



Barkly Regional Deal Tennant Creek Childcare Places

Consultancy Report – October 2020

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Executive Summary

The Barkly Regional Deal (BRD) and Connected Beginnings (CB) contracted Bonita Moss from Anglicare NT to talk to families and other relevant stakeholders about childcare places in Tennant Creek.

The foundations for a healthy life course are laid in the womb, in the time before birth and in the very early years of life (the first 1,000 days). These 'early years' are the best time to work to support children's healthy growth and development and head off problems before they arise¹. Early supports, like early childhood education and care, family support and health care services, are great for all children and can be transformative for children with the greatest challenges. Australia's Early Childhood Development (ECD) service system is made up of all of these types of services which are very cost effective in the long run. This is why Governments, institutions, and non-government organisations are so focused on investing to strengthen the 'early years' and assisting families to grow their capabilities to create the best life possible for their children.

The consultations focused on 'childcare – where to next' and 'who should be involved in making change happen'. There was a series of conversations around local needs, capturing ideas as recommendations, and identifying priority actions to guide the BRD next steps and government investment decisions. Further feedback from members of the Barkly Regional Deal Interim Leadership Table and Backbone Team endorsed the recommendations in this consultation report and emphasised the development of a business case. The business case would outline a comprehensive, co-designed ten-year plan for transforming childcare provision in Tennant Creek to better meet the needs of parents, caregivers and children currently not being well-served. Development of this detailed, costed plan should involve stakeholders at all levels of government and leaders from the local community from the outset, in order to leverage existing or improved funding and build a better service system.

The initial process reflected the recent Productivity Commission, *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory Report*, which recommended to just move forward with gathering strategic ideas 'not waiting for perfect information'. It was an 'opportunity to reflect the desired outcomes and prioritised needs of communities, as articulated by community members and local governance bodies'². Face to face interviews, phone interviews and three focus group meetings happened locally. A small number of follow-up interviews with key organisations and people outside Tennant Creek were also conducted. Overall 53 people contributed their views and ideas. Participants included: parents, caregivers, workers, managers and leaders in early years services, Northern Territory and local government departments, non-government and Aboriginal controlled organisations. Participants often spoke from more than one perspective, such as, as a caregiver and a worker, while they teased out the complex issues for families seeking suitable childcare in Tennant Creek.

The consultation enabled broad discussion of current childcare issues. Childcare services are an important part of this ECD system, for both children and parents. At present there is an estimated two-year waiting time for a place at the Tennant Creek Childcare Centre. Also, no Outside School Hours Care service runs for families who need care before and after school time. Participants also focused on how to create a more thriving Tennant Creek and improve environments and experiences for children in the community in which they are born, live, learn and grow. Making sure the right future actions happen so that Wumpurani (Aboriginal) little ones and their families, can access high quality services and supports, were a strong focus. New well documented ECD models operated by Aboriginal-controlled organisation in Alice Springs³ and in the Kimberly region of Western Australia⁴ could help with ideas about what to build and change in Tennant Creek to ensure better child health and development outcomes.

A series of big ideas providing great solutions capable of strengthening the local ECD system were generated and are outlined in the following report. The solutions are also presented as an infographic

¹ Starting Early for a Better Future – Early Childhood Development in the Northern Territory 2018-2028. Available from https://dcm.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/815386/starting-early-for-a-better-future.pdf

² Productivity Commission 2020, *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory*, Study Report, Canberra

³ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Annual Report 2018-2019. Available from https://www.caac.org.au/uploads/pdfs/Annual-Report-18-19_web.pdf

⁴ The Marulu Strategy – Making FASD History. Available from <https://www.marulustrategy.com.au/>

for broad distribution (pages 4-5). Some solutions align closely to the strategic directions and specific targets of *Starting Early for a Better Future*, the ECD plan for the Northern Territory Government 2018 – 2028, and the recommendations of the Tripartite Forum⁵, the advisory group to the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments around children and young people service delivery reforms.

The overarching aim of the report is to ensure that all Tennant Creek children and families are able to give their children the best start in life and the chance to live and thrive in a vibrant community. The participants strongly recommend that immediate actions are needed to meet long-standing needs of parents and caregivers and to plug gaps in the early childhood service system in Tennant Creek, that are available to families in almost every other town in Australia.

In addition to immediate actions, there is a recommendation for a comprehensive and systematic 'hub and spoke' plan with short, medium and long-term goals for Tennant Creek. Tennant Creek is currently the central hub for many child and family services and an ECD plan can guide investment and support service delivery coordination. This report can be a foundation for the towns' plan and can contribute to the broader regional plan as well as make sure young children's needs are represented in current BRD initiatives, such as the plan for trauma informed practice. This action is to make sure that an integrated, collaborative, multi-faceted early childhood service system, with a core framework of child and family services⁶ is supported and funded by local, Northern Territory and the Australian governments.

The following infographics capture the great solutions that were generated and propose an action implementation timeline.



