

Community *Consultation* Report

Australian Early Development Census (NT)

Moulden and Gray, Palmerston.

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1. Introduction

The Australian Early Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is an Australian Government initiative (aedc.gov.au) that measures the development of children in their first year of school. It provides important information about children's development, at the local, territory, state and national levels, and helps identify areas of strength, as well as where children may need support.

During March and April 2023, the Palmerston Child and Family Centre (Palmerston CFC), in partnership with the Northern Territory Department of Education, and the Northern Territory Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet, facilitated a series of discussions with Palmerston community members, to share the AEDC information and hear community views.

The Palmerston Child and Family Centre

The Northern Territory's Child and Family Centres (CFCs) are a focal point for the integration of services supporting children and their families within a community. The Palmerston CFC is one of six purpose-built child and family centres (CFCs) currently operating in the Northern Territory (NT). The centre plays an important role in the local community, providing opportunities for families to develop strong relationships and support their children's development and wellbeing with:

- Playgroups and parenting programs
- Maternal and child health services
- Early childhood education and care services
- Family support and counselling services
- Health and wellbeing programs for parents and children

The CFC integrated service paradigm represents authentic community co-design, joined up service provision, sustainable local employment pathways and most of all better education, health and social outcomes for young children.

The Project

Palmerston CFC, in partnership with consultant, Gretchen Ennis (Useful Projects), facilitated seven community workshops and five individual and small group discussions with local families, schools, services and leaders about the AEDC data for Palmerston. Fifty people participated in conversations reflecting on the data and their own experiences and knowledge about how families grow up our children to be strong learners in Palmerston.

This report provides an overview of the consultation process and outcomes. It sets out the community vision for strengthening early learning in Palmerston, and shares the stories of family and community strengths as well as the barriers and challenges being faced. A summary of the wide range of community ideas is presented, along with a set of recommendations for the Palmerston CFC.

1.1 Language and terminology

This report is focused on describing the views, ideas and experiences of participants. Their own words have been used as much as possible. In many cases we have included direct quotes (these are in italics with quotation marks).

The terminology used throughout is also the participants own. In some cases there are different terms being used to describe the same thing. For example the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', 'Indigenous' and 'First Nations People' were all used by different people in our consultations. We have not changed this terminology into one consistent term, as we wanted to reflect the voice of participants. Below is a list of some of the terms, concepts and abbreviations used by participants, with a brief explanation.

- **AEDC:** Australian Early Development Census
- **AI EW:** Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker
- **ASQ Tracker / Ages and stages tracker:** The Ages and Stages Tracker, also known as the ASQ or ASQ-3 (Ages and Stages Questionnaire), is a screening tool used to assess the development of children from birth to 5 years. It is designed to help parents, caregivers, and professionals monitor a child's growth and development across various domains.
- **FaFT:** Families as First Teachers. NT Department of Education early learning and parent support program. It develops place-based programs to engage families and communities, and build parents' capacity to give their children the best start in life.
- **Integrated governance:** A holistic approach to managing service systems that aims to align and coordinate various functions, departments, and stakeholders towards a common vision and goals. It emphasizes the integration of strategies, policies, and processes across different levels and areas to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, and synergy.
- **No wrong door policy:** A person-centred approach that aims to ensure that people are directed to the the resources and support they need, regardless of their initial contact point.
- **PCFC/Palmerston CFC:** Palmerston Child and Family Centre.
- **Services:** Participants used the word 'services' and 'service providers' to describe government and non-government organisations providing health, community, education and social supports to the community.
- **Trauma informed practice:** Trauma-informed practice is an approach that recognizes and responds to the impact of trauma on peoples' lives and seeks to create a safe and supportive environment for healing and recovery.
- **Universal plus one:** The concept, in early childhood, refers to an inclusive approach to education and support services for young children. It suggests that providing universally accessible programs and services for all children should be accompanied by an additional level of support, referred to as the '+1,' to address the specific needs of individual children who require additional assistance or accommodations.

2. Executive Summary

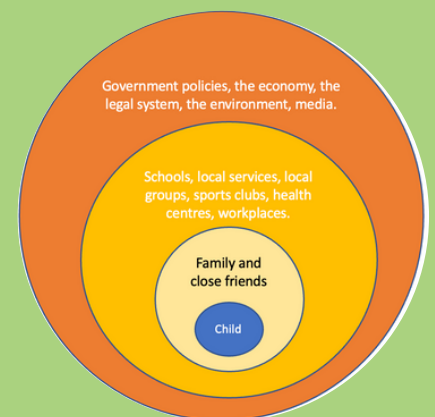
In early 2023, Palmerston CFC facilitated discussions with 50 people who live and/or work in the Palmerston community (with a focus on Gray and Moulden). Participants included families, community leaders, schools, community, health and social service providers. The discussions were based on the questions: What makes our children strong learners, strong communicators and culturally strong? In summary, this is what we learned.

Community Vision

The vision for children aged 0-5 in Palmerston involved broad ecosystem of ideas that included our society, community, schools and services, with families and children at the centre.

The vision for our children and families in Palmerston

- Children will have safe homes to grow and learn.
- Children will be strong in their identity and first language.
- Children will be active.
- Children will have access to good food.
- Parents and carers will know about trauma and have support to work with its impacts.



Ecosystem with the child at the centre

The vision for our local community, schools and services

- The community will be safe for our children.
- There will be a wide range of accessible, regular indoor and outdoor activities for children and families.
- The community will have knowledge about trauma and its impacts.
- There will be good relationships between families and government services (including police)
- Families will have strong partnerships with the service providers they need (and no wait lists).
- Service providers will collaborate around a collective focus on supporting children to be strong learners.
- There will be real inclusion: schools and services will be able to adapt to children's needs.
- Schools will be culturally safe, truly inclusive, and welcoming of all.
- Schools will be well resourced and supported to work with needs of their students.
- Schools and services will work together to provide safe places for school children and their families, outside of school hours (including before school).
- Families will have access to high quality, well resourced, early childhood hubs.
- There will be support in the home from birth to aged four.

The vision for our society

- Families' basic needs will be met.
- Equity of opportunity for all families in Palmerston.
- High quality, flexible health care systems.
- Integrated governance in early childhood
- Increased investment in early childhood

Community strengths

- There are great schools and teachers.
- There are strong partnerships: families, early learning services and schools.
- There are already a good range of programs, groups and supports for families with young children in Palmerston (e.g. The Palmerston CFC, Families as First Teachers (FaFT)).
- There is growing knowledge about trauma and its impacts in the community.

Community Challenges

For our families

- Safety in streets, parks and outside the school.
- Feelings of anxiety and anger.
- A lack of family support.
- Working with daily challenges means less time to focus on children's learning.
- Impacts of intergenerational trauma.
- Personal and emotional issues.
- Limited transport.
- Moving around a lot.
- Language barriers.
- Health issues (mental and physical health).
- Finding information about early learning opportunities.
- Lack of employment support and opportunities.
- Supporting children with their emotions.

For our services

- Staff shortages and work pressures.
- Low self-esteem in the early childhood sector
- Limited flexibility and responsiveness in service provision.
- Frustration with limited access to services in the community.
- Difficulties accessing cultural programs and leaders.
- Families experiencing 'trust fatigue' with services.

For our schools

- Addressing children's basic needs (food, clothing, safety).
- Increasing needs of children means teachers are under more pressure.
- Limited capacity to provide the extras that children need.
- Building trust and relationships with families takes time.
- Essential services in schools have 'dropped off'.
- Ensuring inclusion in schools.
- The transition from early childhood programs to schools.

For our structures and systems

- Crime and violence.
- Housing issues, poverty and exclusion.
- Cost of living pressure.
- Lack of service integration and coordination.
- Systems gaps.
- Judgement, racism, and frustration.



Community Ideas *to help children grow as strong learners in Palmerston*

Ideas for our governments.

- Prioritise the basic needs and human rights of all people in Palmerston.
- Focus on integrated governance in early childhood.
- More resourcing for CFC's.
- Develop and implement a 'universal plus one' early intervention/prevention approach and reduce impact on NDIS.
- Increase support for children's sports activities.

Ideas for our community services (government and non-government)

- Engage in 'bigger-picture' collective action.
- Continue to foster a 'no wrong door' policy in all services and spaces.
- Develop and deliver a range of practical programs for parents (e.g. budgeting, legal systems).
- Employment programs for parents – with very small steps.
- Develop and deliver leadership programs.
- Trauma-informed practice training for Palmerston families, community members, services and in schools.
- Services need to go to families rather than families having to find services.
- Develop a directory of child and parent resources and activities in Palmerston.
- Help build social connections between families.
- Build relationships with leaders.

Ideas for early learning spaces.

- Investigate an expansion of the home visiting child and maternal health nurse role and potential links to early education opportunities.
- More 'steppingstone', 'halfway' and open space events to bring families into PCFC activities and programs.
- Promotion of existing early learning activities, events and programs.
- Ensure all early childhood activities are welcoming and accessible for all.
- Expand the existing programs that work well.
- Encourage and organise volunteer groups and committee membership.
- Provide children's resources in all languages.
- Develop stronger relationships with local government.

Ideas for our schools

- Ensure schools have funding and access to qualified staff, so they can offer the extra's children need.
- Work with relevant programs and services to develop a coordinated plan for more consistent and regular support of schools.
- Develop a transition to inclusive schooling plan.
- Ongoing trauma informed practice training for all school staff.
- Nutrition programs (and other practical supports).
- Cultural workshops in school communities.
- Build more relationships between schools and families who are not connected.

Summary of recommendations

for the Palmerston Child and Family Centre

- Share the report learnings with the community.
- Bring together an early years reference group.
- Investigate options for funding and support of a 'collective action' type project focused on improving AEDC results in Gray and Moulden.
- Encourage family participation in Palmerston CFC volunteer groups and committees.
- Encourage the participation of fathers, uncles, grandfathers and other male community leaders, in all activities.
- Ensure workers are trained in group dynamics and are observing and facilitating connections between people in all programs.
- Develop and distribute a quarterly calendar of events and programs (online and printed).
- Investigate options for the expansion of existing programs that work well.
- Develop and facilitate more open space events to introduce families to the PCFC, and provide opportunities for families to build relationships with each other.
- Consider options for outside 'usual' hours activities.
- Work with local service providers to develop further programs for parents of 0-5 year olds, on a range of topics (parenting, practical, social).
- Investigate options for working with home-visiting child and maternal health nurses to develop further links between new parents and early education opportunities.



NAIDOC celebrations at PCFC 2021
(source: PCFC Facebook)

3.The NT AEDC

The Australian Early Development Census

The AEDC is a national measure of child development in Australia. It is conducted every three years by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment, with the Northern Territory AEDC (NT AEDC) being administered by the NT Department of Education. The results of the NT AEDC provide valuable information to our communities, policymakers, educators, and parents. This can be used to identify areas where children may be struggling, to develop targeted interventions to support families and to help to inform decision-making and resource allocation (<https://www.aedc.gov.au>).

The AEDC measures the development of children in their first year of full-time school (around the age of five) across five domains:

1. physical health and well being,
2. social competence,
3. emotional maturity,
4. language and cognitive skills, and
5. communication skills and general knowledge.

There are three main indicators used to explore the AEDC results. These are:

- On track in all 5 domains ('OT5' or 'on track')
- Vulnerable in 1 or more domains ('Vuln 1' or 'at risk')
- Vulnerable in 2 or more domains ('Vuln 2' or 'vulnerable')

The NT AEDC results provide insights into the development of children in the NT, highlighting the strengths and challenges faced by children in the region. According to the 2022 National AEDC report, just over 60% of NT children were developmentally on track across all five domains. However, 39% were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains. The most challenging areas are the domains of social competence and (school-based) language and cognitive skills (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, p.63).

