



Children's Voice

Palmerston

August 2023

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Table of contents

02 Executive Summary

03 Introduction

04 Background: Engaging with Children

05 Our Process

06 Sessions 1 & 2 (FaFT)

07 Session 3 (Gray Primary School)

11 Session 4 (Palmerston Skate Park)

12 Session 5 (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Childrens Day at Tiverton Park)

14 Summarising the sessions

16 Discussion and next steps

18 References

19 Appendix

Executive Summary

Hearing what children have to tell us about their worlds, the places they live, their hopes and dreams, has never been more important. Understanding and incorporating their views is key to providing meaningful services and activities that enrich children and families lives. This Children's Voice project was developed by the Palmerston Child and Family Centre (CFC) in consultation with the Palmerston Indigenous Network (PIN). The aim was to gain a strong understanding of children's views about Palmerston; what they like, and what they would like to change. The project was focused on the Palmerston suburbs of Gray and Moulden.

The learning from this project will be used to help the Palmerston CFC, and other local services focused on children and families, in their planning and service provision in Palmerston. To hear children's views, we facilitated five different arts and play-based sessions with children aged between 0 and 12 years during July and August, 2023. Each session was co-designed with a host service, so children were engaged in safe and fun ways that suited their context and location.

Five Children's Voice sessions in four different locations

- Families as First Teachers at Palmerston CFC - 14 children (aged 0-5 years)
- Gray Primary School - 210 children (aged 4-12 years)
- Palmerston Skate Park - 18 children (aged 4-12 years)
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day @ Tiverton park - 15 children (aged 2-10 years)

There were many similar, and some different, ideas shared by children across the various locations, and this report provides detail about each of these. This summary brings together some of the main ideas.

What children like about Palmerston included:

- Outdoor places such as the Palmerston Water Park, local parks, playgrounds, the skate park and the pool.
- Local shopping centres, fast-food restaurants, markets and the cinema.
- Home, family, friends.
- School, the Library and the Recreation Centre.
- Playing sports, fishing, free kids activities and events.
- The natural environment, trees, plants, animals, lakes and sea.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community.

What children would like to change about Palmerston included:

- More activities, better and bigger parks and playgrounds for children. Make the outdoor spaces cooler (shade and cold water).
- No more crime, safer neighbourhoods and buses, no rubbish, friendlier dogs and cats.
- More kindness.
- More free activities and events for kids in cool places (undercover, indoors, air-conditioning).
- Less crocodiles and mosquitos
- Have more shops.
- Make things cheaper.

Over 250 children aged 1-12 years participated in Palmerston Children's Voices



Our learning from this report can help inform local child and family focused services with their planning and activities.



Introduction

This report documents the process and learning from the Palmerston Child & Family Centre (CFC) Children's Voice Project. The Palmerston CFC and project consultant worked together in partnership with the Palmerston Indigenous Network (PIN) to develop and facilitate a process of hearing children's voices in Palmerston. The focus of the project was on the communities of Gray and Moulden.

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.
- Education and employment pathways programs for young mums.
- Integrated working partnerships with other service providers in the Centre for early years and young mums.

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.

This report includes background information about ideas that inform this Children's Voice project. An overview of the methods and processes we used to complete the project is also presented. Each of the Children's Voice sessions is described and photographs of the processes and examples of children's drawings, and writing are provided where appropriate. The report culminates in a summary that attempts to bring together all the ideas about what children like about Palmerston, and what they would like to change.

The learning presented here will be used by the Palmerston CFC in their planning and activities, and we hope it will also be of use to anyone who works with children and families in Palmerston.



Background: Engaging with Children

The importance of listening to children's views, opinions and ideas is becoming more widely understood and appreciated across the globe. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) supports the right for children to have a say over the things that affect their lives. Finding ways to do this in a meaningful and respectful way is an exciting area of research.

To begin this Children's Voices project we consulted with expert stakeholders (Early Childhood Australia, and Children's Ground) and completed a brief review of similar projects from across the country. We were keen to use this information to understand ways communities have worked together to hear the voices and views of children (see Appendix 1) so we could develop our approach with this in mind. We learned it is important to think about the project in three stages: before, during and after.

Before: Ensuring all stakeholders know why they are doing this project and are clear on what they want to find out, and the steps involved (making a plan with a timeline).

During: The 'gathering voices' phase needs to be able to adapt to each specific location and context, involving activities that will appeal to each particular group. It is important to ensure that the activities are set in spaces that children are comfortable with, and that adults who they already know and trust work together with the facilitator. Documenting the session is also necessary. This includes taking notes/photographs during each session as it occurs, and final documentation of children's key messages.

After: Bringing the voices together (analysing/synthesising/summarising) and sharing what has been learned with children and other stakeholders. It is important to report children's messages in ways that are true to children's meanings. It is also useful to track the use and impacts of children's messages.