⁵ The Children and Families Tripartite Forum. Available at <https://rmo.nt.gov.au/tripartite-forum>

⁶ Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum's - A child health and early childhood core services model for the Northern Territory. Available from <http://www.amsant.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/What-Are-the-Key-Core-Services-Needed-to-Improve-Aboriginal-Childhood-Outcomes-in-the-NT-Report-FINAL.pdf>



Evidence Supporting the Big ideas and Great Solutions

The *Starting Early for a Better Future* ECD plan for the Northern Territory Government 2018 – 2028⁷, guides delivery of services, including investment and the integration of services to support better early childhood outcomes. It outlines the Northern Territory Government's strategic direction to build early childhood development services into a more comprehensive, high quality, integrated sector. The plan has targets, it aims to increase the number of families who can access an approved childcare centre while they work, from 28% to 50%, and grow the number of professionals in the ECD workforce.

Starting Early for a Better Future also emphasises the importance of an integrated, collaborative ECD service system in building the capabilities of parents, particularly parents in vulnerable families. A well-integrated ECD service system has the capacity to work collaboratively with other initiatives to improve family living situations. This is very important in the Tennant Creek context as the levels of vulnerability in little children are unacceptably high⁸. Poverty is one of the main factors that impact upon this level of vulnerability and it has serious consequences across the whole lifespan. Living in poverty causes chronic stress, which holds back optimal growth and development⁹. Poverty impacts on parents' capacity to parent, it can create toxic circumstances that gets in the way of parents doing the great things they want to for their children.

There is strong evidence of how we can protect children and strengthen parents' capacities. High quality comprehensive programs can help children and young people develop the skills to overcome poverty. Children need a core set of skills and capabilities to manage their lives and achieve their goals and these are most easily and productively developed in the early years of life, particularly the first 1000 days. Also, adults need these same skills to maintain households, provide nurturing and stimulating environments for their children and to model effective planning, problem solving and decision making, bolstered by a strong sense of self-efficacy and resilience. There is a growing body of evidence that the best way to build this constellation of competencies – executive function skills – is through the provision of intensive and integrated programs that span two generations¹⁰.

Many participants said that Tennant Creek needs an additional Aboriginal-led child and family focused service. New well document, evidence informed ECD models operated by Aboriginal-controlled organisation can help with ideas about what to build and change in Tennant Creek to ensure better child health and development outcomes while meeting the specific cultural needs of the community. The Australian Research Alliance for Child and Youth stresses that today we have an unprecedented opportunity to leverage advances in the biological and social sciences to design new strategies capable of transforming the ways services operate to break the cycle of disadvantage and to build the capacities of children, young people, and parents to manage stress and adversity and chart a pathway to health and social wellbeing¹¹. A recent Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islanders Child Care (SNAICC is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children) paper¹², also offered suggestions for funding models that can support this kind of service innovation.

The recommended ideas and suggested actions from the focus groups that emphasise adequate housing and adequate childcare as major incentives to families seeking training and employment are well supported by the evidence of the ongoing detrimental effects of poverty for children and the difficulties of sustaining a workforce in Tennant Creek. Innovative models that support young parents to stay at school, Aboriginal job-seekers to train or undertake work-experience or apprenticeships and Aboriginal parents wishing to study full-time would require stakeholders from the

⁷ *Starting Early for a Better Future*. Op. cit. Page 16.

⁸ *The Story of Our Children-The Barkly* 2019. Available at https://dcm.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/798046/story-of-children-young-people-barkly-2019.pdf

⁹ Productivity Commission 2018, *Rising inequality: A stocktake of the evidence*. Commission Research Paper, Canberra.

¹⁰ ARACY 2020, *Building Children's Potential - A Capability Investment Strategy*, Canberra. Available from: <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/667>

¹¹ Productivity Commission 2018. Ibid.

¹² SNAICC Federal Budget Proposals: *Early childhood education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - August 2020*. Available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/federal-budget-proposals-early-childhood-education-and-care-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-august-2020>

Australian Government, NT government and local government to work with local leaders to leverage existing funds to expand funding and develop new models of childcare.

The concepts of liveability suggested in the focus groups and interviews are supported by evidence on the snowballing detrimental family and community impact on people living in poverty. The evidence of the positive effects of multi-faceted inter-generational programs point towards the need for an integrated, collaborative system which included family, health and education services, of which high quality affordable childcare options is an important component.

Consultation Methodology

The consultation process to investigate the multiple and diverse needs for childcare for all families in Tennant Creek was planned to enable many local community voices to be captured. The impetus for the project was the recognition by the BRD that the lack of available childcare options has significant social and economic impacts in Tennant Creek. There was also an urgent need to address equity and vulnerability issues for many Aboriginal children and families. The focus of the consultations was around improved childcare options - 'what a better local childcare service system should deliver' and 'who should be involved in making change happen'. The process recognised that Tennant Creek is a diverse community with diverse needs to be met. Consequently, the consultancy was closely supported by CB to work with organisations like Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, Anyinginyi Health and Family programs, the Tennant Creek Childcare Centre and the Barkly Regional Council. The existing CB Jina (Prevention and Early Intervention) Working Group and members of the BRD Governance Table were also incorporated in the consultation process.