The NT AEDC results highlight the importance of early childhood development and early intervention strategies to ensure all children have the best possible start in life. They also reinforce the need for continued investment in early childhood education and development programs in the NT to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

4. Engaging with Community

During early 2023, the project reference group developed a plan to engage with the Palmerston communities of Moulden and Gray. In March and April 2023, we engaged with 50 people through consultation workshops with the following groups:

- Families as First Teachers (FaFT) staff at the Palmerston Child and Family Centre (2 participants)
- Parents & carers at Families as First Teachers (FaFT) at the Palmerston Child and Family Centre (6 participants)
- Parents and staff at the Gray Family Centre (9 participants)
- Palmerston Indigenous Network (PIN) service providers group (12 participants)
- Aboriginal & Islander Education Workers (AIEW's) from Palmerston schools (4 participants)
- Families from Moulden School Community (4 participants)
- Families from the Palmerston Young Mum's, Strong Mum's Group (7 participants).

We also had discussions with the following local stakeholders and experts.

- Donna Westaway (Principal) and Rachel Turton (Assistant Principal,) Gray Primary School
- Ali Brady (Principal), Moulden Park Primary School
- Janet Williams-Smith, Inclusion and Early Intervention General Manager, Early Childhood Australia
- Kay Villaflor, Coordinator, Larrakia Nation Palmerston Family and Culture Centre
- Mayor Athina Pascoe-Bell, Palmerston City Council.

4.1 How we ran the community consultations.

Our community consultations were guided by the AEDC Discussion Toolkit. This toolkit was developed by the Department of Education in partnership with Telethon Kids Institute and AEDC to support co-facilitated group conversations through respectful, strengths-based conversations and shared decision making. It assists facilitators to use AEDC results to engage with communities around better supporting local children and their families. It is based on Engoori, which comes from Mithaka country in southwest Queensland. Engoori is a process through which differences can be resolved without conflict using a strengths-based approach to identify what is going well and how to build on those successes.

The Toolkit takes each group through a process of identifying a shared vision for children in the community, creating space for discussion of people's stories (strengths and challenges) about what is currently taking place in their community. Important relationships and partnerships are discussed before moving onto ideas about what the community wants and actions towards things they have the power to change. AEDC data about Palmerston was presented at different points in each consultation, depending on when this information fit into conversations that were happening. The specific information presented is included at Appendix A.

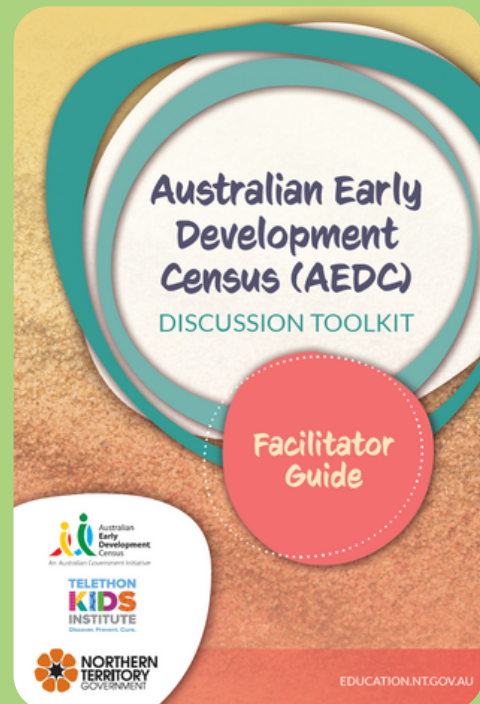


Engaging with Community (continued)

The Toolkit guidelines for preparing for the session were followed, ensuring we had both a facilitator and local co-facilitator for each consultation.

Consultations were held at the Palmerston Child and Family Centre, Gray Family Centre, and Moulden Park Primary School.

In addition to the community consultation we held four discussion sessions with other local expert stakeholders. These followed a less structured format but were based on the same topics areas as the community consultations: vision, stories, partnerships and relationships, and ideas/ actions. All participants were provided with the consultation or discussion notes so they could add further comments or clarifications.

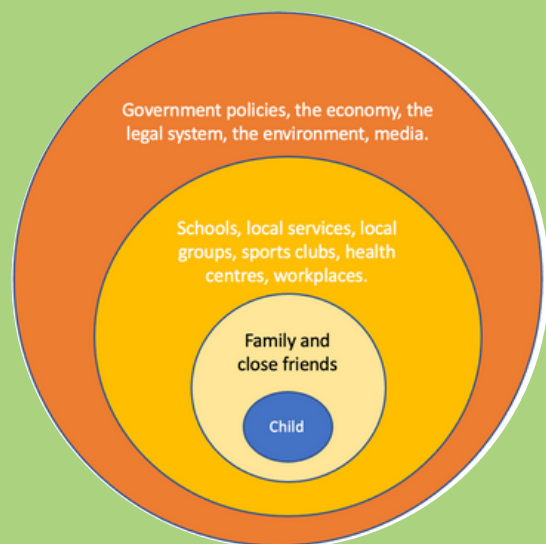


4.2 Organising the information.

The main discussion points from all the different consultation sessions were organised using the Toolkit framework headings: vision, stories, partnerships and relationships, and ideas/ actions.

Within each of these Toolkit areas, a set of ideas were put together to summarize the information discussed by the participants. Because conversations with different groups often covered a lot of quite different ground, there is a range of different kinds of information to digest.

To help make sense of the information, the ideas have been arranged using systems thinking, with children and families at the centre of a social system, which also encompasses layers of schools and services, community and the broader structures and systems in our society.



Ecosystem with the child at the centre

5. The vision for our children in Palmerston

Participants were invited to discuss the future they want for children and families in the Palmerston community. In some discussions we used the 'miracle question' as a way of thinking this through. For example, if we woke up tomorrow, and everything was in place for children to grow up as strong learners, what would be happening?

Our vision for children and families

Children will have safe homes to grow and learn.

- Families will know the importance of the early years and linking their children to early learning activities.
- Homes will be free from violence, alcohol, and drug abuse.
- There will be resources for families to learn skills such as budgeting, English literacy and numeracy, decision making, and anything that helps with day-to-day life.

Parents and carers will know about trauma and have support to work with its impacts.

- All parents and carers will have knowledge about what trauma is, different kinds of trauma, and the impact it can have on themselves and their families.
- All families will have access to knowledge and support so they can work with trauma. This includes supports such as play therapy, and family counseling, to help them and their children grow strong.

Children will be strong in their identity, first language and sense of belonging.

- Children will know '*who we are and where we are from*'.
- The philosophy of '*our way, first way*' is embraced across sectors and services.
- Children will feel strong in their identity and can '*move confidently and openly*' in the world.
- Children will speak in their first language, and that will be embraced and encouraged in their homes and learning environments.

Our children will be active.

- There will be many sport options for very young children.
- There will be indoor, air-conditioned options to suite our climate.
- There will be more support from government to assist with costs.

Children will have access to good food.

- Families will have easy access to good food and nutrition information.
- Schools will be able to provide nutritious food for children at no, or very low, cost.



Our vision for schools, services & community

Our community will be safe for our children.

- We will feel safe to let our children ride their bikes and play in their front yards and local parks.
- Parks and streets are clean of dangerous rubbish (glass, bottles), and people are respectful of others.

There will be a wide range of accessible outdoor and indoor activities for children and families.

- There will be clean and safe outdoor spaces with shade and with good amenities.
- There will be low-cost indoor activity options that will cater to families with children at different ages.
- There will be spaces that work for adults and children, to be together at the same time, so that adults can also engage with each other.
- There will be activities at different times so families work schedules are not barriers to participation.
- The Fun Bus will be back in Palmerston.
- Some activities will be facilitated to encourage people to meet and mingle – build their networks.

The community will have knowledge about trauma and it's impacts.

- People will understand the different types of trauma and their impacts.
- There is trauma-informed practice training and ongoing learning and development opportunities for all schools, services, community members and families.

There will be good relationships between families and government (including police)

- There will be regular opportunities for families and children to interact with government representatives and government services in positive ways.
- Police will attend community events and engage with local people in the places where they meet.

Families will have strong connections to the service providers they need.

- Families can easily access services they need (e.g. mental health services, CFC's, allied health services such as occupational and speech therapy, general practitioners and other doctors, culturally safe medical services).
- There will be many opportunities for families to make positive links to services before a crisis happens.
- There will be no waiting lists for services.
- Families with children who have special needs will be able to have assessments, supports and services without long delays.

Service providers will collaborate around a collective focus on helping children become strong learners.

- Schools will have great links with service providers (this is seen as part of schools being ready for all children when they come into transition).
- There will be a smooth transition between early childhood programs and school.

Our vision for schools, services & community (continued)

There will be real inclusion: Schools and services will be able to adapt to children's needs.

- Schools and services will be able to adapt to the children they are working with - rather than children needing to fit with schools and services.
- There will be options for learning in different spaces (eg. outdoors), more use of movement and arts and other techniques that can be used to meet the learning needs of children.
- Teachers have the capacity, time and resources to help all children really excel.
- Schools are linked with allied health and community services providers so they are able to provide the extra's that children might need (in a non-labeling, de-stigmatised way) as part of the 'universal' services all children and families are entitled to).

Schools will be culturally safe, truly inclusive and welcoming of all.

- Two-way learning will be understood and embraced.
- Real Australian history is taught in our schools, along with local Aboriginal languages and culture.
- Traditional owners and leaders work will be working with schools in meaningful, ongoing ways, including in governance and leadership roles.
- Traditional foods will be available in schools.
- Children and families will feel represented, and a sense of belonging to a school community.
- There will be many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in preschools and schools.
- There will be staff from many different language, age, gender, social and cultural backgrounds.
- There will be staff with diverse abilities.
- There will be many opportunities for families and children to meet teachers and get to know the school community, well before preschool starts.
- There will be clear, accessible options for families to provide feedback to schools and school-based services.
- Schools and school-based services will be accountable around inclusion. They will use the feedback they are given, and report on the changes they are making to families and community.
- Parents will be 'built up' through their relationships with schools and school-based services, so they have the confidence to self-advocate for their children's needs.
- Fathers will be more involved with their children's early learning and schooling.

Schools will be resourced and supported to work with the needs of their students.

- Schools will have free or low-cost comprehensive food and nutrition programs to ensure all children have regular, easy, access to healthy food.
- Schools will be able to run a 3-year-old preschool program so families can get support earlier.
- Schools will have well-stocked libraries so more children have reading and language building opportunities.
- There will be easy access to a range of allied health professions required to support students to be strong learners (e.g. speech therapy, occupational therapy, social work, psychology, audiology, optometry and dental).

Our vision for schools, services & community (continued)

Schools and services (community and health) will work together to ensure safe spaces for children and families outside of school hours.

- Schools will open earlier and stay open later so that children have safe spaces outside of school hours when they need it.
- There will be safe and kind adults in this space, with healthy breakfast and clean clothes for any child, and any parent or carer who needs it.
- There will be safe, appropriate people for children, and adults to talk to if there are difficulties at home.

All families will be able to access high quality, well resourced, early learning hubs.