The brief background report was presented at the June meeting of the Palmerston Indigenous Network Meeting for discussion, and the focus and method for our project was developed and refined with leaders from the Palmerston CFC. The following section provides detail about the process we used to hear Children's Voices in Palmerston.



The Process

After exploring similar projects in different locations, we shared and discussed this information with PIN members. At a PIN meeting in May 2023, various locations for Children's Voice's sessions were suggested. The Children's Voice team (Bianca Cameron, Aboriginal Coordinator Palmerston CFC; Letichia Russell, Integrated Early Childhood Services Leader and Charmaine Wigness who took on this role later in the project; Gretchen Ennis, project consultant, Useful Projects and social work student Jack Dowden) met with potential session hosts to discuss the project, brainstorm ideas and develop appropriate activities. The questions that we focused the sessions on were:

- *What do you like about Palmerston?*
- *What would you like to change about Palmerston?*

At the FaFT sessions we focused on what children liked and also what made them feel strong. This resonated more with the age group than the '*what would you like to change about Palmerston?*' question.

At each session, two or three of the Children's Voice team set up activities that encouraged drawing, playing and talking about the two questions. Further detail about each session is provided within this report. This approach worked well as children were comfortable in places they were familiar with, alongside people they knew and trusted.

The Children's Voice team were careful to ensure children interpreted their own drawings so we were not making assumptions about what they had created. With very young children, the parents were sometimes part of these conversation, providing background to the things children discussed. While our original focus was children aged 0-10, there were some children at Palmerston Skate Park and Gray Primary School who were a little older, however none were over 12 years old.

A summary of each session, with photographs of the process and the children's art was provided to each host location for feedback about the accuracy of observations and interpretation. In the following sections of the report, we provide an overview the process for each session, and a summary of children's responses to the questions. Children's drawings have been included throughout the report.



Our process was developed with the Palmerston CCF and the Palmerston Indigenous Network

5 Children's Voices sessions in 4 different locations across Gray and Moulden

Each session co-designed with session hosts, to fit with the children in each location

Families as First Teachers

At Palmerston Child & Family Centre

Session 1 on 20 July 2023 with 6 children (18 months to 5 years old)

Session 2 on 21 July with 8 children (2 to 5 years old)

At these two sessions we set up a low table with activities involving toy people, animals, houses, vehicles and many different accessories. There were crayons, paper and stickers with different shapes, colours and images. Children began each session with their regular FaFT activities (parents and carers were also present). They could choose to look at our table, and play if they wanted to.

We drew pictures with the children, and talked with them about what they were playing with, drawing and 'sticking'. We moved gently into asking about things they liked about Palmerston and things that made them strong. Through these interactions, listening and observing the children the following information was collected.

What I like about Palmerston

Going to the park
Going to the pool
Going on a boat
The jungle where bats sleep
Mum
Fishing
Fruit (banana)
Flowers
Animals
Planes
Buses
Nice dogs
Fluffy dogs
Colours
Hot Wheels and Thomas toys

What makes me strong?

Cooking
Fruit (cherries, banana's, apples and watermelon)
Swimming.



Gray Primary School

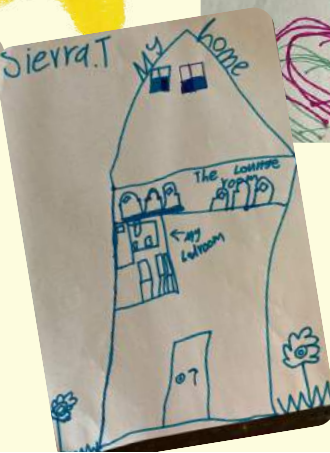
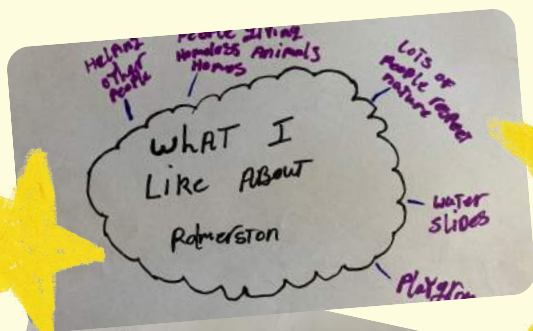
Session 3 on 21 July 2023 with 210 children (primary school aged)

The Palmerston CFC organised a Children's Voice session as part of the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) events at Gray Primary School on Friday 21 July. The activity included six large groups of primary school-aged students (made up of two classes per group, with a younger grade and older grade class together). Each group involved approximately 35 children in a large classroom with tables and chairs for small groups and floor mats. Lots of paper and coloured markers were provided on the tables and floor space, and these were tidied and refreshed after each group.

The six sessions were facilitated by the project consultant and staff from Palmerston CFC, with the teachers and teachers assistants from each class helping out too. The facilitator introduced the team and the project to the whole group, and asked children to help us understand what it is that they really like about Palmerston, and what they would like to change. Children split into small groups around tables or on the floor (or could work individually if they wished).

