GREAT START GREAT FUTURE
FACT SHEET

WHAT WE KNOW

Getting the right start in life is essential for children’s later success. It shapes a child’s ability to thrive at school, stay healthy and socially connected and contribute to society – socially and economically.

The pattern of a child’s later life is set in the early years and even before birth. This is supported by a wide range of research evidence from education, health, justice and economic experts.

A child's family is central – effective engagement with parents is an important first step. Babies and young children whose mothers have access to good ante and post natal care, adequate nutrition before and after birth, and who reside in a caring, stable environment with ample opportunity to interact and form relationships with important people in their lives, are more likely to thrive.

The critical significance of the early years for brain development – starting from infancy, routine assessment of a child’s development, social and emotional wellbeing, vision, hearing, oral health, language and communication skills are essential. Inadequate nutrition, coupled with factors such as poverty, housing instability, smoking, family violence, drug and alcohol use, and lack of access to quality education and support are strong predictors of poor child outcomes.

Investment in the early years is an investment in the economy – Over the life course, studies estimate that for every dollar spent on quality universally available early childhood education and care programs, seven to eight dollars are returned to individuals and society through increased tax revenues, and reduced school, health and criminal justice expenditure, compared to the return on investment of forty-five cents for every dollar spent on youth job training.
Quality matters – high quality early childhood education and care services provide children with early skills and knowledge to build on for the rest of their lives.

The health care system has a pivotal role to play in the early years – Programs that facilitate good health care and adequate nutrition before and after birth are essential to improving childhood developmental outcomes.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Families as First Teachers program

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is driving generational change and assisting in building resilient families in the Northern Territory.

The program has a focus on school readiness with particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy foundations, orientation to school programs and parent engagement initiatives.

By December 2017, as part of the A Share in the Future Indigenous Education Strategy, FaFT will expand to 32 remote and very remote communities across the Northern Territory. There are currently 22 programs operating across the Territory, expanding to 26 by the end of 2016.

As part of the 2016-17 Education Budget, $1M per annum has been allocated to roll out urban FaFT programs delivered from multiple sites in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs, including the Larapinta FaFT.

Young Mothers are Strong Mothers Program

The Young Mothers are Strong Mothers Program is aimed at young pregnant and parenting mothers under 25 years of age in the Palmerston region, including school-aged mothers.

The program provides an integrated services model of care to young mothers, including parenting support and role-modelling, child preventative health checks and immunisations, individual pre-training assessment for learners and intensive support and childcare, to support young mothers to complete their education or attain qualifications within a culturally safe space.

The young mothers are completing a Certificate II in Community Services which can contribute towards their Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (completing Year12). At the completion of this qualification, the mothers will have a clear pathway towards further study, training or work.

There are currently 15 mothers enrolled with 17 children (0-5yrs), in the program.

Pregnant and Parenting Program

A Pregnant and Parenting program is offered as part of a pregnant and parenting student’s enrolment with NT Open Education Centre (NTOEC), allowing them to study from home but
with regular face-to-face support.

The support component enables students to have face-to-face time with teaching staff from NTOEC to discuss their lessons and any learning concerns.

These students are dually enrolled through Darwin High School and the NTOEC. One day a week, the students are able to meet with NTOEC staff.

Child and Family Centres

Child and family centres integrate early childhood education and care programs into the communities with a number of programs including: preschool; Families as First Teachers; crèche; Strong Women, Strong Babies and Strong Culture; and the Healthy under 5 Kids Program.

The Northern Territory currently has child and family centres in Palmerston, Gunbalanya, Yuendumu, Maningrida and Ngukurr, with the sixth in Larapinta on track for completion in July 2016.

Hearing Health Program

The Department of Education and Department of Health are working together to ensure ear and hearing health is improved in Indigenous children in remote areas.

The Department of Health’s Hearing Health Program (HHP) works with Indigenous families in the FaFT program to reduce the prevalence and incidence of ear disease in Indigenous children. The program works in partnership with families from initial diagnosis and treatment through to surgery and rehabilitation if required.

Having the Hearing Health Program at FaFT sites allows families to directly access information that helps them understand that hearing loss in children is preventable. It also provides families with ear health strategies and raises community awareness about optimal ear health.

Northern Territory preschools

The Northern Territory Government is one of the only jurisdictions in Australia that provides free preschool education for all children (ACT and SA are the others).

Since 2014, the Northern Territory Government (with Commonwealth assistance) has provided a 15 hours a week of preschool in all government preschools (previously 12 hour per week).

A new Northern Territory preschool curriculum has been developed and will be implemented across all preschools from Term 3, 2016.

The new preschool curriculum is linked to the Australian curriculum to provide continuity to children from preschool into their first year of school.

The curriculum provides a consistent approach across all schools through high quality teaching and learning programs focusing on developing a solid base for literacy and numeracy, and English oracy.
It will improve the quality of preschool education and ensure that children are ready to start formal schooling.

**Current early childhood infrastructure**
The Northern Territory Government has invested and continues to invest in early childhood education and care.

Investment in these areas is a priority with initiatives that focus on preparing our very young children and their families for the future and building educational infrastructure.

Development of integrated care and education services collocated with primary schools are currently underway along with the construction of new preschool at Braitling and a child and family centre at Larapinta both of which are nearing completion.

The new early childhood facility at Braitling will cater for 47 places and allow for future growth to meet the needs of students entering the first stage of schooling.

The Northern Territory Government 2016-17 Budget includes $3.13M to complete Braitling Primary School’s early childhood precinct with a shared community area complete with an outdoor play space and café that will foster family engagement with quality early learning from birth.

Locating the early childhood precinct at Braitling primary school with the new preschool will provide a seamless and supported education pathway from early years through to preschool and transition to school.