- Early childhood centres and programs will be culturally responsive and able to embrace all diverse families, cultures, and situations.
- Early childhood programs will include, and be guided by, the voices of the families in their community.
- There will be a range of 'small steps' activities to engage all families, particularly those who find it difficult to do so. This would involve a range of locations, various times including weekends, with skilled facilitators who know how to encourage inclusion, with options for minimal 'standing back' interaction for newcomers until they feel safe.
- More fathers, uncles and grandfathers will be involved in their children's early learning activities.

There will be support in the home from birth to age four.

- All new parents will have access to intensive home-based support in the first year. This would be like (or linked to) the current midwives visits, but more often and for longer.
- This support would include health information and advice, social health and early learning information provided, as the baby grows.
- From aged one through to four the home visits would be less often, but as often as each family needs.
- From one to four years, the focus would be on further child development and include relevant assessments.
- This would help with flagging things for families before they become big issues so they are prepared before starting school.
- Such a program would 'be a bridge', help support parents to link to non-home-based early childhood activities, groups and programs in the community.



Celebration of National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (source: PCFC Facebook post 5 August 2022)

Our vision for society

Families' basic needs will be met.

- Families will have safe, stable, affordable housing.
- The costs of living will be manageable.
- Families will worry less and have more time and energy to focus on parenting.

There will be equity of opportunity for all families in Palmerston.

- Everyone will have the opportunity to participate in their child's learning in ways that are appropriate and safe for them.
- There will be a strong safety net of support for the whole community so everyone can access quality supports when they need them.

We will have a high quality, flexible, health care system.

- There will be easy access to free or low-cost physical and mental health support
- Doctors, allied health workers and counsellors will really listen, relate, and respect the knowledge you have about your child.
- There will be practical support from birth, included breast-feeding and co-sleeping.
- Hospitals have safe, non-clinical spaces for children.
- There will be no waiting lists
- Four-year-old developmental checks will include vision and hearing, so there are more options for early intervention.

Governments will increase investment in early years.

- Schools will have the resources they need to support the social, emotional, health and wellbeing needs of every child, so they can be strong learners.

There will be integrated governance in early childhood.

- Integrated governance in early childhood recognizes the complex and interconnected nature of children's development and the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting their well-being.
- Collaboration and coordination of all sectors to ensure that young children receive the best possible support and services.
- Alignment and integration of policies, programs, and services across all sectors with the involvement of families, caregivers, and communities.
- The overall goal is to provide a seamless and integrated system of support for young children and their families, to promote their health, learning, and development, and to address any potential risks or challenges that may arise.



6. Community stories

Strengths and challenges in growing up strong learners

Participants were asked about their knowledge and experiences of growing up strong learners in the early years. This information has been organised into **strengths** and **challenges**. In this section, participant quotes are in italics and the type of participant (a parent, school staff, service provider) is noted for context.

6.1 Strengths

There was a wide array of stories about the resources, supports, skills, knowledge and experience that people draw upon to help them grow up their children in the early years. People discussed strengths in relation to schools and community services and programs, including core programs of the Palmerston Child and Family Centre. Among some service providers there was also an emerging feeling of positive change in the early childhood space. Some noted that at the federal government level, there is a new 'sense that government is listening'.

6.1.1. Strengths in our schools

'Schools are doing some great work with children and families'.

- There is a process of building trust between schools and families through holding school events and meeting in safe spaces. For example, Moulden Park Primary offer parent/teacher meetings in the local park rather than the school, run a walking bus program, and do home visits.
- Gray Primary are seeing good results in the Gray Family Centre, through linking with the Palmerston Child and Family centre, and providing access to information and therapies when available.
- Moulden Park Primary are doing lots of work in the physical education area. Focusing on balance and coordination work, starting right from pre-school and are seeing improvements.
- There are food options for children in schools. 'We are feeding a lot of kids, with nutritious food, fruit and veggies each day' (school).

'We have amazing teachers'.

- There are 'amazing teachers' at Moulden and Gray schools. As one parent pointed out 'it shows when you child has access to a great teacher'.
- 'There are passionate people here, making a difference, and it's inspiring. Highlighting the great practice [in schools] is really important' (school).

What are the
things that make
you strong and
keep you strong?

Community Stories - Strengths (continued)

Developing links between families and schools

- Positive relationships between family members, children and school staff are viewed as key to helping children become strong learners.
- Every school is different, so what building community links involves will depend on each school community.
- Strong links between families and preschools ensures families know what is available for their children and how to access it.
- Having parents, families, traditional owners, elders and community leaders come into schools helps create positive links.
- Schools, and teachers, are aware that many of their students' families are struggling and try to support them.
- *'There are some amazing family groups in the school communities. The care and connectiveness of families is really strong. They are the foundational relationships and a beautiful base to work from'* (school).

'There's an inclusive, flexible open and friendly feeling. The schools' values are great' (parent).

Increasing knowledge about trauma and it's impacts.

- Schools are noticing a change in language with many parents, as people are talking about intergenerational trauma. Parents are learning it's impacts on the brain. *'Those conversations were not happening five or six years ago'* (school).
- Understanding intergenerational trauma is empowering for families and *'they are asking for more knowledge in this area'* (school)
- Schools are seeing some positive impacts coming from this knowledge as they witness parents trying different ways of dealing with it and changing damaging patterns. *'If that can happen with more families, it actually changes kids lives'* (school).

6.1.2. Strengths in the services and supports in our community.

Families have a range of supports supporting their children's growth and learning.

- The following organisations, services, programs, and people (in no particular order) were noted by parents as important for providing services, support, information and activities.
- Territory Health child and maternal nurse (home visits when you first have a baby), The Hippy Program (54 Reasons), Anglicare NT's Pandanus Program, Young Mum's, Strong Mums, Baby FAST, Frangipani Friends. Play to Learn, G4GD (birth to 4 years programs), Danila Dilba (providing health, nutrition information at Gray Family Centre), Team Health (emotional coaching at Gray Family Centre), Speech therapists services, Oral Health services, Hearing Australia, Palmerston City Council (children's week activities, school holiday activities, cultural awareness training, \$250 grants for kids team sports, mental health first aid training, Palmerston Kids Network), Palmerston Library (play groups, great resources for all ages, printing and other facilities you can use), The Smith Family (scholarships for primary school), Somerville (financial counselling, NILS), Early Childhood Australia, YWCA (transport), PaRBA (supportive of young people in the community), YMCA, The Flourish Collective (provides free workshops on anxiety), Stars and Clontarf programs in schools. The Community Nurse (currently there is no one in this role), Sue Hyde from Stop, Wait, Go (0-6 years behaviour/trauma/sleep help at Gray Family Centre), Amy Hetherington (employment and tech skills training), Penny from The Root Cause (cooking on a budget at Gray Family Centre), Counselors in general, Music programs at churches, local sports clubs, Centrelink, Local members of parliament and local government.

Community Stories - Strengths (continued)

The Palmerston Child and Family Centre is a great support for families.

- The Palmerston Child and Family Centre (PCFC) is 'a really important support'. 'I've been coming here since my first child was born' (parent)
- 'The groups at PCFC really help. They teach you self-care, they are affirming, there is transport' (parent).
- 'There are good people everywhere here' (at PCFC) (parent).
- Parents appreciated being able to attend play groups in the same space as the childcare centre, as it meant less separation anxiety for the children once they started childcare there. They were used to the space and knew that their parent would always be coming back.
- 'It's multicultural' (parent).
- 'Parent's need to know it's normal to have concerns and worries, and to be able to get support from experienced people' (service provider).
- 'You are going to make mistakes and you need to be able to learn from them and become a better parent' (parent).

'Families as First Teachers (FaFT) is great'.

- FaFT was acknowledged as having 'huge benefits' (service provider)
- Parents say they have 'learned so much' taking their children to FaFT. 'Things I never would have known'. 'Learning to be a teacher of your own child. Learning about turning everyday things into learning opportunities – the shops, the garden, everywhere' (parent).
- At PCFC, the FaFT children feel safe, they know this is their place, as many have been going to the Centre since they were born.



6.2 Challenges

6.2.1 Challenges for families growing up strong learners.

There were a wide range of concerns raised about life in Palmerston, and the issues faced by families. Each of the issues discussed in the consultations are summarised here.

Concerns about safety in streets, parks and outside the school

- Participants reported too much anti-social behaviour in the Palmerston area. Parents talked about feeling unsafe having their children play in the front yard without constant supervision and locking the gate.
- Parents expressed an anxious feeling that was *'always with you'*, that *'something could happen'*. Children might be verbally abused by someone walking past. Or they might witness violence, drunk people, or people abusing each other. This happens outside the schools sometimes also.
- It means parents feel safer with their children being inside their homes. Parents believed children needed to be active and not on screens all day, but it is hard to let them outside and still feel safe.

Anxiety: Parents, young people and children.

- Parents felt that in general, their feelings of anxiety were getting worse.
- Others discussed having a sense that there is *'a lot of fear in kids'* (service provider.). This was thought to be related to a range of contemporary issues such as the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and reporting on that, the war in the Ukraine, climate change impacts and other large-scale social issues, wars and disasters.
- *'It can be scary being a parent'* (parent).
- Parents were also feeling worried about cost of living and ability to pay bills and rent, employment, family issues and more. *'There is so much to worry about, you need to focus on your bub, but you are worrying'* (parent).

A lack of family support

- Many families in Palmerston, and across the NT have come from other places, we have quite a transient population.
- This means there can be parents who have no support from extended family or close friends. This can cause isolation, anxiety and depression.

Young people are angry.

- Some participants discussed the way young people in Palmerston are carrying a lot of anger and experiencing the impacts intergenerational trauma.
- Service providers highlighted how working with these young people is very important, as many are, or will become, young parents. The anger and trauma can be passed on to their children.
- *'We need to listen to the young people, really hear and acknowledge their concerns, and experiences'* (service provider).

'You need people you can rely on, just ask for help when you need it. When you don't have that it is really difficult, you have to do everything yourself' (parent).

Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

Early learning activities, and school, may not be a priority for families when other parts of life are extremely difficult.

- Experiencing domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, overcrowding in homes, drug and alcohol abuse are all barriers to access and participation. *'When women experience domestic violence and have controlling partners, they can't access the available supports'* (service provider).
- Parents discussed generally feeling overwhelmed, inexperienced, unsupported and just struggling to get by.
- *'If school is not important for the parents, then how will they get their kids to come?'* (service provider).

Impacts of intergenerational trauma: 'you worry about children being removed'.

- Some participants expressed concern that *'you will do something wrong, and your children will be taken from you'* (parent).
- Service providers noted this is a big issue with parents who have experienced the trauma of removal and separation from other family members. It can be a barrier to parents wanting to engage in their child's education, attending activities and interacting with services.
- *'Families have legitimate trust issues with schools'* (school).

Personal and emotional barriers to accessing early learning supports and opportunities: 'it can take a lot of bravery to go'.

- There are many personal reasons why people might not engage with the activities on offer. Parents discussed feeling shy, anxious, tired, introverted, and uncertain about attending.
- Programs that have been running for a long time can get a bit 'cliquey' (parent).
- Worrying about being 'judged' by other parents or program workers *'what if I'm doing things wrong?'; 'Am I good with my kids?'* (parent)
- Parents may have had bad experiences with schools, so they now feel school is not relevant or part of their lives. Sometimes there is *'just too much else going on'* (service provider).
- *'Sometimes it's just easier to stay home'* (parent). Especially when juggling the needs of multiple children of different ages.
- *'As a young mum it can be hard to go to new things, people don't relate to you'* (parent)
- Having a facilitator who makes everyone feel welcome, and makes sure you are included, was considered very important.

Limited transport.