Each session was short and action-packed with 20 minutes of drawing, writing and discussing their thoughts on Palmerston. The team walked around and engaged with children and their drawings and writing, noting down the meaning (either on the back of the drawing or later in a note book). Some children preferred to discuss their thoughts rather than draw or write, so their ideas were noted on large sheets of paper pinned to the wall.

A total of 222 separate works were created by the Children. The drawings and discussion notes were compiled into the lists presented here. The ideas are listed in order of how often they appeared in drawings, words and discussions (with the number of times noted in brackets).



Gray Primary School

What I like about Palmerston

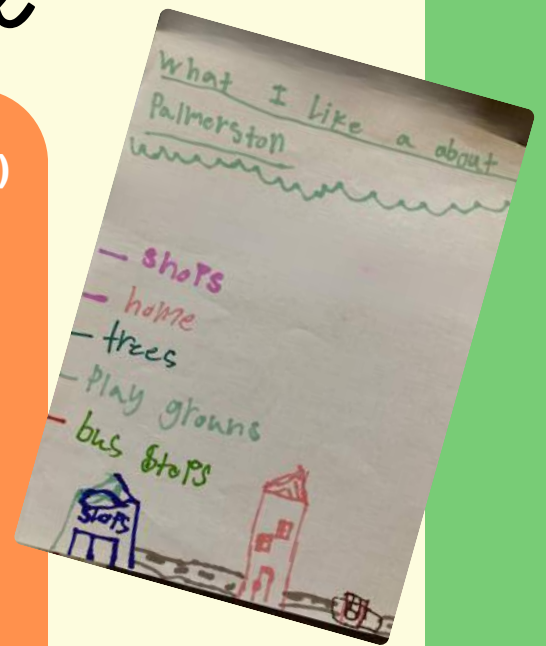
- Palmerston Water Park (water slides) (53)
- My home (35)
- Fast food places (McDonalds/KFC/Hungry Jacks) (29)
- Gray School (my class, my teacher, playing with friends, school sports) (26)
- Gateway Shopping Centre (Cinema, Gloria Jeans, Jay Jay's, Food shops Kmart) (26)
- Team sports (soccer, AFL, netball, basketball, rugby) (23)
- Natural environment (nature, the land, the bush, the forest) (18)
- Pets and animals (guinea pig, dogs, cats, frogs) (16)
- Palmerston Markets (15)
- Food and drinks (chicken/beef/Mi Goreng noodles/sushi/pancakes/ice cream/ice cream van/burritos/Fanta/milkshakes) (15)
- The library (13)
- The swimming pool (12)
- Trees (11)
- People (who are kind, help animals, help others, respect nature) (11)
- Shops (Supermarket/Target/Toy shops) (10)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture/NAIDOC celebrations (9)
- My family/my carers (8)
- Gaming (video games, Roblox) (8)
- Parks and playgrounds (8)
- My street/my neighbourhood/my community (7)
- My friends (7)



Gray Primary School

What I like about Palmerston (continued)

- Skateboards/skating (6)
- The big round-a-bout with the Palmerston sign and the big tree in the middle (6)
- Darwin Show (5)
- My bed/bedroom (5)
- The weather/sky (sunshine, sunset, rainbows, the moon) (5)
- Swimming (5)
- Games and toys (Pokémon, Lego) (4)
- The beach, the sea and sea views (3)
- Play shack (4)
- Bus stop (4)
- Lakes (3)
- The Wildlife Park (2)
- The Recreation Centre (2)
- The Dog park (2)
- The Ninja Park (2)
- YMCA (1)
- My Phone (1)
- Walking paths (1)
- Grandma's house (1)
- The servo (1)
- Love (1)
- Babies (1)
- Oasis Shopping Centre (1)
- Dancing (1)
- Carwash (1)
- Painting (1)
- Car (1)



Gray Primary School

What I would like to change about Palmerston

- Have a wave pool (10)
- Have a King Pin (6)
- Have an Ice-skating place (6)
- More kindness/people are kinder to each other (6)
- Bigger water park (3)
- Better neighbourhoods (safer and friendlier) (3)
- More shops (Salty Plum Shop, toy shops) (3)
- Stop crime (2)
- Friendlier dogs and cats (2)
- Stop littering (2)
- A Time Zone (1)
- Make things cheaper (1)
- More Darwin Show (1)
- More milkshake and coffee flavours (1)
- Less mosquitos (1)



What I'd change
Bigger water park
ice skating



Palmerston Skate Park

with Build Up Skateboarding

Session 4 on 25 July 2023 with 18 children (between 4 and 12 years old engaging in our activity).

This session was integrated into a regular Tuesday afternoon skate session (4-6pm) facilitated by Build Up Skateboarding. There were three Build Up staff present who were familiar to the children, and they supported children with their skating skills. Local street artist, Reece, also engaged children in conversations about what they like about Palmerston, and what they would like to change.