The consultant worked in Tennant Creek during the week commencing 29 June, 2020. The CB Director, Deborah Hartman collaborated to plan the overall logistics and co-facilitate focus groups. BRD Backbone team members documented some focus groups. The consultations were also advertised in the local paper and through local networks.

Three focus groups were conducted in Tennant Creek, they were semi-structured in that each group had some key questions and a process to record and feedback to the group the issues and recommended actions as they were raised. The focus group process allows participants to tell their own stories and express their opinions. In Tennant Creek, they were a way to consult with larger numbers of Aboriginal parents, community members and diverse professionals. Other parents of small children who wanted to access childcare services were also invited to take part in face to face interviews.

Focus Group 1 – Aboriginal parents and community members resident in Community Living Areas in Tennant Creek were the target group. Julalikari Council Community Development staff (Community Connectors) supported access to the group and also took part in the session held at Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre.

Focus Groups 2 & 3 – Professionals working across child and family wellbeing services were the target group and the session were held at the CB Office, Patterson Street Tennant Creek.

Face to face interviews and phone interviews were also completed with stakeholders outside Tennant Creek. Overall 50 people, including 22 Aboriginal participants contributed their views and ideas. A Consultation list is attached.

Documentation was reviewed with CB staff ensure there was shared understanding about the needs, ideas and solutions that emerged across the consultation sessions. The information produced was then used to create the following report.

Consultation Results for Tennant Creek Childcare – Where to Next

Eight big ideas were identified from the consultation. These ideas and potential solutions are described here. Some quotes have been included to emphasise issues raised. Overwhelmingly, discussion pointed to ensuring greater access and opportunity for everyone, striking a balance around short term access needs and long-term plans to meet long-standing gaps and future needs. Other critical requirements are sustained training for local workforce, new ways of working, leadership and partnerships for Indigenous equity, technical and resourcing supports for Tennant Creek.

1. Affordable, Inclusive Childcare Services

There should be affordable, inclusive childcare services for everyone in Tennant creek (including Aboriginal families and families with children with disabilities). These services should be designed locally to meet the diverse needs of the Tennant Creek population.

2. Foundational Principles Underpin Solutions

The principles needed to ground the development and extension of a local Early Childhood Education and Care Service System should include:

- Aboriginal voices must be included in all services to address current inequities (through management committees, decision-making tables or working parties, or through Aboriginal controlled and operated services). Exclusion is a barrier to developing quality culturally appropriate services and decreases individual and community trust in programs and services. Recent and historical failures to incorporate Aboriginal people and their representative Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) in child and family service governance and decisions are critical to the nurturing of Aboriginal children.
- new models of care must build on the strengths of existing service providers and organisations.
- a locally developed early childhood system should be collaborative, integrated and connected so that the diverse needs of all children and families are met and the system provides adequate infrastructure to enable local people, employment, business and the economy to thrive.

On a positive note, it was recognised that significant policy reforms focused on increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and community control are now in-place. Local Decision Making¹³ is a Northern Territory Government commitment to provide opportunities to transfer government service delivery to Aboriginal Territorians and organisations, based on their community aspirations. Northern Territory Government agencies partner with Aboriginal communities to assist the transition of government services and programs to community control. A similar approach underpins the Barkly Regional Deal processes that are built around the community governance framework that drives the implementation of the Barkly Regional Deal, including a Governance Table. The Governance Table includes representatives from key local ACCO's.

The BRDs commitment to service system reform also includes providing better therapeutic recovery supports to people with complex needs resulting from experiences of trauma. Incorporating ECD services into any planned trauma response initiatives is essential.

3. Urgent Unmet Needs and Long-Standing Gaps Need Immediate Actions

There are currently fewer childcare options in Tennant Creek compared to many regional towns in Australia. Overall the voice of employers and people who need care was desperate and consistent - there are big demands and few options. The multiple ways that the lack of childcare options stifles recruitment for employers and constrains choices for parents and carers in town were illustrated many times:

- Non-working parents are anxious and unsure if they can enter or re-enter the workforce
- There are many Aboriginal families who wish to study and work and have more capacity to support their children. They want affordable, culturally safe options for care

¹³ Available at <https://ldm.nt.gov.au/home>

- Families need support when they have children with additional needs
- Local foster carers can sustain providing a safe loving home to children for longer when childcare is available
- Employers hate telling potential employees that childcare is so limited in Tennant Creek
- Childcare is vital to business growth in the town, it will negatively impact on recruitment for planned projects like the Solar Farm

Local childcare supply does not meet demand. Also, there are few care options for people who work irregular hours or on weekend. Simply addressing low availability of childcare places by extending the current childcare centre is one solution to increase supply. This is urgent. However, it will not address the complex individual, service, social and cultural factors that impact access or contribute to increased wellbeing outcomes more broadly across the Tennant Creek population.

