendumu Childcare Centre (run since 2008 by Central Desert Regional Council) ceases operations. The childcare remains closed until 2022.

2008

Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) contracts WVA to deliver the Warlpiri Early Childhood Care and Development Program in Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirripi. This includes setting up the Yuendumu Early Childhood Reference Group (ECRG).

2014

WETT ceases funding WVA.

2017

WVA **ceases** to work in Yuendumu.

2020

WVA and WYDAC put in a **joint tender** to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to run the Yuendumu Childcare Centre. The application includes a support letter from the Yuendumu ECRG.

2021

Over the course of 2021, WVA supports WYDAC to obtain its registration as a childcare provider (a precondition to opening the childcare centre). It is a complex, time-consuming process.

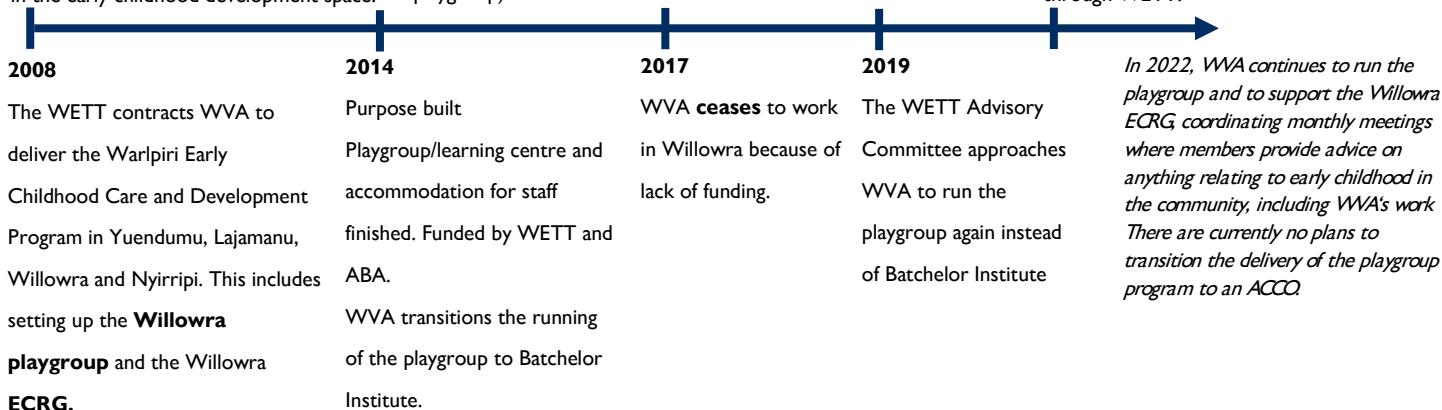## Timeline: establishing the Willowra Playgroup

2008 – 2014

WVA runs the Willowra playgroup and supports the Willowra ECRG, with the aim of support community decision-making, and more broadly supporting community members to grow their skills in the early childhood development space.

2014 – 2017

WVA self-funds a reduced program focusing on **capacity-building** the **Willowra ECRG** (while Batchelor Institute takes on the running of the playgroup).

2020

WVA takes over management of the Willowra playgroup from Batchelor Institute, funded through WETT.

2008

The WETT contracts WVA to deliver the Warlpiri Early Childhood Care and Development Program in Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirripi. This includes setting up the **Willowra playgroup** and the Willowra **ECRG.**

2014

Purpose built Playgroup/learning centre and accommodation for staff finished. Funded by WETT and ABA.

WVA transitions the running of the playgroup to Batchelor Institute.

2017

WVA **ceases** to work in Willowra because of lack of funding.

2019

The WETT Advisory Committee approaches WVA to run the playgroup again instead of Batchelor Institute

In 2022, WVA continues to run the playgroup and to support the Willowra ECRG, coordinating monthly meetings where members provide advice on anything relating to early childhood in the community, including WVA's work There are currently no plans to transition the delivery of the playgroup program to an ACCO.

Key lessons learnt

	Establishing early year programs in Willowra and Yuendumu
	Key success factors
1	Developing and supporting ECRGs in each community so community members can provide oversight, direction, and local governance to WVA for the programs.
2	Building strong relationships with community members based on trust, communication, and a long-term presence in each community (WVA first started working in the communities in 2008).
3	Developing a local workforce through training of local people to create a sustainable workforce for the programs, including through: • Formal accredited training (Cert III Children's Services), certified training like *3a* • Informal workshops around topics relevant to early childhood such as trauma, child protection, breast feeding.
4	Committing significant time and resources to a) understanding how to become a registered childcare provider and b) supporting the ACCO, WYDAC through the process, noting registration was a pre-condition to WVA and WYDAC delivering childcare services 'in partnership'.
5	A clear partnership agreement with the CLC/WETT Advisory Committee outlining roles, responsibilities and WVA's approach to working in communities.

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Key challenges	
1	On beginning to work in the communities, immediately trying to build collaboration across services, without having a clear mandate to do this. The service sector is deeply siloed, and other organisations were not receptive to a systems-change approach from a new service in the community.
2	A difficult relationship with the CLC in the first five years of the WETT funding relationship due to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and lack of clarity around program outcomes.
3	Lack of government funding and advice to support local ACCO, WYDAC, to become a registered early childhood service provider as part of the WYDAC/WVA partnership in Yuendumu.
4	Lack of government funding to support the playgroup model in Willowra which WETT have committed to.

Conclusion

Developing early years programs for First Nations communities in remote and regional areas, and then transitioning them to ACCOs is not an easy undertaking. Whilst WVA's experiences in the West Kimberley and Central Desert were each unique, there are some key reflections we can draw across case studies as outlined above.

These case studies are not intended to be a summary of 'best practice' in this space, rather a chance to learn from WVA's experience - what has worked, and not worked in their journey to develop early years programs with Aboriginal communities and to transition them back to the community, and to share these deep insights with others looking to do the same.

The key elements of success highlighted in these case studies include;

- Developing and investing in strong community governance to design and guide culturally strong, place-based ECCD work
- Commitment to long-term partnerships and support, with a shared understanding of the vision for ECCD work
- Investing in workforce and organisational capacity development as well as providing technical support
- Investment in building relationships – trust, time, strong communication, both ways
- Application of partnering principles with ACCO's and other First Nations organisations, which allows for a shared understanding of; roles and responsibilities, strengths and priorities.

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