Reece used an easel with a poster-size pad to encourage children in the discussion through drawing or writing their thoughts. He walked around the park during the session, and talked with kids about the questions. Staff from Build Up Skateboarding also facilitated conversations with children. Approximately six parents were also at the session. Throughout the session we noted down kids' ideas. These notes, and the posters themselves where provided the following information.

What I like about Palmerston

- The skatepark
- Playing
- Drawing
- Build Up Skate
- Burritos
- Fishing
- Gaming
- Talking and drawing with Reece
- Free activities
- Playing netball
- Geekfest
- Gaming room
- Anime conventions
- Cosplay activities.

What I would like to change about Palmerston

- No more bad people
- Less crocs
- Bigger and more parks
- More activities with free snacks
- More functions and events for kids
- Shade for the skatepark
- Open the toilets at the skatepark.
- Rubbish bins at the skatepark.
- More skateparks
- Bigger ramps
- A cold water bubbler at the park
- A cold room for outdoor activities in Palmerston
- A soccer pitch
- More anime and cosplay conventions
- Rollercoaster
- Spray painting class



Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

Tiverton Park, Moulden.

Session 5 on Friday 4th August 2023 with 15 children participating in our activity (aged 2 to 10 years).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day is an annual celebration facilitated by the Palmerston Child and Family Centre. It was based at Tiverton Park in Moulden from 9-11am, and involved free activities, food, fun and cultural performances for children and families. The Children's Voice team set up a large mat and cushions in the shade, with drawing, sticking and playing activities about people/places and things. Children and their parents or carers could come and look, sit down, relax, and play and engage with us if they wanted to. They could draw with crayons and markers on board and paper, and stick stickers on drawings.

We had two easels with big pieces of paper where we would record the things children were telling us about Palmerston. One sheet was for what children liked, and another for what they would like to change. There were conversations with the older children, and some one word responses from very young ones – sometimes their parents 'interpreted' with them. Through these interactions and through listening and observing the children the information below was collected.

What I like about Palmerston.

- The library
- Baby Ballet at the Rec Centre
- Playgroup
- YMCA (doing fun activities, crafts, and outside games)
- The pool
- Sanctuary Lakes Playground
- Parks
- Playgrounds
- Animals
- Trees
- Flowers
- Birds
- Fun
- Free activities
- It's good for families and kids

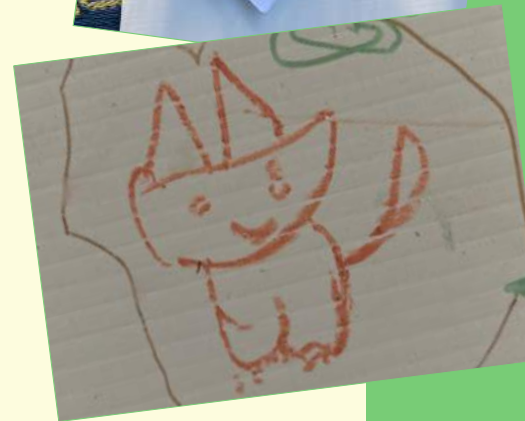


Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

Continued

What I would like to change about Palmerston

- Cleaning up the rubbish and broken bottles.
- Have more buses and make them safer for kids and old people.
- More birds and a bird park.
- Fix the old parks and have more little kids play equipment in them.
- More shade.
- More undercover playgrounds.
- More activities in cooler places (inside with air-conditioning, or undercover, shady places).
- More things to do in the afternoon for little kids.

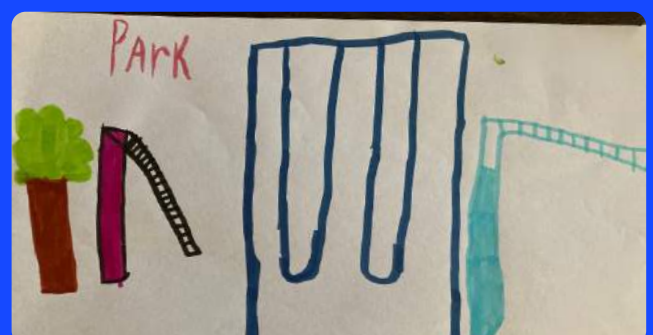
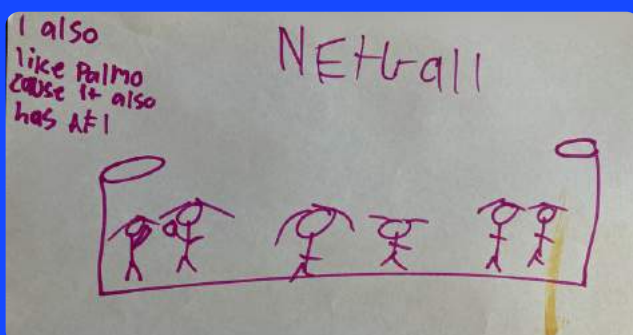


Summarising children's views

Here we bring together the information and ideas children shared with us from all five sessions in all four locations through a summary of the more detailed information presented throughout the report. We have attempted to list the ideas in order of how often they were mentioned by children, however this was problematic because the number of children at each session varied greatly. Therefore, we have chosen to treat each location as equally as possible, to reflect the views and ideas of all ages and locations as much as we can. As such, if an idea was mentioned in all four locations, it was placed at the top of the list. If multiple ideas were mentioned in all four locations, then a count of the number of mentions within each of the locations was completed. The higher that number was, the further up the list it was placed.