Urgent unmet needs and long-standing gaps include: Out of School Hours Care in the afternoons; Centre based care often called Long-day care places, particularly for babies and toddlers; Family Day Care; Kinship care for children at risk; Emergency and respite care; Care linked to study or training, especially for young parents, including high school students. There are immediate actions identified to plug these gaps and address these needs.

4. Additional Models of Care

Increased investment and collaborative planning are needed to respond to urgent and long-standing needs and create a 'joined up' integrated ECD system capable of providing equitable access and achieving better outcomes. Funding and regulatory stakeholders from all levels of government could collaborate with local decision makers to provide an authorising environment to leverage existing and additional funding to build on and extend ECD care models, to develop and trial a unique regional arrangement in the Barkly. This requires starting additional service models and strengthening others:

New Aboriginal-controlled, culturally appropriate and culturally safe multi-purpose childcare service, building on the existing services in Aboriginal organisations

This was about the need for an additional stand-alone Aboriginal childcare hub to support working and non-working Aboriginal families, carers and children. Many local Aboriginal families wish to work or train and have more capacity to support their kids, and they prefer an Aboriginal controlled childcare service as opposed to a general, mainstream childcare service. Participants pointed to where the ECD system needs to expand to be able to respond better; culturally suitable and safe access to care options that include long day care, occasional and respite care.

They also identified current gaps in specific professional diagnostic and therapeutic support services; responding to developmental conditions, disabilities and additional needs identified in children's NDIS plans and resources to support parents about child developmental issues. This

includes responding to children who may have Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Participants identified limited professional capacity to deliver therapeutic, trauma-informed interventions and care at the scale to make a difference to children lives. Resources to build intergenerational language and culture programs that can strengthen children's identity were highlighted as areas to improve.

The service was described as a childcare centre 'hub' with the potential for outreach into other smaller communities (spoke locations) to deliver specialist services in a culturally safe way. A multi-purpose complex that all relevant service providers can feed into and that can focus on working before the gap in health and wellbeing opens up for Aboriginal children, was suggested.

What about those kids with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder they need help... can we do something for them?

Lots of families and kids have hearing problems... they need help

Families need access to washing machines... this could happen when they drop kids off

Not enough services for people outside of town, they have to be looked at too

Not enough language and culture in services

The current user-pays mainstream model of childcare has created barriers for many Aboriginal families, another model is urgently needed in Tennant Creek. Potentially with open access and appointment free support. This model requires different funding through a stream like the Community Child Care Fund to enable affordable access to childcare services, but also different funding arrangements to enable delivery of range of wrap-around supports that families and children need to thrive in the early years. SNAICC is currently calling for the Federal Government to urgently increase subsidised access to childcare and introduce an alternative community focused funding program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECD services. Service need funding that recognises their unique role in providing cultural, integrated early childhood development supports to children, families and communities¹⁴.

Two promising well documented ECD models operated by Aboriginal-controlled organisation in Alice Springs¹⁵ and in the Kimberly region of Western Australia¹⁶ could help with ideas about what to build and change in Tennant Creek to ensure better child outcomes.

In Alice Springs, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, is partnering with the Northern Territory Department of Education to integrate child health and child development services for children under five years to make sure they are healthy and ready for school. They operate two services; Congress Childcare, a long day care centre for children aged 6 months to 5 years, for working families and for a cohort of children who are living in out-of-home care and also separate Child Health and Development Centre for children from local non-working families, aged 6 months to 3 years. Both Centres use an international evidence-based program modified for our Australian context and adapted in language for Aboriginal communities. The aim is to deliver therapeutic day care to the children who can most benefit from it. This will help close the gap before it opens and increase health, educational attainment and wellbeing across the lifespan.

In the Kimberly region of Western Australia, the Fitzroy Valley Community is driving the Marulu Strategy, a comprehensive response to the identified high numbers of children and families impacted by FASD and Early Life Trauma(ELT). The strategy has four goals that are focused on; preventing FASD and ELT, connecting families to healing and therapeutic services, building the capacity of the service system to enhance services for children, adults and families impacted by FASD and ELT and developing a sustainable community and national response to these issues.

In Tennant Creek Aboriginal family members want to be involved in developments and want more information about specific services and how they can support children to develop well. Overall there was low exposure to any formal childcare services for the Aboriginal family members who took part in consultations by attending Focus Group 1. Consequently, specific details about what should happen in any new service needs strong collaboration with community and more detailed concept design.