- Transport, cost, timing and fitting in around work and other family obligations were all issues for some participants.
- Public transport has problems that mean you may not feel safe to use it. *'There can be violence on the buses, drunk people, and isn't always safe'* (parent).
- Diving lessons were thought to be hard to access. Even with vouchers participants reported long waits, as there are not enough instructors (and some are not very friendly).



Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

Transience: Moving around a lot

- Some people have to move a lot for work. It takes time to feel 'stable' in a place.
- Parents point out that it is hard to meet new people and to know what supports, resources, groups etc are there for you as a mother when you move a lot. *'I didn't know what was available, it took a long time to find out'* (Parent).

Language can be a barrier.

- Some parents noted that people they know have very limited English language literacy.
- They may not know what is available because information is in English.

Health issues

- Some service providers noted that FAS-D is a growing issue in parenting. Some parents were living with FAS-D themselves, and it made parenting, and also attending parenting programs, play groups, and school, difficult for them.
- Others noted that when people are struggling with their mental health, they may not feel able to access programs at the PCFC and other play group type activities.

Finding information can take time.

- When you are a new parent you don't always know what support is out there — such as play groups and mums' groups.
- Parents thought that it was hard to know what is available unless someone tells you and encourages you to go along.
- *'It relies on word of mouth, so you can miss out if you are not linked into things already'* (parent).

Supporting children with their emotions and communication.

- Some parents talked about children needing safe outlets for expressing their emotions, and how their children are impacted by the emotions of those around them. *'Emotions and communication are connected. Kids can shut down when there are strong emotions'* (parent),
- It could be difficult to know how to handle difficult or strong emotions in children *'It is so important for children to be able to express their feelings. Some teachers are great listeners and can help with this, but not all teachers'* (parent). This can impact engagement in early learning activities and school.

Parents want better employment support and opportunities.

- Parents discussed the need for updating their current skills, experience, and confidence so they are able to get work, and better support their families.
- One group thought there was quite a lot of employment support for younger parents (under 25 years) but not a lot available for parents over 25.



Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

6.2.2. Challenges in the school context

Schools are being tasked with addressing basic needs.

- Children are not always getting what they need in terms of basic daily needs; food, nutrition, shelter and safety at home. School is an important place for many children in Gray and Moulden, where they can access food, safety and sleep.
- Delivery of curriculum is something that can only occur when children have eaten, slept and feel safe. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was noted: children's basic needs must be attended to before higher-level ones can be addressed. Schools report that much of their time is spent attending to these basic needs.
- Access to information and communication technology (ICT) is an issue for some families in our school communities. As many services require online interactions, Moulden Park Primary School has computers available for families that enable this access.
- Schools are working with families who might not trust services anymore. This means schools sometimes need to work alongside families to investigate a service, and ensure it is going to be able to meet a family's needs.
- Schools have informally become allied health meeting spaces. Some participants felt that schools changing roles, as hubs where a wide range of health, wellbeing, social and emotional learning are being met, needs to be acknowledged and formalised.

Increasing needs of children in the classroom means teachers are under pressure

- Over the past few years there is an increase of children with specific support needs in classrooms.
- Problems and delays in developing language is a significant issue for children who are isolated, vulnerable and have fewer adults to engage them in play, speaking and learning activities.
- In pre-school and transition, participants pointed to a notable increase in children's hearing and speech issues. This impacts children's confidence and their ability to engage and learn.
- This means that teachers are spending a lot of time addressing these needs, often without appropriate supports, and then curriculum is 'laid over the top' (service provider).
- Teachers' roles are becoming bigger and more diverse, there is a lot of pressure associated with that.

Limited capacity to provide the 'extras' that children need.

- Schools do not have the capacity or resources to provide all the extra's (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy, support workers) that children need.
- Children are not able to access the extra's they need within current universal health and education systems.
- Waitlists for assessments and intervention (e.g. hearing and vision) are long and increasing.
- Early intervention could prevent escalation of issues, which can be both challenging and costly.

Essential services in schools have 'dropped off'.

- Participants pointed out that there used to be more access to a range of services in schools such as allied health and nutrition programs. Participants noted that this had decreased over time, and it has impacted families and children's learning.
- Some families don't have access to transport, so if a service isn't offered within a school setting, the child may not get that service at all.



Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

Building trust and relationships with families.

- Developing trusting relationships with schools is difficult for some families. *'When you are vulnerable, accessing support groups is really tough'* (school).
- Parents can be juggling work and other commitments and not have time to build relationships. *'Most parents don't talk to teachers at schools. They just drop the kids off and go to work or home'* (parent).
- Some parents may feel unconfident or uncertain around schools.

Inclusion in schools

- Some participants noted that parents can feel *'swept under the carpet'* and *'fobbed off'* when they seek support for their children in classrooms (service provider).
- *'Legislation around inclusion in schools is being breached every day, and no one is held accountable'* (service provider).
- Some parents and service providers noted that it can be difficult to understand school decision processes and feel empowered to be part of that.
- There were concerns raised by service providers, about the decreasing number of Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW's) in Palmerston schools.

Communication with teachers is important but it can be hard to know how to do it (parent).

The transition from early learning experiences into school can be challenging.

- Service providers noted that children are often instilled with a sense of autonomy in early learning programs and activities, but once they move into schools, they have less autonomy and need to follow more rules.
- They felt there were not enough *'bridging'* activities and events between early learning centres, schools and other services. It was thought that further opportunities for teachers from preschool and transition to engage with early learning centres and families, and vice versa, could help with this

6.2.3. Challenges for services (including government, non-government, and school-based programs)

Staff shortages and pressure

- Participants pointed out that roles don't always get filled when someone leaves their position, or people are away. This adds pressure to workloads.
- Service providers note they are doing the work they are skilled and experienced in, but under increasing pressure.
- There is limited time for developing strategies for much needed system change.

Limited flexibility/responsiveness in service provision

- Some participants felt that service providers and schools could be very rigid in their roles and at times may lack the flexibility needed to support each child's needs.
- Services and programs need to continue learning, engaging with current research, and evolving so they are not basing their practice on out-of-date assumptions or models.
- Being open to a range of diverse narratives about early childhood is important.
- Some participants expressed frustration because *'the child needs to fit the school or service, rather than the school or service fitting the child'* (service provider).
- In a similar vein, the question was asked: *'Can we shift the focus from getting children ready for school, to getting schools ready for children?'*

Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

Self-esteem in the early childhood sector.

- Childhood educators and staff can lack confidence, and experience depression.
- This can be associated with low pay and devaluing of predominantly female workforce, and workforce shortages.
- When a profession is not valued, workers find it hard to value themselves.

Limited access to services in the community (mental health, general practice, specialists, drug and alcohol support)

- Finding and developing a trusting relationship with a general practitioner is difficult. *'Doctors need to really listen to parents'* and understand parents as the experts in their child's life (parent).
- There are very long waiting lists for most services - *'We can't get into anywhere'* (parent).
- There are no mental health programs for children under 12. Some participants pointed out a lack of child-friendly non-clinical spaces in hospitals. Noting that they are not appropriate places for young people who need assistance with mental health issues.
- Getting appointments outside of school hours is challenging. *'It adds to family issues when you have to take time off work, and children out of school, to attend appointments'* (parent). More flexible service hours are needed.
- Some participants pointed out there is not enough support for people living with drug and alcohol problems. Whole communities are impacted by the problematic drug and alcohol usage of its members, whether they are closely related or simply sharing the same environment.

Difficulties accessing cultural programs and local leaders.

- Some service providers noted that they had found it difficult to know who local leaders were, and how to engage them in their work in meaningful ways.
- Some had wanted to have cultural programs integrated into their services, but they had found cultural programs were very expensive or not available.

'Trust fatigue'

- Some participants discussed the ways families had put their faith in a range of different services and had been promised things but let down. When expectations are not being met, and people don't receive the assistance they need, they can develop *'trust fatigue'*.
- People expressed frustration that many services have come and gone. *'There needs to be better integration of services around children and families'* (school).

6.2.4. Structural and systems challenges

Crime & violence

- There is an increase in violence in our streets, parks, public transport, shops.
- Domestic and family violence is a big issue.
- Children witness violence and it impacts their health and wellbeing.
- Parents report feeling stressed and unsafe; *'Crime and violence is just always in the background, you are always aware of it, and it causes anxiety'*.

*'There are systemic issues. The current structures don't always serve families and children well'.
(service provider).*

Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

Housing issues

- Families need safe and secure housing so they can thrive.
- *'When you are looking for your first private rental and have no references' it's impossible' (parent).*
- There is nothing between public housing and the private rental market that young parents can access.
- *'Not having a house makes it very hard. You can't have your own space or your own things, you can't be yourself' (parent).*
- Families are forced to stay with other people and that makes it really difficult to ensure children are ready for school each morning, with the food and clothes and bags and things they need. It creates a lot of stress for families.
- Some parents are in unsafe situations (e.g. domestic violence) because there is nowhere safe to live.

Poverty and exclusion.

- *'Families are experiencing the impacts of poor policy and disadvantage' (service provider), and this in turn impacts their capacity to engage with their children's learning.*
- *'Parents are dealing with the pressure to present their children at school with the right clothes, food....and then are being asked to come up with solutions to these ourselves, but we already know what the solutions are – systems change' (service provider).*
- The gap between families continues to get wider. Vulnerable families struggle to afford any extra's children need to strengthen their learning.

Cost of living pressures 'access to the basics is getting harder'.

- *'The cost of power and other bills is rising. The price of groceries is going up. It makes you feel anxious and worry a lot' (parent)*
- *'Parents need employment, families need housing and good food and nutrition. All these things work together to help build up families and children's strengths' (service provider).*
- *'Work life balance feels impossible at the moment. It's just like working to survive and no time for 'life'. You can't just take a break' (parent)*
- Parents also pointed out that worrying about money can lead to problems and fights in the home.

'I would love to work part time, and engage more with kid's learning, but I can't afford it' (parent).

The politics of it all is getting in the way (service provider).

Systems gaps 'the NDIS ship is sinking'.

- There are a lot of children just outside the average of the 'bell curve' of child development norms. Currently, NDIS is the only option for those families as there is nowhere else to get support.
- NDIS support was generally intended for people with higher level support needs and now is sinking under the weight of needs that could be met by expanding and extending current universal services, so they are more inclusive.
- Systems and structural failure mean children cannot access much needed supports if they fall between the 'gap' of current universal services and the NDIS.

Community Stories - Challenges (continued)

A lack of service integration and coordination

- Some service providers described the apparent breakdown of communication in the systems that are meant to support families and children (education/health/child protection/early learning).
- There are expectations of service delivery collaboration on the ground, but there needs to be integrated governance at the highest levels also.
- Each service has its defined parameters, and these can bump up against each other rather than work together smoothly.
- Systems must be coordinated and integrated.
- There are good partnerships between many services already. However, service funding is linked to provision of specific activities and outcomes and is often not flexible enough to adapt to what children and families need. A 'stop and reset' around priorities and funding is needed.

Children have so many areas in their lives that are at breaking point. Being able to share important information to support a child is needed'
(service provider).

Judgement and racism in systems

- Services providers pointed out that there was judgement and racism in our systems. This was seen in the way parents are treated in some areas of education and health systems.
- This can make people wary of these systems and not want to engage with them.

Frustration with systemic issues

- Families and service providers expressed frustration about the slow pace of change, with many believing '*the change process is not accessible*' (service provider).
- People advised they are taking part in consultations and change-focused activities but feel there is not much shifting.
- '*We need leaders who will take up their responsibilities and lead*' (service provider).
- There are many families that are not able to navigate the current systems to ensure their children are included.