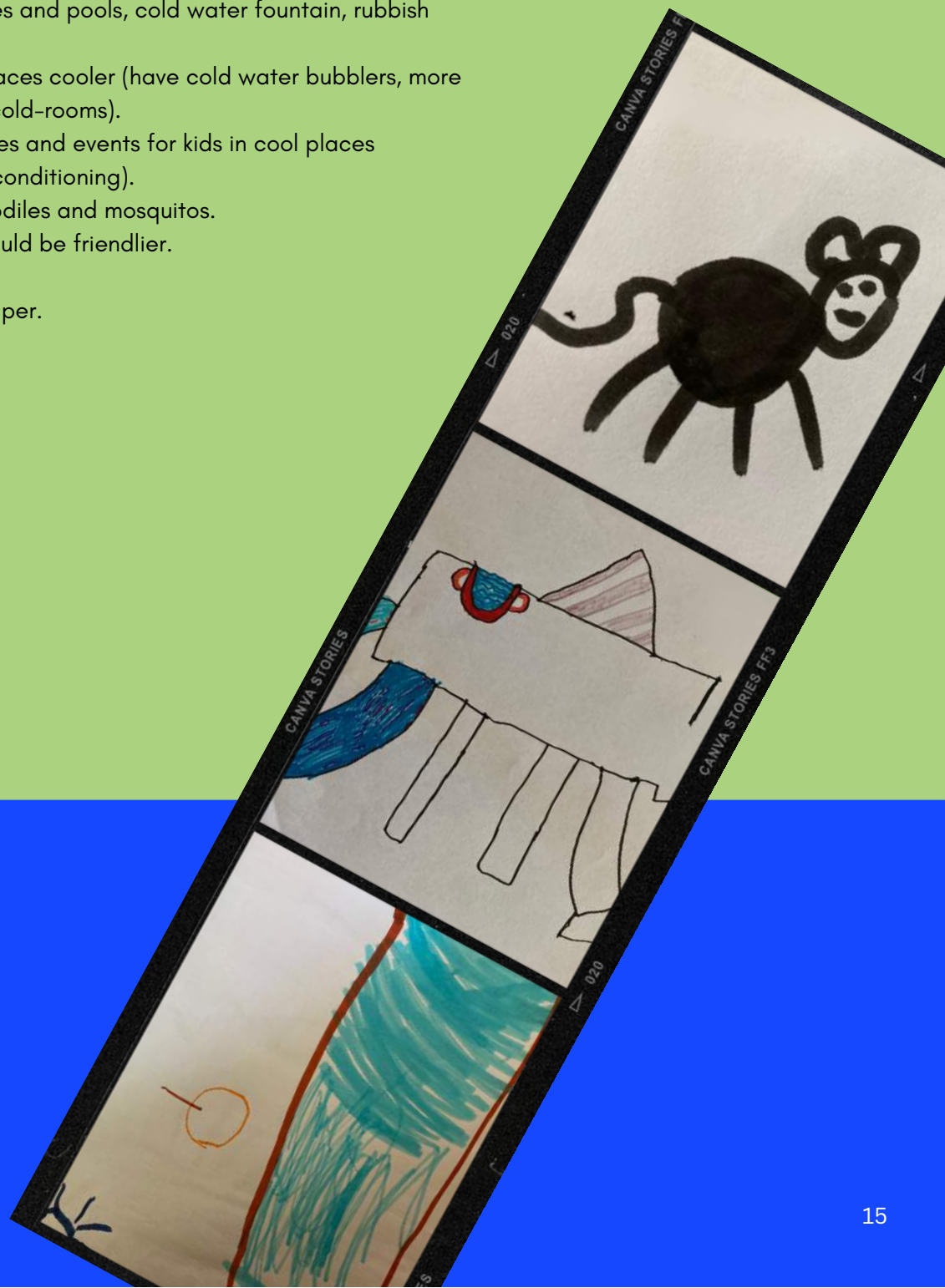
Summary of what children like about Palmerston

- Palmerston Water Park (including the water slides and skate park).
- Parks, playgrounds and the pool.
- Foods and drinks (including fast food outlets and Palmerston market)
- My home and family (including: bedrooms, mum, carers, grandma's house, cooking, garden, babies).
- Animals, birds and pets.
- Nature and environment. (flowers, trees, weather, sun, sea, sky, beach, lakes, bush, jungle).
- Free activities for kids and families (eg. Build Up Skate, YMCA, Recreation Centre, Geek fest, cosplay drawing, playing, gaming, playgroups).
- Palmerston Library.
- My School (teachers, class, playing with friends, activities).
- My friends.
- My community and culture (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, kind people, love, my street, my neighbourhood).
- Shopping Centre and shops (e.g. cafes, cinemas, toy and clothes shops).
- Sports & e-sports (team sports, swimming, fishing, skating, gaming).
- Playing (with toys and friends).
- Activities & events (Play Shack, Territory Wildlife Park, Darwin Show).
- Special local sites and places (e.g. the big roundabout with the banyan tree and the Palmerston sign, the bus stop, walking paths).
- Drawing and painting.
- Planes, buses, cars and boats
- Dancing