The recent Productivity Commission Study Report¹⁷ stressed that for the NT to improve outcomes for children and families a new approach to service planning, one capable of delivering high quality evidence informed interventions with children and families and based on a public health approach is essential. A public health approach to integrated family, health and education services is also supported as a model for the delivery of family services by the peak body Family and Relationship Services Australia¹⁸. According to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum¹⁹ core services should be available in eight key areas; quality antenatal and postnatal care; clinical and public health services for children and families; a nurse home visiting program; parenting programs; child development programs; two years of preschool; targeted services for vulnerable children and families; and supportive social determinants policies. These services need to be responsive to, and

¹⁴ SNAICC Federal Budget Proposals: Early childhood education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - August 2020. Available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/federal-budget-proposals-early-childhood-education-and-care-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-august-2020>

¹⁵ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Annual Report 2018-2019. Available from https://www.caac.org.au/uploads/pdfs/Annual-Report-18-19_web.pdf

¹⁶ The Marulu Strategy – Making FASD History. Available from <https://www.marulustrategy.com.au/>

¹⁷ Productivity Commission 2020, Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory, Study Report, Canberra . Available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/nt-children/report/nt-children-overview.pdf>

¹⁸ Toumbourou, J., Hartman, D., Field, K., Jeffery, R., Brady, J., Heaton, A., Ghayour-Minaie, M., & Heerde, J. (2017). Strengthening prevention and early intervention services for families into the future. Deakin University and Family and Relationship Service Australia

¹⁹ What are the Core Service Needed To Improve Aboriginal Childhood Outcomes in the NT (2016).. Available at <http://www.amsant.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/What-Are-the-Key-Core-Services-Needed-to-Improve-Aboriginal-Childhood-Outcomes-in-the-NT-Report-FINAL.pdf>

driven by, the community at a local level. The Final Productivity Commission Study Report also recommended that the NTG undertake a Scoping Study relevant to ECD service availability in the eight key areas and the potential of locating them within comprehensive primary health care services. The results of this will be practical for local ECD planning and resourcing. It is worthwhile to note that much of the service system infrastructure for this combination of services is currently available in Tennant Creek.

Extension of existing pre-school service to include entry for three-year-olds

Many children in Tennant Creek start school without the foundations they need to take advantage of the learning opportunities school provides. Our schools are struggling to help them catch up. Two years of preschool can help three-year-olds receive the right amount of high-quality learning to make a sustained impact on their education. Two years are recognised as being better than one, especially for children from disadvantaged communities. Many Aboriginal children can benefit from this in Tennant Creek. Three-year-old pre-school is currently operating at Ludmilla Primary School in Darwin and through a long-day care centre in Katherine. The Australian Capital Territory runs Koori Preschools that delivery two years of education to around 100 Koori children. Currently options are only available when parents attend with their three-year-olds. These are: Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program and Pikka-pikka-Kari Playgroup that delivers the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).

Extension of existing long day care service to open up more baby and toddler places

Centre-based care is available but very limited in Tennant Creek. Tennant Creek Childcare Centre Inc (TC CCC) run by a volunteer parent Management Committee (MC) and approved by government to care for up to 50 young children aged between 0 to 5 years old each day. Around 44 children from 30 families were enrolled at the service at the time of the consultancy. Availability of a place or finding any other stable suitable childcare options is a challenge particularly for babies and toddlers. The centre is not running at capacity or open to taking new enrolments due to the long waiting list (about two years), staff to child ratio requirements and the impacts of COVID. The original proposal for the building was for 75 places, but a smaller less costly 50 place centre was constructed.

In August 2020 due to staffing shortages the MC proposed a temporary closure to focus on recruitment processes. However, the closure did not eventuate. After working with government advisors and others to explore viability options the MC is in negotiation with Kentish Lifelong Learning and Care Inc (Kentish), a not-for-profit provider operating in several Northern Territory locations, to take over management of the centre. The expected date for the handover is late 2020. The continuation of a quality long-day care service is vitally important and is the current short-term focus of local efforts. The additional expertise of another professional early-childhood provider in Tennant Creek, will open up the possibility for partnership arrangements for the provision of extended and enhanced options for both baby and toddler places and for out of school hours care.

Overall the Australian Government is the most significant funder of childcare services largely through providing Child Care Benefits to participating parents. The Northern Territory Government through Department of Education Early Childhood Education and Care Division provides ongoing additional resourcing and capacity building support. For example, it currently provides rent free access to TC CCC through an agreement with Tennant Creek Primary School Council. Also, rent free accommodation is provided to the TC CCC Director through Department of Trade Business and Innovation.

Explore Care Needs of Young Parents

Aboriginal participants said that young people need to be talked to directly about the care supports they require. There is a knowledge gap about what young parents want. Especially the ones that don't come to any early years programs and high school aged parents. The Strong Young Parents Program that delivers training and provides childcare at Larapinta, Maningrida and Palmerston CFCs was viewed as a potential model of local innovation.

Out of School Hours and Vacation Care

The need to access Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) in early mornings and after school time is urgent. A network of OSHC services provides before and after-school hours and vacation care services for school aged children in most towns in Australia. These services enable children to access quality care during the hours they are not in school and while their parents work. They are critical supports for many employed families.