7. Community ideas

Helping children grow as strong learners in Palmerston.

In this section the ideas and actions that were discussed in the community consultations are brought together under the categories of government, early learning centres, community services, communities, and schools.

7.1 *Ideas for our governments.*

Prioritise the basic needs and human rights of all citizens in Palmerston.

- **Providing social safety nets:** The government can strengthen our social safety net to ensure that all citizens have access to basic needs, including housing, food, and healthcare. This can also include raising social security payments such as youth allowance, parenting payment, job seeker, rent assistance.
- **Promoting employment opportunities:** The government can promote employment opportunities to ensure that all citizens have access to a decent standard of living. This can include policies that support job creation, and training programs (with childcare) for parents returning to the workforce.
- **Investing in education:** The government can invest in education to ensure that all citizens have access to the skills and knowledge they need to participate fully in society. This can include policies that support early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, and tertiary education.
- **Strengthening community support:** The government can work with community organisations and other stakeholders to strengthen social networks and support systems. This can include programs that promote social inclusion and community engagement, as well as support for marginalised groups such as Indigenous Australians.
- **Community safety:** Addressing social issues such as drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems, and homelessness can help make communities safer. Providing access to treatment and support services can help reduce crime and improve public safety.
- Overall, ensuring that basic needs and human rights are met requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves a range of stakeholders, including government, community, and the private sector.

Focus on integrated governance in early childhood.

- Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that the child is put first and the service system is flexible to children's needs.
- There is a need to focus on the interface between practice, policy and research in early childhood.
- One participant pointed out that we know what the research tells us, it's time for policy change to enable integrated governance and joined up services.
- We need legislation that enables information sharing, as many other jurisdictions have.



Ideas for our governments. (continued)

More resourcing for Child and Family Centres

- Service providers noted that these are the spaces '*where the magic happens*'.
- There is more support needed for the things CFC's currently do, so the space can be further enriched. This includes developing more supports during the transition into school, which is such an important time.
- Participants believed more support and resourcing was needed for centres to become more inclusive of the families that are not currently engaged.
- Families need to be able to access what they need, when they need it.

Develop and implement a 'universal plus one' early intervention/prevention approach and reduce impact on NDIS.

- One service provider/early childhood advocate raised the idea of a '*universal plus one*' strategy.
- 'Universal services' refers to essential services or programs that are made available to all members of a society, regardless of their income, or anything else. Examples of universal services include our public education system and healthcare system.
- Universal services 'plus one' refers to the idea of ensuring that these essential services or programs are provided to all members of society, along with an additional level of resources provided to children who are one just outside the average range of expected child development. That is, one 'standard deviation' the average in a bell curve, in terms of their early learning.
- Such a systems aims to ensure schools are well resourced to support children who may be vulnerable in two or more of the AEDC domains.

Increase support for children's sports activities.

- Ensuring there are more sports participation options for very young children by extending the current the NT Government sports voucher scheme to pre-school aged children, was suggested by parents.
- Increasing the sports voucher value was also suggested (\$100 is no longer enough to cover the many costs associated with a sport).
- Parents pointed out that children need to be able to try out a range of sports activities. A program where young children (3-5 years) can try three different sports across a term is needed.



7.2. Ideas for our community services (government and non-government)

'Bigger-Picture' collective action.

- Most participants believed that everyone needs to work together to bring about positive change in the 0-5 age group. We all know the importance of the first 1000 days.
- Organisations (government and non-government organisations, businesses, community groups of all kinds) can work together, collaboratively to focus on this and make it a priority.
- This will involve sharing knowledge and data to build understanding about the community and families. For example. The Ages & Stages (ASQ) Tracker. This is done in health centres, and FaFT don't have access to that. It could be good information to share with permission to help work well with families and children. FaFT could complete the ASQ with families (as this happens in other locations).
- Develop a statement of commitment among all partners.

Continue to foster a 'no wrong door' policy in all services and spaces.

- The philosophy of *'no wrong door, no wrong time, no wrong question, no wrong person'* (service provider) was thought to be really important by parents and service providers.
- It was acknowledged that this has been taken up by some schools and other services. It means children's voices are being listened to, and respects community-based ways of knowing and learning.
- This approach needs to be supported, encouraged and promoted.

Programs for parents.

- Culturally appropriate and safe programs are needed, particularly around setting boundaries with children.
- Some service providers advised there is *'a burning need'* for new parents to learn more about parenting and available supports for their children and families. This includes information about drug and alcohol support, the law, and their rights. *'All sorts of practical things'* (service provider).
- Programs could also include learning about different types of trauma and resilience and help build confidence.
- It was suggested that programs start right from ante-natal care and go through a child's life, and work across health and education systems. Families need to know about links to things when they become relevant at different ages and stage.
- Parents worry when their children are not doing things at particular ages, such as recognising letters and numbers. *'You need to keep an eye on that, and teachers are also looking out for that, but it would be good to have access to information about what to look for and when to get help'* (parent).

Employment programs – with very small steps

- 'Small step' programs to support parents into work are needed, as they may have lost confidence, or have not yet been employed.
- These would teach a wide range of skills that are used across different workplaces, but in a way that is not overwhelming (small bits of information at a time).
- Some parents will need English literacy support *'we are still filling in forms for some parents who cannot write'* (service provider).
- Employment can have positive 'knock on' effects such as improved finances, which in turn links to better food, housing and more

Ideas for our community services (continued)

Leadership programs

- The idea of training and mentoring young people from a range of cultural backgrounds to become cultural leaders in our communities was raised. A leadership program was thought to be a good way of doing this.
- 'We need to have empowerment and leadership programs in schools to help young people become confident and become leaders' (service provider).

Trauma-informed practice training for Palmerston families, community members, services and in schools.

- Service providers thought that advocating for trauma-informed practice to be part of the teaching-training (and other human service professions) curriculum at university, was very important.
- Others suggested that opportunities for ongoing learning about culturally sensitive trauma informed practice, for everyone (parents, schools, services, whole community), was needed.
- Understanding trauma, normalising and removing stigma, knowing how to support people living with trauma and it's impacts, are all important in this community.
- The previous Palmerston Indigenous Network (PIN) training was particularly good as it included cultural aspects such as a smoking ceremony.
- Follow up after training is also needed, as learning about trauma needs to continue over time (not just a one off, but supportive and continuous learning)
- There needs to be different trauma-informed practice training suited all these different contexts (children, teachers, service providers, community members, parents etc), and people can decide which type of training is best for them.
- Training should span from early learning centres into the early years at schools.

Services need to go to families rather than families having to find services.

- Some parents and service providers thought that, with difficult-to-engage families, services could start in the home. These could then gradually transition to other spaces and places.
- This might gradually build families confidence to engage with more supports and programs, through developing relationships.

Develop a directory of child and parent resources and activities in Palmerston.

- Parents suggested a directory of services and supports for families that was updated annually.
- This would include information about all the groups and services relevant to parents and children in Palmerston, as well as information about the pre-schools, transition, and school systems in the area.
- The directory would be provided when a baby is born and sent to parents every 12 months (could include some free vouchers).
- Or it could be dropped into every letterbox annually, so that people who were new to the area would have easy access.
- It could be in paper form (booklet) and online.

Ideas for our community services (continued)

Help build social connections between families.

- Wherever there are children's activities or services, think about how you might get the parents/carers talking to one another also (and vice versa).
- Introductions, offers of a place to sit and perhaps have a cup of tea can help people to start conversations and get to know one another. This all helps to develop parents and carers social networks.
- Parents were keen to have access to more low cost or free waterpark-type active spaces (something like the waterfront area in Cairns, QLD) where fun play activities can take place for young children and also older children can take place. If there are café's or food vans then parents can mingle while children play.

Build relationships with leaders.

- There is a need to build further working partnerships with leaders (politicians, industry, and business leaders) 'up there'.
- Service providers have been seeking ways of development partnerships with those who have power and influence within the structures and systems that impact everyone's lives. They asked: How do service providers access these systems to create the changes everyone knows need to happen?



7.3. Ideas for our early learning centres

Bridges to early education opportunities.

- The child and maternal health nurse role was considered to be important by parents and could be even better if there were more regular visits over a longer period of time (up to four years).
- This role could be expanded to encourage parents and carer access to early learning support through other home-based programs like 'HIPPY'.
- As parents and carers build their confidence in engaging, they could be encouraged and supported to access other opportunities such as FaFT programs and other early learning activities and events.
- As a first step, it was suggested to work with Territory Health to ensure child and maternal nurses can bring local information about the PCFC and the various groups and programs on offer to new parents (and let them know that there is transport available).

More 'steppingstone', 'halfway' and open space events to bring families into PCFC activities and programs.

- Creating relationships in safe and neutral spaces (open space events, visiting sessions) so that when a service is needed it is not intimidating to access (meeting in parks, shopping centres, low key events with incentives such as food, books and toys, having time for people to visit CFC in a supported way).
- Having a range of ways parents and carers can engage but also 'stand back' when they need to. People can be in a room, park or other space and not have to join the conversation if they don't feel comfortable/able. The main thing is that they have brought their children.
- Some 'steppingstones' for vulnerable/not engaged families could be good for people to start making links to groups (home visits, events in parks and shopping centres)
- Using people's networks to make connections with families who might not be connected into organised groups was raised as an idea ('bring a friend' or 'invite your neighbour' type activities).

Promotion of existing early learning activities, events and programs

- The idea of developing a yearly calendar of events was raised: relaxed, open space, safe space events, that will bring people into contact with the PCFC and its programs.
- The calendar could be printed and put in all Palmerston letterboxes, every few months, so everyone has access to this information.
- It was suggested that the PCFC use community radio and TV announcements, Facebook, posters for events each month or quarter.
- Using posters at places like shopping centre, on buses and in medical facilities (e.g at the doctors) was suggested.
- Some participants suggested organising donation campaign – where people and business can bring donations into the PCFC that can be distributed at the events (children's books, toys) to encourage people to come along.
- Others suggested creating a community wide survey (send link via Facebook, email lists, Instagram) to find out why people do or don't engage; what specific events they might like; what might make events more appealing/safe for people?



Ideas for our early learning centres (continued)

Ensure all early childhood activities are welcoming and accessible for all

- Opening up a wider variety of options and activities for early childhood would be great too.
- Ensuring there are options for working parents is also important. Having some playgroups on weekends (coffee morning, afternoon teas) and in the school holidays (when lots of early years activities stop because of school holiday programs for school aged children).
- Having activities that cater for a family with children of different ages is also needed.
- Ensuring group facilitators are aware of any 'cliques' forming within programs and that new participants are welcomed and accompanied as much as possible until they are comfortable (this may take a number of visits).

Expand the existing programs that work well

- Some participants wanted to see the Young Mum's Strong Mum's program expanded so it goes for longer and can involve more parents. 'The learning those young women are getting, the confidence they are building, they are making positive changes for their children – that's how we have to do it' (service provider).
- Expanding FaFT with further funding in the FaFT space was also suggested. 'We've seen some huge benefits from PCFC, the play groups, the supported special needs FaFT that we've just started. Because these are families that need to get that support from very early. Get them the support they need, that can then give those kids a decent start' (service provider).
- Developing play groups that have allied health workers involved, providing information sessions and advice was discussed. This could involve providing as much positive interaction as possible (singing songs, playing and reading together), building parent relationships, and providing access to skills while ensuring children are having opportunities to develop language.

Encourage and organise volunteer groups and committee membership.