Summary of what children would like to change about Palmerston

- Have more facilities and activities for children (wave pool, skate parks, ten pin bowling, ice skating, bird park, time zone).
- Stop crime, have safer neighbourhoods and buses.
- Clean up the rubbish.
- More kindness (friendlier people, no bad people, looking after each other, animals, and the environment).
- Make better parks and playgrounds (fix the old ones, have more equipment for little kids, shade, cold water, toilets).
- Make Palmerston Waterpark even better and bigger (more skate ramps, slides and pools, cold water fountain, rubbish bins and shade).
- Make outdoor spaces cooler (have cold water bubblers, more shade, portable cold-rooms).
- More free activities and events for kids in cool places (undercover, air-conditioning).
- Have fewer crocodiles and mosquitos.
- Dogs and cats could be friendlier.
- Have more shops.
- Make things cheaper.



Discussion & next steps

This report has brought together the views and ideas of over 250 children in the Palmerston, with a focus on Gray and Moulden communities. They have shared what they like about where they live, and also told us what they would like to change. While there is much to learn from what children have told us, there are a few areas we wished to highlight, as they were so common in children's conversations.

The importance of connection to particular local places was seen throughout the sessions. Children have told us they like the local facilities involving outdoor activities and play, such as the Palmerston Water Park, skate park, the pool (which they are looking forward to re-opening), and other local parks and playgrounds. However, they want these places to be shadier, cleaner and safer, with access to cool water and toilets. Children shared their appreciation of the natural environment, as they drew and discussed particular trees, flowers, birds, as well as their pets and other animals.

Children have highlighted the importance of their families, friends, carers and homes. Many children drew pictures of their homes, or those of important relatives, with specific rooms and items that they loved pointed out. In our sessions, children would often talk about places in relation to particular people, for example, going to the park *with* mum, or liking school *because* of friends and teachers. Some children pointed out that they liked their neighbourhood and community, this was also often linked to ideas about kind people, friends, family and culture, and sometimes to specific places like bus stops and the big trees at the roundabouts on University Avenue!

Holding one of the sessions at Gray Primary School provided some wonderful insight into Children's appreciation of their school and the supportive relationships and activities they have access to there. Holding that session as part of the NAIDOC celebration activities meant children were in a space that celebrated local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Many children were excited to point out their cultural identity and connection and enthusiastically added this to their drawings and discussion. Local shopping centres, fast-food outlets and other entertainment options were also very popular with this group of children.

Many students noted that they would like more entertainment options such as ten-pin bowling and ice skating in Palmerston. At all sessions (other than those at FaFT), children highlighted a need for more indoor or undercover activities, particularly for the hotter, and the wetter, months of the year. At the skate park session, children suggested a range of ways outdoor spaces could be adapted for the hotter months. Sports and other physical activities also featured in the sessions, with children talking about how they liked to play soccer, basketball, netball, AFL and rugby. They also discussed skateboarding, fishing, swimming and dancing.

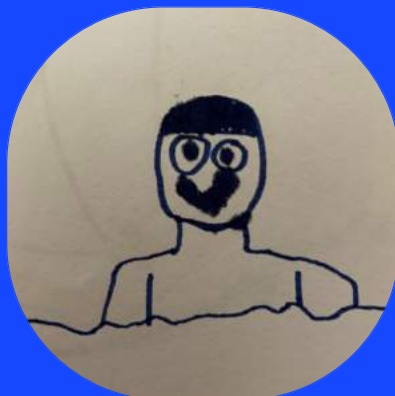
Other than wanting more options for activities, facilities and entertainment, what children would like to change about Palmerston was centred on increasing safety and stopping crime in their neighbourhoods and on buses. They want people to clean up their rubbish and to be kinder to each other (and, as some noted, to animals and the environment).



The Children's Voice project aimed to hear what children in Palmerston (particularly Gray and Moulden) had to tell us about what they like and what they want to change about where they live. It is now up to 'the grown ups' to ensure we listen to what children have told us, and to integrate these ideas and thoughts into the services and activities we provide. We need to continue making the most of each opportunity to listen to what children have to tell us each and every day, through our day to day interactions and engagement.

Palmerston Child and Family Centre will be using the information we have brought together in this report to inform our planning and activities over the coming years. We recently completed a report that documented a series of community consultations with families and services providers in Palmerston (Ennis, 2023). The consultations focused on exploring the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data about Palmerston (see adec.gov.au), and listening to peoples views about what helps families to grow up their children to be strong in their learning and culture.