OSHC this is centre-based childcare for families who need care before and/or after school, on student-free days and during the school holidays/ vacation. It's only for primary school-age children

Most OSHC are operated by community based or private organisations and School Councils. NT services operate usually only after school until 6 pm, because school hours here commence earlier than some states. 49 NT OSHC services are listed on the National Quality Authorities website for the NT ²⁰. In Tennant Creek OSHC has operated in the past but not for few years. It is understood that there are current plans to submit proposals for an OSHC program.

Already I'm really worried about what will happen after my little kids start school. Will I just have to quit my job?

Family Day Care

Family Day Care (FDC) does not operate in Tennant Creek although Kentish supports two Out of Home Care / Purchased Home Base Carer placements for Territory Families. They are also currently in discussion to take over as operators of the TC CCC. Starting FDC in Tennant Creek would increase available childcare places. Potentially they can support Aboriginal carers start a FDC business, including carers whose home might not be suitable through the delivery of 'in venue' care, for example where care is provided at a community hall.

Kentish is a Registered Training Organisation that currently delivers formal training to childcare staff across a range of children's services including long day care, OSHC and FDC settings. In Darwin they also deliver resourcing to increase cultural competency of childcare staff and foster carers.

Family Day Care is when a child is looked after by a carer, who operates a small childcare business from their own home. Each is a registered home-based business and most work through an approved coordination unit (scheme) that regularly monitors care provision, children's development and ensures professional supports.

Priority Solutions

Participants identified possible solutions to these ongoing issues that could be implemented in Tennant Creek. They emphasised that local solutions and models of care appropriate to Tennant Creek were needed. Below is a summary of their suggested actions.

Extend TC CCC capacity

TC CCC needs more places particularly for babies and toddlers. BRD should lobby for funds to expand the capacity of TC CCC. It was suggested that there is some possibility for expansion in the existing location, around 80 places rather than current 50. A number of creative solutions are currently being discussed: maximise numbers of children in specific age groups and place a demountable in the grounds for 3-to-5year olds, extend the TC CCC by adding another nursery room, locate a group in the underutilised room adjacent to FaFT.

These are all currently being explored. BRD needs to work with the operator of the Childcare Centre to finalise options for extending places. This should include exploring creative ways to better align childcare and preschool attendance to maximise service access. A more responsive wait list

²⁰ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. Available at https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/national-registers/services?f%5B0%5D=service_state%3ANT

	including a priority needs approach for the Centre and possible three-year-old pre-school options should be explored. A collaboration with the Pre-school and new TC CCC Management means this could also free up space in TC CCC for more children. However, both governments also need to be involved in solutions as increasing access will require significant infrastructure investment.
Explore Needs of Young Parents	BRD to support an ACCO to lead discussions with young parents to ensure their needs and preferences are captured and can be responded to well. This can be done through their current reference group which includes young women with strong links across the town.
Extend Support Options for Three Year Olds	ACCO's and their partners to lead discussions with the community, the school and DOE about extending options for three-year-olds to be included in existing pre-school and other early learning programs in Tennant Creek.
Start Outside School Hours Care	ACCO's and their partners to lead a feasibility study and submission to start OSHC as soon as practicable. This may need to be in partnership with a larger care provider like Kentish, YMCA or Camp Australia.
Start Family Day Care	BRD to support ACCO's and their partners to lead discussions with key FDC providers about opportunities and actions especially how to grow Aboriginal FDC in Tennant Creek.
CB in Partnership with ACCO's and move forward an ECD data working party	<p>This is focused on a situational analysis of use across all local ECD and child health services. The aim is to join the dots on who uses which services and who is missing out. This is essential to strengthen service delivery planning and to make sure that children and families receive the amount of support (program dosage) that can make sustained impact. Data is currently held across many organisations and governments and join it up will provide a sense as this report was about community voices, it does not provide data about levels of need for particular services – more specific data will help shape service improvements across the system.</p> <p>Current data indicates that there are over 400 children 0-5 years old in Tennant Creek, the vast majority of these are Aboriginal. Attendance and enrolment records of early years services seem to indicate that at least half of these children do not regularly attend any service. Eighty-seven Aboriginal children aged 0-5 live in the Community Living Areas of Tennant Creek and the majority of them do not regularly attend early learning services.</p>

5. A Funded ECD Sector Workforce Development Support Initiative

A local workforce is an essential part of the infrastructure required for an integrated ECD service system. Discussion reflected that urgent and sustained action is needed to boost the local care workforce. 'Growing our own' was viewed as the sturdiest workforce foundation. Better outcomes for children and families can only flow when a professional, qualified, responsive, collaborative workforce is accessible. This is highly relevant to the NTG Starting Early for a Better Future target to deliver increased access to childcare.

