

# Child care dismay

By FERGUS McEWAN

THE impending withdrawal by managers of a Palmerston child care centre is a "cruel blow" for parents, a senior polmie said.

NT Opposition leader Terry Mills said last week's decision by Mission Australia to stop running the Gray Early Learning Centre on December 22 was a "major headache" to parents of the 40 youngsters on its books.

Mr Mills also slammed the Department of Education and Training (DET) for leaving a new child care centre in the Palmerston GP Super Clinic unused for more than a year, calling it a "double hit for families".

Mission Australia NT director Phillip Leslie said the charity, which took

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I realise this decision is not an easy one for parents, but we've given them as much notice as possible to allow them to make the best arrangements for next year

over the Gray Early Learning Centre in 2009, had decided not to renew its lease on the building for financial reasons.

He explained the estimated cost of necessary improvements to the site was "a fair bit more than we could afford", but did not give a figure.

"We try to offer the best service we can with the funding we have, but unfortunately it's not always good news," he said.

"I realise this decision is not an

easy one for parents, but we've given them as much notice as possible to allow them to make the best arrangements for next year.

"Hopefully by then there will be another operator at the Gray centre."

Mr Leslie said the Gray centre's nine full and part-time staff would be offered jobs at the charity's existing child care centre in Stuart Park and its new operation at Wulagi Primary School in Darwin's northern suburbs.

He said parents of the children who

attended Gray had been encouraged to seek a transfer to Wulagi, but admitted most would "prefer their children to remain in child care in Palmerston".

DET early childhood general manager Anna King confirmed the owner of the Gray Early Learning Centre site was looking for another operator to start immediately after the school holidays and would inform parents.

She said negotiations with a potential operator of the empty Palmerston Early Childhood and Care Centre within the super clinic were in the "very final stages" and the service should begin around the end of the year. She added the Palmerston City Council-operated Gray childcare centre has not been affected by the withdrawal of Mission Australia.

## Mental health funding triples

FUNDING for mental health facilities has more than tripled in a decade, Children and Families Minister Kon Vatskalis has revealed.

Mr Vatskalis said the Territory Government now budgeted \$48 million a year on tackling mental health issues, which affected one in five Territorians and were considered a "major priority".

"This mental health funding is a significant commitment to addressing an issue of significant public importance," Mr Vatskalis said.

Speaking at an event during Mental Health Week last week, he said the government was spending more money on frontline workers, education and targeted intervention for young people at risk.

Mr Vatskalis said \$7.8m would be spent over the next three years on suicide prevention strategies and child and adolescent services.

Another \$14 million had been pledged to build two secure care facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs for young people and adults.



Bell Shakespeare actors (in black) Teresa Jakovich, Nathaniel Middleton, George Banders and Adele Querol entertained students Summer McGuire, Caelen Bailey, Tess Hales, Kira Witte and Jasmine Broucker-Johnston

## Shake-spear-ing it up at school

By CLAYTON BENNETT

STUDENTS at Nightcliff Middle School had a taste of culture when Bell Shakespeare dropped by last week.

A travelling road show from the national touring theatre company performed *A Midsummer Nights Dream* to students in years seven and eight.

The play was adapted for young audiences and placed in a modern setting, re-named *Midsummer Madness*.

Senior teacher Sandi van Duren said the production was an introduction to Shakespeare.

"It gave the students an opportunity to recognise Shakespeare and his plays as timeless," she said.

"Students now see

Shakespeare in a different light... it brought a sense of comedy, fun and an entertainment value to the forefront when studying (his plays)."

The students who may have normally found the Bard's prose boring instead were captivated by entertainers who brought the words to life.

Student Tess Hales said she thought the show was

"entertaining."

"It's interesting to see how he (Shakespeare) uses words," she said.

Bell Shakespeare actor Teresa Jakovich said they always had a good response when performing at schools.

"Kids don't understand Shakespeare unless they see it performed," she said.

"When they see it they open up to it."

## New stats show banned drinkers register works

ALCOHOL-FUELLED assaults have seen a "significant reduction" due to the Banned Drinkers Register, the government has claimed.

Chief Minister Paul Henderson said booze-related violence went down 20 per cent in Darwin and 23 per cent in Palmerston in the first three months of the scheme from July to September, compared to the previous year.

In the three-month period, there were 196 assaults involving grog in Darwin (down from 247 in the same period in 2010) and 52 incidents in Palmerston (down from 68 last year).

Figures show there were 415 names on the register when it came into force on July 1 and this had grown to 1576 names by September 30. So far, 1109 takeaway alcohol sales have been

refused to people on the register from a total of 1.4 million bottle shop transactions.

"This significant reduction in alcohol-related assaults means less pain in the community and proves our policy is working," Mr Henderson said.

"It's early days but there are positive signs the register is an effective tool," Alcohol Policy Minister Della Lawrie said, adding it was the only new policy which could explain the sudden drops in crime.

NT Police assistant commissioner Mark Payne said the register "gives us a real opportunity to make inroads into anti-social behaviour".

"This was never going to be an overnight fix, but it's a tremendous tool which has already given us some wins on the board," he said.

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