

Executive Summary

Palmerston Community Consultations

NT Australian Early Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is an Australian Government initiative that measures the development of children in their first year of school. It provides information, at the local, territory, state and national levels, about children's development and helps identify areas of strength, as well as where children may need support. In early 2023, the Palmerston Child and Family Centre (Palmerston CFC) facilitated discussions with families, schools, health and community services and local leaders. The aim was to share the NT AEDC information and to hear community views and stories about growing up strong learners in Palmerston (with a focus on Moulden and Gray). **Fifty** people participated in these conversations. In summary, this is what we learned

Community Vision

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.

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, before and outside of school hours.
- 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

- Great schools and teachers.
- Strong partnerships: families, early learning services and schools.
- A good range of programs, groups and supports for families with young children in Palmerston
- Growing knowledge about trauma and it's 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 citizens in Palmerston.
- Focus on integrated governance in early childhood.
- More resourcing for Child and Family Centres/hubs.
- 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 Palmerston CFC 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 to develop engagement and action.
- 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)