The ECD workforce is a broad group including coordinators and managers, early childhood teachers, teaching assistants and para-professionals, childcare workers for pre-primary and primary aged children, early childhood intervention professionals, administrative staff, community service workers and relevant health and social welfare professionals. There was recognition that care-giving and educating young children is complex and requires a range of qualifications and access to ongoing professional development. Young children achieve better outcomes with qualified educators, especially when delivering evidence-based programs.

The need for culturally safe services and culturally appropriate curriculum also points to the need for language and culture specialists in early childhood services. The current Tennant Creek population includes members of at least 6 different Aboriginal language groups from the Barkly region.

Access to ongoing training was identified as a huge gap across many care professions: Childcare, Aged Care, Disability Support, Allied Health, Family Support etc. The success of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and provision of more integrated services also hinges on availability of trained professionals.

Training for the sector had stalled until the current CB ECD workforce training initiative commenced. The twelve people enrolled are current employees in Tennant Creek ECD services. The funding also secured a qualified local ECD professional to provide mentoring and assessment support. The delivery strategy was praised as innovative, empowering and high-quality. The CB manager collaborated with the local Workforce Training Coordinator to secure flexible funding and contract a private provider willing to deliver regular face to face block training in Tennant Creek. Continuing the momentum of this face to face training was viewed as essential.

It was suggested that the BRD Regional Workforce Strategy Working Group focus on how to scope and fund a specific ECD sector development initiative, because the capacity of the community-controlled early years sector is a key reform priority of the new Closing the Gap Agreement and essentially linked to stronger child outcomes. SNAICC²¹ is currently calling for the Federal Government to invest in place-based workforce capacity building initiatives to increase the effectiveness of care and learning interventions.

Also, because the ECD system is becoming more integrated, there is an opportunity to support people who are training to work with the broader ECD workforce including the range of professionals that work with children and their families across health and family services. The local workforce plan should recognise and strengthen opportunities through pathways planning, for example through the community service qualifications at the high school – School Based Apprenticeships and the VET in Schools program.

Priority Solutions	
Career Pathways and sustained training	Innovative models of training currently available in Tennant Creek should be supported, extended and built on. Career Pathways need to be built into each early years' service and across the local ECD sector as a whole.
Tennant Creek ECD Workforce Plan	BRD Regional Workforce Strategy Working Group to work with ACCO's to secure investment to fund a specific ECD sector workforce development initiative. This will respond to current and anticipated future demands to meet closing the gap targets and the ECD regulatory environment (qualifications that are required to meet benchmarks for the National Quality Framework and delivery of preschool). This action could commence in early 2012. The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy will be finalised mid-2021. Northern Territory Government commitments through the National Workforce Strategy will be clearer in 2021 and can be folded into and support a local Tennant Creek ECD Workforce plan.
Recruitment and retention	BRD Regional Workforce Strategy Working Group to work with Northern Territory Government to implement strategies to focus on addressing recruitment and retention challenges in ECD in Tennant Creek.

6. Aboriginal Kinship Care

Better sustained implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle was called for. Expanding the Aboriginal Carers Growing Up Aboriginal Children program in Tennant Creek presents an important opportunity that could benefit local

Aboriginal Kinship Care is a way of finding stable, loving homes that are culturally-connected for Aboriginal children in care. Kinship Carers can include grandparents, aunts or uncles, or other community members.

²¹ SNAICC, 2020. *Op.cit.* Page 4.

Aboriginal children and families²². Participants said kinship carers need resources and support and kids need appropriate models of care so they can stay in Tennant Creek with their families and connected to culture. Lack of care options is the main reason why children are placed in other large towns like Alice Springs.

Aboriginal Kinship Carer needs were specifically raised; many have less access to financial and material resources and care for more children in impoverished and social challenging home environments. Participants said there was a lack of understanding of carer support needs including access to adequate housing for families who want to be kinship carers. They said real progress in Tennant Creek is tied to tackling the social determinants of wellbeing, especially housing access.

Childcare can play a supportive role in Kinship care, it provides respite from care, additional nurturance and stimulating experiences for children.

Aboriginal Carers Growing Up Aboriginal Children is the key NTG program reform in this area and eight Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are now funded to lead the work to find, prepare and support Aboriginal Carers to look after Aboriginal children. The Kalano Kinship Carer team in Katherine and the Larrakia Nation service in Darwin are examples of Aboriginal Carer support services. Last year was the first time in the Northern Territory when there were more Aboriginal kinship carers than foster carers looking after children and young people in care. Tennant Creek needs to be part of this positive development.

It's a huge problem for us placing children and recruiting carers...

People may be interested in being foster carers but no childcare access means they can't continue to work so it's not a real choice

Any care plan we create cannot include childcare... kids just miss out

It's not just the respite ... many young children come with past experiences that have deeply impacted on them...they have complex needs and behaviours, sometimes very challenging behaviours...that's a big demand on any foster/ kinship carers... childcare supports them to continue caring

Priority Solutions	
Kinship Care support is essential	BRD to work with NTG to secure support for local ACCO's to lead a recruitment, capacity building and support program for Aboriginal kinship carers such as the Aboriginal Carers Growing Up Aboriginal children program ²³ .
Respond to Housing	BRD to work with NTG to secure investment similar to the 'Room to Breathe' Housing Initiative ²⁴ so housing upgrades are available for Aboriginal kinship carers in Tennant Creek.