- Parents raised the idea of putting together a volunteer group of parents, carers and family members, to be general helpers at the PCFC (and Gray Family Centre), support newcomers, and to assist with ensuring new people feel welcome at all early learning activities.
- Early learning spaces could promote the benefits of joining school councils and other local committees.
- It is important to ensure these are welcoming of all potential members, and enjoyable.

Provide children's resources in all languages.

- Participants highlighted that strong language and strong culture are linked, and fundamentally important to early learning.
- This involves having language resources such as posters, books, visual texts, songs and community visitors who can speak language with children.
- Having more Aboriginal educators and educators who are from similar contexts to the children, is also important to develop strong learners.

Develop stronger relationships with local government.

- Parents thought it would be good to find out who local council members are and invite them to come to the Child and Family Centre, to hear people's concerns and suggestions about safety in parks and the need for good, clean amenities.
- 'We need to talk to services and tell them we need them to come into our schools and family centre' (parent).
- Investigate getting the Fun Bus back in Palmerston. Some parents suggested asking Palmerston Council to do a survey of parents to find out when and where it could go, and how often it would be used in different locations.
- Encourage Palmerston City Council to maintain and upkeep parks by hosting more events in the parks.

7.4 Ideas for our schools

Ensure schools have funding and access to qualified staff, so they can offer:

- Consistent, regular access to occupational therapists and speech pathologists was noted. There must be incentives to recruit and retain them, because there is a shortage of skilled staff.
- Language, literacy and numeracy support workers in schools are needed.
- Parents and service providers felt that more Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) are needed
- Access to dentists, general practitioners, and pediatricians are required, to support students and families.
- The idea of a community services engagement officer role was raised; To work with families, businesses and the community more broadly, to link the school to opportunities to help build up families. This would include fund-raising, above and beyond the school budget, and sourcing donations of much-needed resources such as library books. It could also involve coordinating and facilitating community visitors who can help build the school community (Elders, leaders, volunteers, alumni).
- *'Things like the old ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness) program were good, because it was empowering for parents'* (service provider).

Work with programs and services so they engage more regularly and consistently to support schools.

- Work with relevant programs and services to develop a coordinated plan for consistent and regular support of schools.
- Participants pointed out that services such as Danila Dilba are good, but they need to come into the schools, rather than wait for parents to take their children. Many parents struggle with transport, getting children to appointments can be difficult.
- More sport and cultural programs could be offered in schools, by sports clubs and cultural groups. This could bring in more community members to support the school and help build a sense of community.

Transition to inclusive schooling plan

- Some service providers highlighted the need to develop a plan to transition to a truly inclusive early education and school system.
- Equity needs to be embedded into the plan. *'We are still segregating children who are different and that needs to stop'* (service provider).
- There needs to be a focus on building school capacity to be truly inclusive (resisting the immense pressure to conform).
- Learning approaches and environments can be adjusted for each child.
- Ensure community-led plan development.
- Start with the child feeling safe, then layer education/curriculum over the top. *'Children who are sitting on the outskirts of education are brought into a system that works for them'* (service provider).



Ideas and actions for our schools (continued)

Ongoing Trauma informed practice training for all school staff

- Understanding different types of trauma was considered to be very important for all school staff.
- Learning about intergenerational trauma specifically, and how it impacts families and children's learning, and knowing how to work with that, is very also important
- Some participants felt it should be essential training and practice in all schools.
- The idea of ensuring there are wellbeing spaces in schools was raised. Where students can feel calm and safe and learn to settle heightened emotions.

Nutrition programs (and other practical supports)

- Many participants noted that these generally work well in assisting children to be ready for learning each day, and there needs to be more.
- Different models and types of nutrition programs work for different schools and families.
- Some have parents pay a small fee for children's food every two weeks or so. This helps when families home situation means it's not possible to make and bring lunches each day.
- Some schools/teachers also let children keep their school shoes and clothes in the classroom. This means children have one less thing to worry about in the morning.
- Particularly when there is homelessness, it is really important for kids to feel included. Having the right clothes, shoes and access to food is a bit part of that.

Cultural workshops in school communities

- Having cultural workshops (painting, storytelling, weaving) with local Aboriginal leaders in schools, would be great.
- Involving families from schools (aunties, grandma's) who have skills in these areas would be good. Participants suggested they could be paid to do this.
- The example of Dale Austin who runs workshops at the library was raised.

Build more relationships between schools and families who are not connected.

- Having more family-teacher meetings was considered important, so there are more opportunities for families to come into the school. Hosting these in parks is also great. Otherwise, by the time a family comes in for a parent/teacher meeting it can be too late.
- Participants pointed out that connecting in vulnerable families must be done in a relationship-based way, with appropriate people making the links between families and services - as families might take offence if 'someone just starts telling them to go to a service' (service provider).
- Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker's: Service providers stressed the importance of AIEW's in the school community and their role in helping children, and their families, feel connected and included.



8. Reflections

8.1. What was happening in Palmerston when the AEDC data was last collected?

To better understand the context of the 2021 AEDC data, we asked participants about what they thought was happening in the community that may have impacted the results.

Covid-19.

Participants agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have had an impact on the 2021 AEDC data in Palmerston. This is particularly in relation to children's speech and language development, because of limitations on parents and children to socialise. Parents of children who were living in Melbourne, have noted delays in speech, anxiety, and other developmental issues that they feel are due to the multiple long lockdowns in that city. Other participants pointed to research from the USA showing concerning impacts on children's learning and potentially the need for further schooling opportunities to make up for what has been lost.

Covid-19 restrictions on movement in the Northern Territory have affected our most vulnerable families, particularly in terms of access to services and family support. Family safety is also an issue, with domestic violence increasing while the ability to access services decreased. Some participants pointed out that the full impact of Covid-19 was not seen in the data from 2021 but will only become apparent in the 2024 collection.

Changes in demographics

The suburbs of Moulden and Gray have undergone significant changes, with lower school enrolments from 2018 to 2021 and an increase in disadvantage based on the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA). Many families moved out of the areas to newer suburbs with affordable housing, resulting in a higher density of families in government housing. A high-rise housing area was bulldozed, leading to a decline in enrolment numbers. Both suburbs are widely considered to be low socio-economic areas, and the changing community makeup has resulted in increased vulnerabilities and risks for children.

Reflections (continued)

8.2. Participants thoughts about the AEDC data and it's uses

The AEDC was generally considered to be a useful measure of child development, with some participants noting that it can show outcomes (rather than outputs). However, prior to this project, none of the parents who participated in the community consultations had heard about the AEDC or knew that every three years children in transition would be part of such a national survey.

Some participants wanted to know more about how the data was collected, and what sorts of questions were asked in each of the domains. One question asked was about how culture and ethnicity are taken into account, particularly in relation to what kinds of knowledge and development are valued and reflected in the five domains. It was also noted that it was difficult to imagine seeing a positive change in the AEDC data until children's basic needs are being met more consistently .

One participant asked if there were any questions asked about where the child had been living in the past three years (ie. Have they been in Palmerston for all of the past three years, or have they come from elsewhere?). This is an important question to consider in a location where there is a lot of population movement. The data from Palmerston is likely to include transition aged children who have been growing up in other locations. Hence, the outcomes are not specifically about the impacts of growing up in Palmerston, but could be about growing up in many different places.

Other participants noted that it would be good to know how schools are using the AEDC data and to know if school councils are engaging with it. Many suggested that an information session about the AEDC for parents would be good. It would be great if there was a presentation of data and discussion night for each school council and interested school community members.

Some parents thought that a summary of the AEDC data for their school could be part of each family's orientation to the school.

Other ideas for using the AEDC data for further analysis were also raised. For example, looking at the AEDC data to see if there are impacts in the years when various resources and programs were withdrawn from schools. Examples such as health screenings, dental screenings, visiting ear specialists were noted as points of interest.

Our school is very family friendly, but it would be great if families were more knowledgeable about the AEDC and could have their voices heard about their vision for their children and community.

The AEDC could be introduced when parent first meet the principal, and they could be asked about the supports and strengths they have for their children's learning. This could flag families that might needs some additional support to engage in activities.

Reflections (continued)

8.3 Reflections on the consultation process

The AEDC community consultations at the heart of this project varied in size, and were held with very different groups in a range of locations. It is not surprising that every session was very different! While the AEDC Toolkit was used as the basis of each session, it ended up being used in a variety of ways. Some workshops stuck closely to the suggested format and worked through each phase in order. Other workshops started out with our initial question about 'what makes our children strong learners?' and took off from there with very little need for discussion prompts! The facilitators were flexible in their approach, and went with the flow of each session, while attempting to keep the discussion focused on the toolkit areas.

Consultation participants thought the AEDC data summaries provided in the consultations were informative and helped them to see what was happening in Palmerston. They also noted that the information included important ideas that all families should know. Parents were particularly interested in the information about the positive impacts on children when parents are actively engaged in their child's learning.

It is important to note that the workshops would not have been possible without the support and co-facilitation of a respected and well-connected local person. In our case we were extremely fortunate to have Jody Mummery in this role. Jody organised all the workshops and encouraged everyone's participation. She ensured people were welcomed and safe in the sessions and helped explain the importance of the AEDC data and its uses to each group. The sessions would not have been as rich as they were without Jody in this role.

Because people were often discussing their own experiences, and/or their own families, in these consultations, there were some strong emotions 'in the room' at times. There was enthusiasm, frustration, laughter and some tears. Some parents reflected that some sessions were 'like therapy, but in a good way!' This meant being sensitive and aware of the dynamics involved. Holding the workshops in locations that people were familiar with, and having two facilitators was important for safe and open participation.



9. Recommendations

For the Palmerston Child and Family Centre

These recommendations have been developed through a consideration of all the information provided by participants via the community consultations and discussions.

Share what has been learned with the community.

- Feedback the learning from this report with the community, and help to create an ongoing conversation about supporting families and children in Palmerston.
- Develop a series of engaging, accessible resources, events and activities that share the report information, knowledge about the AEDC, and engage the community in developing shared actions.

Bring together an early years reference group

- With the aim of working collaboratively on the recommendations included here, and other related issues.
- Membership that is inclusive of families, local community members and other stakeholders.
- Develop terms of reference, and a set of priorities, based on this report and ongoing community engagement.

Investigate options for funding and support of a 'collective action' project focused on improving AEDC results in Gray and Moulden.

- Encouraging everyone (services, families, school councils) to work together to bring about positive change in the 0-5 age group.
- Work with the local community to wrap around' Gray and Moulden schools and work collaboratively.
- This would involve organisations (government and non-government organisations, businesses, community groups of all kinds) collaboratively focusing on the social, health and education needs of these school communities, and make it a priority.
- Develop a statement of focus and commitment among all partners.
- Decide on two or three '100-day projects' with each school for each year (e.g. restocking library, food and nutrition programs, building community through development of after-hours programs including cultural events, sport, community garden/ kitchen program, all within or nearby schools)
- The development a directory of services relevant to children aged 0 to 5 years could be a starting point.
- Use the AEDC results from Gray and Moulden to track outcomes over time.

Encourage and organise volunteer groups and committee membership.

- Investigate the idea of bringing together a volunteer group of parents and community member who could support the PCFC in a range of ways including: ensuring new families feel welcome and helping to promote activities.
- Volunteer groups and committee members can be meaningful ways to develop new skills and knowledge, and experience that can be transferred to employment contexts.

Recommendations (continued)

Encourage the participation of fathers, uncles, grandfathers and other men in early learning activities.

- It is notable that there were no male participants involved in the consultations. Investigating ways to encourage more involvement of fathers and other males in early learning activities is encouraged.
- Employment of male workers in the early learning space may be a starting point for this.