Our next steps will be to bring together the learning from this report and the AEDC community consultation report. We will feedback the learning to everyone who has been involved in the both projects, and work together to develop a set of resources that can be used by organisations, services, groups and programs focused on working with families and young children in Palmerston. This work is set to begin in early 2024.



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Appendix

Brief review of 'children's voice' type projects



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Brief review of 'children's voice' type projects

Date: June 2nd 2023

Author: Gretchen Ennis

Introduction

This brief report provides an overview of some of the ways communities across Australia have worked together to hear the voices and views of children. The importance of listening to children's views, opinions and ideas is becoming more widely understood and appreciated across the globe. Article 12 of the *United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) supports the right for children to have a say over the things that affect their lives. Finding ways to do this in a meaningful and respectful way is an exciting area of research.

The Palmerston Child and Family Centre (Palmerston CFC) is working with Gretchen Ennis (Useful Projects) to facilitate a process of hearing children's voices in Palmerston. The focus is specifically on the communities of Gray and Moulden. This brief review of similar projects from across the country, forms the first part of our project.

Aim

The aim of the review is to provide a summary of key learning about the processes involved in similar Children's Voice's projects. This will be used to assist with planning the Palmerston CFC Children's Voice's Project.

Methods

During April and May 2023, a web search was undertaken, to locate resources and ideas from other locations that have done similar 'children's voices' projects. This process was supplemented with reports and guides suggested by people in the extended Palmerston CFC community. The information was collated and summarised and is presented below. Links are provided within the text, so that, where possible, the original source can be viewed for further information.

Context Information

To provide context for our exploration, we considered a range of local sources. The NT Government [Story of our Children and Young People](#), which provides data and stories about the wellbeing of children and young people across the six regions of the NT. The [NT Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\) Report](#) also provided some background information. The Office of the Children's Commissioner provides [information about children's rights](#) and issues related to these rights in the NT.

Sources of local, Palmerston focused information and context included [City of Palmerston Community Plan](#), [The Palmerston Child and Family Centre Annual Report](#) (2020) and the Grow Well Live Well Palmerston '[Connection is the Key](#)' (2021) report. The Australian Early Development Census ([AEDC](#)) data for Palmerston provided information about transition aged

children's development across five domains. The *Palmerston Child and Family Services Forum Discussion Summary* (2021) was also helpful in understanding the knowledge, experience and ideas Palmerston children and families have shared in the past.

What has been done before? A few examples

From the Northern Territory (NT) we read about the 2018/19 Katherine Region Communities for Children [Hearing Children's Voices in the Katherine Region project](#). This project aimed to develop a child-centred, place-based engagement framework to learn about what is important to children in the Katherine Region. It involved 54 children (grades, 4, 5 and 6) across four schools and focused on the questions: what is important to children? how can we help children get the most out of school? and how can children best be heard? The related '[Way of Listening to Kid's Voices: In the Big Rivers Region](#)' guide is a straightforward and very helpful resource that provides some great advice and activities for running similar projects (summarised later).

In 2018, Connected Beginnings, completed the '*1000 Community Voices Tennant Creek*' project, which included a children's voices element. They had conversations and used activity sheet-type surveys to engage with 11 children aged 7-13 years about life in Tennant Creek. The Sanderson Alliance (people from families, organisations and schools in Karama, Malak, Anula and Wulagi) also ran a 1000 Community Voices project in 2017 that included 422 responses from adults and children. They engaged with children through using drawing to look at the questions: 'what is best about living in our community?' 'What is hard about living in our community?' and 'What kind of community do you want to live in?'

In 2022, the Darrandirra Child and Family Centre in Darwin, explored similar questions with children, as part their *Community Talks* process. Darrandirra held conversations to update their understanding of community views (that included the voices from the Sanderson Alliance project), and to generate proposals for action. Community conversations aimed to deepen or establish relationships with children, young people, families and workers in many organisations. A NAPCAN children's activity sheet, which focused on drawing to explore community strengths and challenges, was used to explore children's ideas.

Ideas such as [Polyglot Theatre's 'Voice Lab'](#) approach for collecting children's thoughts and opinions using a little tent, camera and microphone help broaden options for hearing children's voices. Polyglot was involved in the October 2020 '*Splash Your Ideas Around - Palmerston*' project where the voices of 16 children were recorded as part of a day of family activities at the Pool. These children's voices can be heard on [the Palmerston Communities for Children Facebook site](#).

Interstate, the Logan Together project (Piscitelli et. al, 2015) engaged with a total of 69 young children aged (4-9 years of age) in early learning centres and schools in Logan, Queensland in school-based workshops about wellbeing. They aimed to understand children's ideas about life in Logan, as part of the development of a community roadmap. Conversations and activities (stories and drawing) were based on the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) indicators for child wellbeing (being loved and safe, having material basics, being healthy, learning, and participating).