7. Child Friendly / Family Friendly Spaces Support Community Life

Early childhood development and local environments are intertwined, that is why it is important to have place-based investment to promote healthy child development in lower income communities. Place based initiatives and other child friendly efforts work to promote and protect child wellbeing through growing healthy communities. Child Friendly Alice²⁵ and Communities for Children Alice Springs²⁶ are geographically close examples. Place-based initiatives always focus on collaboration and employ local decision-making to plan actions.

²² SNAICC – Reviewing Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Northern Territory 2019. Available at https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ATSICPP-compliance-review-2019_NT.pdf

²³ Aboriginal Carers Growing Up Aboriginal children program Grant Information. Available at https://territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/558246/Aboriginal-Carers-Growing-Up-Aboriginal-Children-Grants-Round-2.pdf

²⁴ Room to Breathe Program Design Guidelines. Available at https://ourfuture.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/821582/room-to-breathe-program-design-guidelines.pdf

²⁵ Child Friendly Alice. Available at <https://childfriendlyalice.weebly.com/>

²⁶ Communities for Children. Available at <https://www.anglicare-nt.org.au/service/communities-for-children/>

Access to playgrounds, parks, shops and local services like childcare, playgroups, kindergartens, schools, health services and libraries are foundational in functioning communities. They lay the foundations of a good community for young children make sense in terms of local place-based resource investment. Disadvantaged communities, lack of resources and opportunities can result in worse child development outcomes that can persist from one generation to the next. They are key factors that can promote healthy child development in lower income communities.

Tennant Creek needs to expand its liveability for local families and visitors. This component is essential to retaining workers in Tennant Creek by providing better amenities. The majority of the population of Tennant Creek are young people and young families, who are currently under-serviced by local, NT and Australian government infrastructure, such as child-care, housing, parks and public facilities and training opportunities. A strong theme was that more resources have to be made available to families to promote healthy development and improve the community to become a more child friendly place. Depleted infrastructure was seen to be just one more reason for families to leave and for negative myths about Tennant Creek to dampen optimism about the many positive features of the community.

It's just so hot out there most of the year, why can't we have a water park?

...we need the park upgrade ... everyone goes there in the afternoon with kids, because there is hardly anywhere else

...no little one's library book reading program... that would be great

Priority Solutions

Increase child and family friendly spaces

BRD to ensure that plans to make Tennant Creek more liveable also focus on actions to strengthen Tennant Creek as a Family and Child Friendly place. The first step is to refine local ideas into priorities and implement a long-term action plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the participants strongly suggested that the time for action is now and that many of the issues raised and solutions suggested have been advocated for by parents, carers and organisations for many years. There was enormous energy and willingness to make change and to be part of building new models of care that would address long standing needs. The participants were calling on the BRD and the various levels of government to support the suggested actions, work with organisations interested in developing new service models and to provide funding so that there could be immediate implementation of some of the required actions.

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Consultation List

Date	Stakeholder/type of interview/location/number of participants
24/06/2020	Department of Education - Early Childhood Education and Care, face to face interview, Darwin (4)
29/06/2020	Territory Families, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
29/06/2020	Member for Barkly and foster carer, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
30/06/2020	Local Aboriginal Community members, Focus Group 1, Tennant Creek (12)
30/06/2020	TC Primary School, DoE, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
1/07/2020	FaFT Mums, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (2)
	CatholicCare, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
2/02/2020	Practitioner, Focus Group 2, (10) Representatives from: TC Women's Refuge Territory Families NT Department of Health, Child and Family Nurse DoE Early Years Disability Coordinator Julalikari Child and Family Centre Julalikari Early Years Programs Julalikari Board Anyinginyi MESCSH Program CatholicCare NT
3/02/2020	Aboriginal Practitioner, Focus Group 3, (6) Representatives from : Connected Beginnings Anyinginyi Grow Well Program Anyinginyi Stronger Families Program
4/02/2020	Barkly Regional Council, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
4/02/2020	Department of Business, Trade and Innovation, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
4/02/2020	DoE, Barkly, face to face interview, Tennant Creek (1)
7/07/2020	NDIS Engagement Manager consultation, phone interview (1)
17/07/2020	TTCC Management Committee, phone interview (1)
17/07/2020	Boosting the Local Care Workforce, phone interview (1)
20/07/2020	Boosting the Local Care Workforce, phone interview (2)
10/08/2020	Kentish Lifelong Learning and Care Incorporated, face to face interview, Darwin (1)
10/08/2020	Department of Education - Early Childhood Education and Care - workforce development strategy, phone interview (1)