Ensure workers are knowledgeable about group dynamics and are observing adults' interactions in programs.

- Ensuring group facilitators are aware of any 'cliques' forming within programs and that new participants are welcomed and accompanied as much as possible until they are comfortable (this may take a number of visits).

Develop and distribute a quarterly calendar of events and programs.

- Develop a quarterly calendar (printed and electronic) of event for activities focused on 0-5's in partnership with Palmerston City Council.
- The calendar could go on relevant websites (for example, CoP, Gray and Moulden school Facebook pages, PCFC Facebook page).
- A poster format put up at shops, bus stops, at schools, health services, Centrelink general practitioners.

Investigate options for expansion of existing programs that work well.

- Families as First Teacher (FaFT): encouraging fathers and other male family members to attend; integrate more allied health services support and information.
- Young Mum's Strong Mums: Options for extended programs that integrate further skills and knowledge.
- Provide further resources in a wider range of languages.

Develop more open space events to introduce families to the Palmerston CFC and build relationships with each other

- Develop a range of local small, welcoming events that families can attend without too much pressure for high level interactions.
- This might include open picnics and games in parks, cake and chat mornings at the Palmerston Recreation Centre, 'pop up' activities in local shopping centres.
- Include incentives such as free food, books and toys.
- Ensure events cater to families with children across a range of ages.

Consider options for outside 'usual' hours early childhood activities.

- Consider developing activity options for families who work full time during the weekdays.
- Having some playgroups on weekends (coffee mornings/afternoon teas) and in the school holidays (when lots of early years activities stop because of school holiday programs for school aged children).

Recommendations (continued)

Work with local health, community and education service providers to develop further programs for parents that include:

- Information about what is available for them and their children and families.
- Information about drug and alcohol support, the legal system, their rights and responsibilities as citizens and parents.
- How to recognise, understand and work with different types of trauma.
- Resilience and building confidence.
- Information about child development and how to support it.
- Creative therapies and art-making for children and families.
- Culturally appropriate and safe programs, particularly around setting boundaries.

Investigate options for more home-visiting services to help develop further links between new parents and early education opportunities.

- Investigate the possibility of working with NT Health to around ways of working with the home-visiting Child and maternal health nurse program.
- Consider options for home visiting and other home-based programs to support parents of children aged 0-4 years.



10. Acknowledgements

Project Reference Group

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- Jody Mummery, Aboriginal Coordinator, Palmerston CFC
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Workshop & Discussion Participants

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Appendix A

AEDC Palmerston information used in the community consultations.

The information was developed by Karen Cieri (Assistant Director, Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), Teaching and Learning Services - Early Years and Primary, Department of Education, Northern Territory Government.



Palmerston Picture

In 2021 700 five-year-old children were included in this census.

Those children are 7 years old today.

Our Children
Our Communities
Our Future

The AEDC is a population census, not a tool for screening or assessing individual children.

AEDC is a measure of young children's development at the start of their first year of full-time school. It is collected every three years across Australia.



It is desirable to see an increase in the percentage of children 'on track' and a decrease in developmental vulnerability with each data collection cycle.

The AEDC shows where we need to work differently to improve the experiences of children and families in the first five years of life.



Health

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.



Social

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning and readiness to explore new things.



Emotional

Children's prosocial and helping behaviours, and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity and inattention.



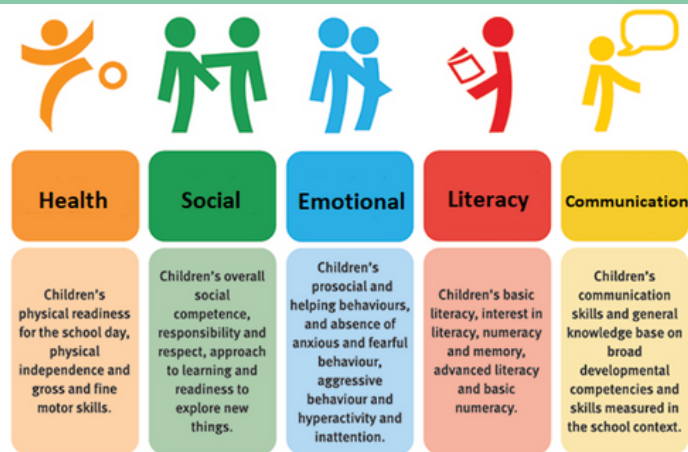
Literacy

Children's basic literacy, interest in literacy, numeracy and memory, advanced literacy and basic numeracy.



Communication

Children's communication skills and general knowledge base on broad developmental competencies and skills measured in the school context.



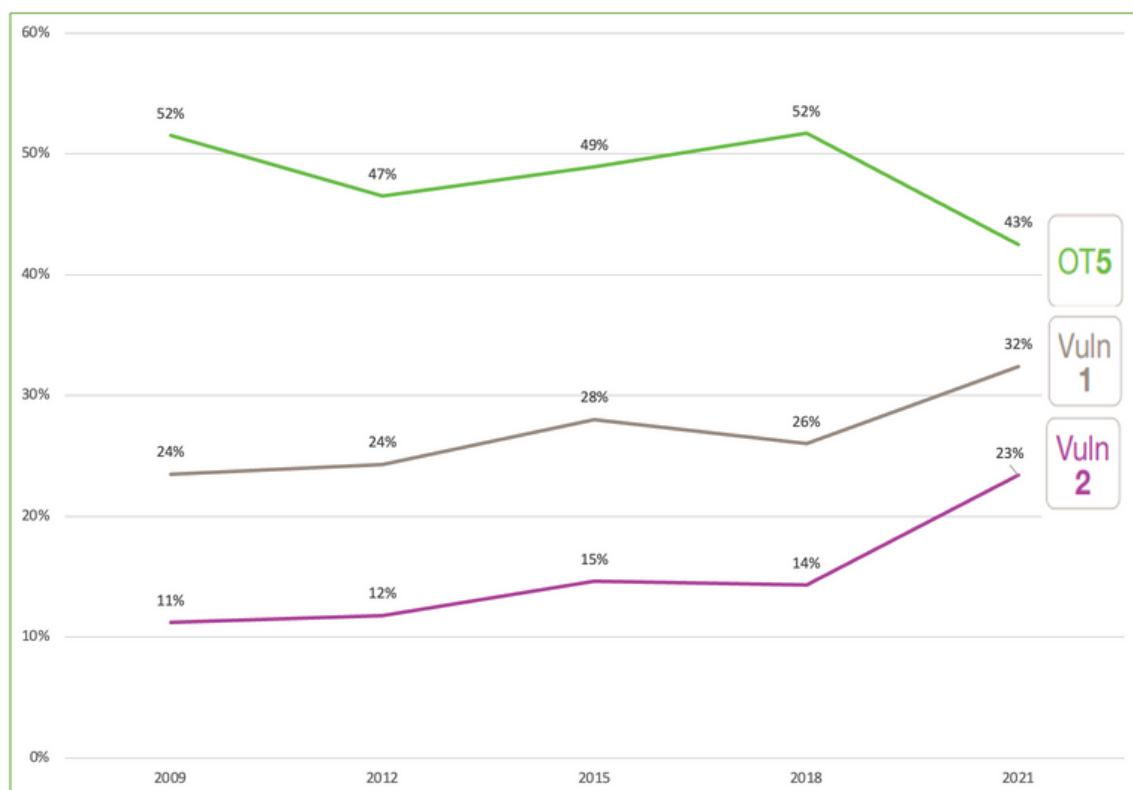
Developmentally on track	Children are developing well
Developmentally at risk	Children are facing challenges in some aspects of their development
Developmentally vulnerable	Children are facing significant challenges in their development



On Track on all five domains

Vulnerable on one or more domains

Vulnerable on two or more domains



These results are significantly worse than previous years.
This is also a national trend, perhaps due to COVID-19



In Palmerston 2 in 5 children are developmentally on track on all five domains when they start school. 1 in 5 are developmentally vulnerable on 2 or more domains.



Children in Palmerston have strengths in

- Literacy and numeracy
- Communication skills and knowledge of the world
- Physical health and material wellbeing

Social skills and emotional maturity are challenges

Most children are doing well on Physical health and wellbeing but its also one of the most common vulnerabilities.

Strengths



Literacy

Children's basic literacy, interest in literacy, numeracy and memory, advanced literacy and basic numeracy.

Communication

Children's communication skills and general knowledge base on broad developmental competencies and skills measured in the school context.

Most children are doing well on Physical health and wellbeing but there are also many children with a vulnerability in that domain.



Health

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.

Difficulties



Social

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning and readiness to explore new things.

Emotional

Children's prosocial and helping behaviours, and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity and inattention.

Children in Palmerston have strengths in

- Literacy and numeracy
- Communication skills
- Knowledge of the world

Social skills and emotional maturity are challenges.



Health

Looking closer at the Health domain in Palmerston

Most of the children who are vulnerable on this domain are due to things like being hungry, tired, late or inappropriately dressed.






There are also many children who are having difficulty controlling their body.

Physical health and wellbeing sub-domains

The physical health and wellbeing domain is the only AEDC domain that is reported with sub-domain analysis. Patterns of vulnerability vary across the physical health and wellbeing domain: for example, children might be coming to school hungry but still have developmentally appropriate fine and gross motor skills. As such, sub-domains are reported for the physical health and wellbeing domain below, enabling communities to make better sense of these results.

Table 2.4 – Children developmentally vulnerable on the physical health and wellbeing sub-domains.

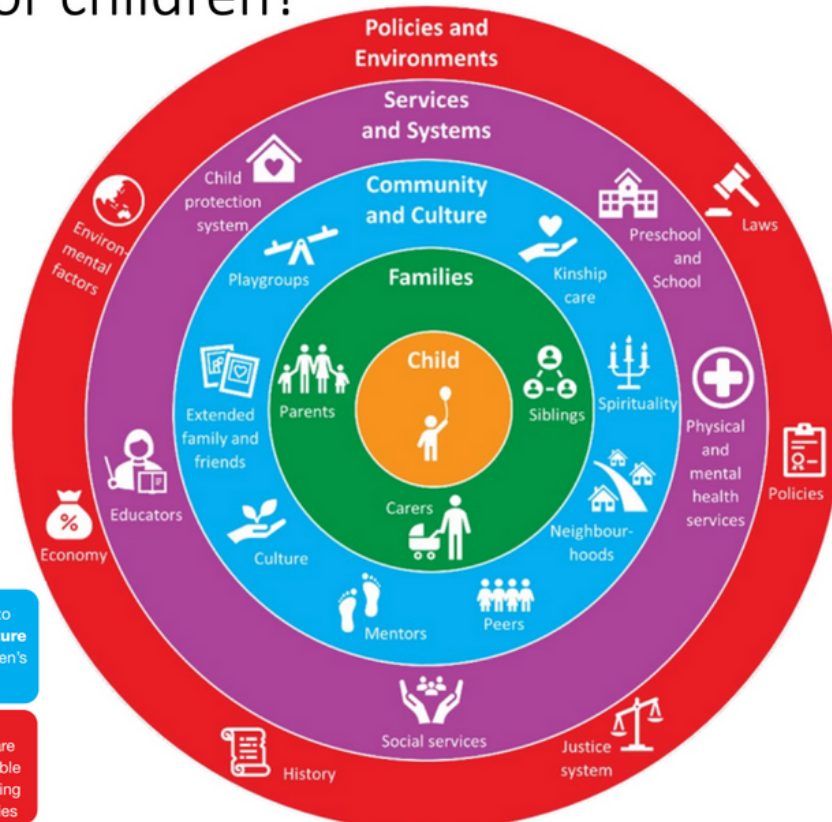
Sub-domain	Description	2015		2018		2021	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Physical readiness for school day	Children developmentally vulnerable on this sub-domain have at least sometimes experienced coming unprepared for school by being dressed inappropriately, coming to school late, hungry or tired.	90	16.2	87	13.5	129	20.6
Physical independence	Children developmentally vulnerable on this sub-domain range from those who have not developed independence or handedness or coordination, to those who have not developed any of these skills.	45	8.1	77	11.9	98	15.7
Gross and fine motor skills	Children developmentally vulnerable on this sub-domain could have poor fine and gross motor skills and/or poor overall energy levels during the school day.	41	7.4	65	10.1	69	11.0