Examples of resources for hearing/collecting children's voices

Various guides, toolkits, frameworks and strategies for engaging with children aged 0-12 in a range of Australian contexts were located. For example, The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care

Agency's '[Child's Voice' Toolkit](#) provides principles and ideas engagement with children in the context of family practice (rather than a broader community context).

[NAPCAN undertook a children's voices](#) initiative as part of National Child Protection week in 2016. The project was developed as a way of encouraging local communities to engage young people in conversations and decision-making to build stronger communities. NAPCAN provided downloadable resources and activities and invited community organisations to engage children in this process. A range of engagement activities and resources are provided on their website. As noted earlier, one of these was used in the Darrandirra Child and Family Centre project.

A different kind of resource, one that is focused on the 'end product' rather than the process, is the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency's '[Children's voices: A reflective resource for educators](#)' provided some ideas for how children's thoughts, experiences and ideas can be used to guide educators to be inclusive of all children. It provides an overview of children's voices about difference and inclusion in schools that can be used by educators.

The final example selected here is the previously noted, '[Way of Listening to Kid's Voices: In the Big Rivers Region](#)'. This provides a good overview of a children's voices process based on reflections and learning from the Hearing Children's Voices in the Katherine Region project. This includes a clearly set out 9-step model that covers everything from planning through to feedback and follow up.

Themes found in place-based 'children's voices' reports.

What is good about the places children live?

- Nature, forest, bush, beach, parks, gardens, trees
- Family
- Home
- Friends
- Animals and pets
- Safety

What is bad about the places children live?

- Violence, fights, weapons, speeding, stealing, break-ins, robberies, kidnapping, vandalism.
- Alcohol, drugs, drunk people,
- Bad dogs
- Mean people, bullying, swearing, punching, yelling, bad behaviour
- Littering, rubbish
- Jail
- Fires

What Children like to do

- Playing with family and friends
- Being active (sports)
- Being creative
- Being respected
- Being safe

Children's hopes and dreams for their town/suburb

- No more weapons
- More shops, cafes,
- More things to do.

- Picking up rubbish/stop littering
- Everyone behave, do the right thing, control yourself, walk away.
- Stop meanness, selfishness.
- Lots of personal career ideas (e.g. footy player, pilot, air hostess)

Learnings about the process of 'children's voices' projects

Preparation (Before)

All sources agree that preparation is critical. As a first step this involves ensuring all stakeholders know why they are doing this project and are clear on what they want to find out.

The Big Rivers Region Guide: suggests the following three steps for preparation work.

- Step 1: figure out why we want to listen to kids? What do you want to find out?
- Step 2: What already around: assets mapping - what resources can help us with this project?
- Step 3: Make a plan (purpose and timelines)

In addition to these steps, Harris & Manatakis (2013) suggest providing professional development workshops to ensure all who are facilitating the consultations are supported and have opportunity to tailor approaches to their particular children and contexts.

Implementation (During)

The 'gathering voices' phase needs to be able to adapt to each specific location and context, involving activities that will appeal to each particular group. It is important to ensure that the activities are set in spaces that children are comfortable with, and that adults who they already know and trust work together with the facilitator.

Harris & Manatakis (2013, p.19) suggest a range of activities that children can engage with and express themselves, depending on their age, interests, and available resources. This might include:

- **Engaging children through movement and role play**
Performing artists, educators and children work together to develop short performances which demonstrated children's views about a child friendly community.
- **Engaging children through photography and information technology**
Children express views about things they like and don't like in their house and/or community, through the use of digital cameras and information technology. This strategy can encourage participation of children with disabilities in remote and rural locations and promote the role of parents/grandparents and guardians in encouraging children to have an active voice in their communities.
- **Engaging children through art**
Children express their views through a visual artistic medium. E.g the painting of a mural, sculpture, collage (dependent on the interests of the children)
- **Engaging children through music, dance and song**
Children express views through song and/or dance, with the assistance of a music/dance teacher, working with children to develop songs and performances.
- **Engaging children through themed drawing and painting**
Children express their views through diagrams, pictures, drawings and paintings. Adults were encouraged to include a short, written description on the drawing or

painting of what the picture represents, capturing the children's explanation of their drawing in their own words.

- **Engaging children through story telling**

This approach focused storytelling and use of narratives with a range of options suggested, including children and adults participating in a walking tour/treasure hunt in their local community and developing narratives about their experiences.

Documenting the session is also necessary. This includes documentation during each session as it occurs, and final documentation of children's key messages.

After

Suggestions within the reports for what to do *after* the implementation activities focus' on bringing the voices together are then sharing what has been learning.

This tends to involve:

- Analysing, synthesising and reporting children's messages in ways that are authentic and true to children's meanings while speaking to an official audience.
- Providing the children who were involved in the activities with feedback on what you heard, what has been done with their voices, and what will happen next, with the ideas they shared.
- Providing other stakeholder with the messages from children.
- Tracking use and impacts of children's messages.

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