		2009		2012		2015		2018		2021		Significant change	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	2009 vs 2021	2018 vs 2021
	Health												
	On track	377	78.2	431	78.1	411	74.2	471	73.0	430	68.7	Decrease	Decrease
	At risk	56	11.6	65	11.8	74	13.4	89	13.8	78	12.5	No change	No change
	Vulnerable	49	10.2	56	10.1	69	12.5	85	13.2	118	18.8	Increase	Increase
	Social												
	On track	356	74.0	399	72.3	388	70.0	455	70.5	397	63.4	Decrease	Decrease
	At risk	74	15.4	95	17.2	101	18.2	101	15.7	111	17.7	No change	No change
	Vulnerable	51	10.6	58	10.5	65	11.7	89	13.8	118	18.8	Increase	Increase
	Emotional												
	On track	356	74.0	389	70.6	387	69.9	474	73.6	398	63.9	Decrease	Decrease
	At risk	86	17.9	114	20.7	104	18.8	109	16.9	116	18.6	No change	No change
	Vulnerable	39	8.1	48	8.7	63	11.4	61	9.5	109	17.5	Increase	Increase
	Literacy												
	On track	371	77.3	404	73.5	453	81.8	524	81.5	465	74.4	Decrease	Decrease
	At risk	73	15.2	104	18.9	52	9.4	64	10.0	81	13.0	No change	Increase
	Vulnerable	36	7.5	42	7.6	49	8.8	55	8.6	79	12.6	Increase	Increase
	Communication												
	On track	388	80.5	406	73.6	409	73.8	490	76.0	436	69.6	Decrease	Decrease
	At risk	50	10.4	98	17.8	84	15.2	107	16.6	109	17.4	Increase	No change
	Vulnerable	44	9.1	48	8.7	61	11.0	48	7.4	81	12.9	Increase	Increase

1 Significant change has been colour coded: green text represents a positive change, red text represents a negative change. At risk has not been colour coded as any changes should be interpreted in context with changes in the percentage of children who are vulnerable and on track.

What matters for children?

The AEDC shows where we need to work differently to improve the experiences of children and families in the first five years of life.



Nurturing Families provide a secure base for children to develop foundations for learning and wellbeing

Strong connections to **Community and Culture** can help to build children's sense of belonging

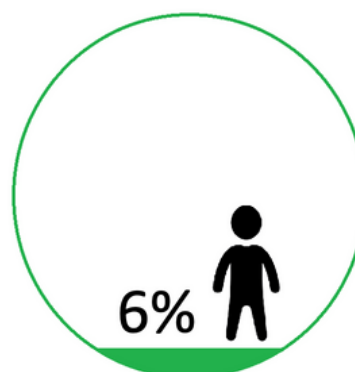
Services and Systems help families thrive when they are culturally safe, accessible, and meet their needs

Policies and Environments that are family friendly can enable parents to balance caring and work responsibilities

Families provide the foundations for children's health and wellbeing



On Track



In the NT, when parents/family **were** actively engaged in their child's learning, 55% of these children were on track on five domains.

When parents/family **were not** actively engaged in their child's learning, only 6% of these children were on track on all five domains.

In Palmerston

90 % of parents are engaged

80 % of children are read to at home

91 % of children settling in well to school

All three of these have declined in Palmerston over the last three collections.

Transition to school

Table 1.5 – Teachers' response to the question: Would you say that this child is making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school.

Child is making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school	2015		2018		2021	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
True	559	95.7	631	94.5	632	90.9
Not true	24	4.1	34	5.1	63	9.1
Don't know	≤3	≤0.5	≤3	≤0.4	0	0.0

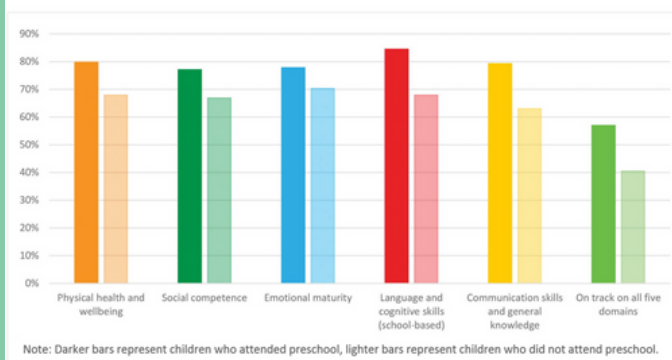
Table 1.6 – Teachers' response to the question: Would you say that this child has parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning.

Child has parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning	2015		2018		2021	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
True	551	94.3	612	91.6	623	89.6
Not true	31	5.3	51	7.6	68	9.8
Don't know	≤3	≤0.5	5	0.7	4	0.6

Table 1.7 – Teachers' response to the question: Would you say that this child is regularly read to/encouraged in his/her reading at home.

Child is regularly read to/encouraged in his/her reading at home	2015		2018		2021	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
True	527	90.2	569	85.2	556	80.0
Not true	50	8.6	59	8.8	95	13.7
Don't know	7	1.2	40	6.0	44	6.3

Children who attend playgroups or preschool are more likely to be on track when they start school



Percentage of children developmentally on track on each AEDC domain and summary indicator by preschool attendance

(The graph for playgroup attendance is similar.)

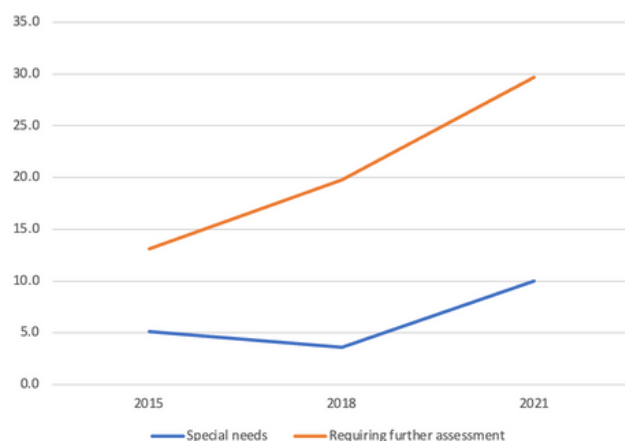
In Palmerston participation in playgroups and daycare has increased by 8% and 27% respectively.

Participation in preschool has decreased by 1%. Perhaps more children are accessing preschool through day care.

Non-parental early childhood education

Table 1.3 – Non-parental early childhood education and/or care.

Types of non-parental early childhood education and/or care	2015			2018			2021		
	n (valid)	n (yes)	%	n (valid)	n (yes)	%	n (valid)	n (yes)	%
Playgroup	149	39	26.2	173	40	23.1	169	53	31.4
Centre based day care	288	117	40.6	313	112	35.8	286	180	62.9
Preschool or kindergarten	534	482	90.3	573	549	95.8	641	607	94.7
Family day care	255	≤3	≤1.2	313	16	5.1	252	4	1.6
Grandparent	260	34	13.1	318	51	16.0	257	38	14.8
Other relative	254	14	5.5	308	33	10.7	251	17	6.8
Nanny	263	6	2.3	324	4	1.2	271	≤3	≤1.1
Other	248	7	2.8	297	11	3.7	248	7	2.8



The numbers of children in Palmerston with a diagnosed special need or who need further assessment are steeply increasing.

This is part of a national trend.

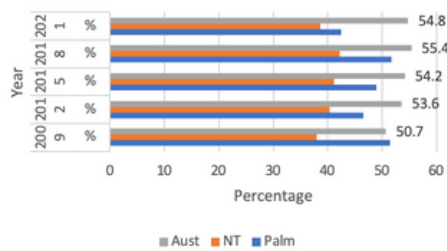
Special needs

Table 1.4 – Support.

Types of support required or identified	2015		2018		2021	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Children with special needs status	30	5.1	24	3.6	70	10.0
Children identified by teachers as requiring further assessment (e.g. medical and physical, behaviour management, emotional and cognitive development)	74	13.1	128	19.8	196	29.7

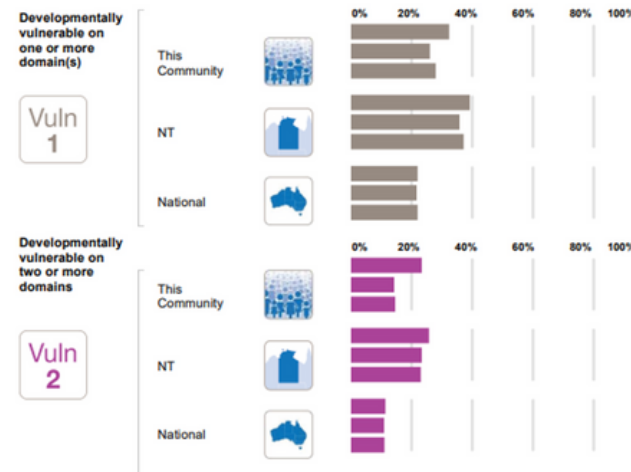
For the AEDC, this means children identified already as requiring special assistance in the classroom with high needs due to chronic medical, physical, or intellectually disabling conditions. Teachers were asked to base their response on medical diagnosis. More information on AEDC terms and definitions is available in the fact sheet Definition of AEDC terms (aedc.gov.au/defterm).

On Track on Five Domains



	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
Palm	51.5	46.5	48.9	51.7	42.5
NT	38	40.4	41.2	42.2	38.6
Aust	50.7	53.6	54.2	55.4	54.8

Developmentally vulnerable on ≥1 and ≥2 domain(s)



Summary indicators of developmental vulnerability on 'one or more' and on 'two or more' domains

	n	%	Total
2021	202	32.4	624
2018	167	26.0	643
2015	155	28.0	554
2021	1,164	39.2	2,973
2018	1,141	35.8	3,190
2015	1,207	37.2	3,248
2021	63,264	22.0	287,164
2018	63,448	21.7	292,976
2015	62,960	22.0	286,041
2021	146	23.4	625
2018	92	14.3	645
2015	81	14.6	554
2021	764	25.7	2,975
2018	745	23.4	3,184
2015	751	23.1	3,255
2021	32,718	11.4	287,737
2018	32,434	11.0	293,619
2015	31,754	11.1	286,616

The AEDC is collected every three years

Collection	Birth year	Age 2023	Age 2024	Age 2025	Age 2026	Age 2027	Age 2028	Age 2029	Age 2030
2009	2004	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
2012	2007	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
2015	2010	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
2018	2013	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2021	2016	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2024	2019	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
2027	2022	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2030	2025	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Children in the current collection are now 7 years old (Grade 2).
They will do NAPLAN for the first time next year (Year 3)

The current collection includes children born in 2016.
The next collection will include children born in 2019.

Children who are currently 1 year old will be measured in 2027.
Children who will be measured in 2030 – Closing the Gap target year will be born 2025.

