



An Australian Government Initiative



Productivity Commission  
Via online submission

9 February 2024

To whom it may concern

### A PATH TO UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE – DRAFT REPORT

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Kimberley thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to submit feedback to 'A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) – Draft Report'.

RDA Kimberley is a not-for-profit organisation part of the Australian Government's RDA Network. We have an active and facilitative role in the Kimberley to improve regional development outcomes, achieved through collaboration across all levels of government, private sector, and community. Our vision is to grow a strong and confident regional economy that harnesses the Kimberley's competitive advantages, seizes economic opportunities, and attracts investment (see **Attachment 1** Map of the Kimberley).

Through building partnerships and economies of scale, many regional based organisations are striving to further the Kimberley's human capital and economic development. The region possesses rich natural and cultural assets; internationally recognised tourism sector; improving transport infrastructure to external markets; and diversification opportunities associated with value-add agriculture and pastoral enterprises. Access to childcare has a critical role in maximising community and economic development outcomes in the Kimberley. RDA Kimberley is acutely aware of ECEC workforce shortages around the country. The situation is exacerbated in the Kimberley due to the remote location.

There are several private sector and government investments underway or in development in the Kimberley which are expected to stimulate the employment market and contribute to economic growth. This is likely to increase the already high demand for ECEC services. This includes:

- **Agriculture, horticulture and value-add processing** e.g. expansion in the Ord River Irrigation Area (e.g. cotton gin); expansion of the Cone Bay barramundi farm under Tassal's new management; Fresh Produce Group's asparagus and table grapes production; Kilty Station's micro abattoir.
- **Government funded projects** e.g. upgrades at RAAF Base Curtin; relocation of Broome Prison; Cable Beach Foreshore Redevelopment; Broome Boating Facility construction; NBN fibre in Halls Creek; establishment of Kimberley Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA).
- **Supply chain infrastructure** e.g. Kimberley Marine Support Base construction; Broome International Airport and East Kimberley Regional Airport upgrades; road and bridge upgrades for Great Northern Highway, Tanami, Gordon Downs, Duncan and Cape-Leveque roads.

- **Mining, oil and gas** e.g. Kimberley Mineral Sands' Thunderbird project; Inpex's ongoing offshore investment; Buru Energy's oil and gas exploration and production in the Canning Basin; Woodside's Browse Basin project; Agrimin's Lake Mackay Potash project.

RDA Kimberley partnered with the Kimberley Development Commission (KDC) in 2022 to gather primary data direct from Kimberley ECEC services. As a result, the KDC published *Childcare in the Kimberley* quantifying the capacity and characteristics of the ECEC sector (**Attachment 2**). RDA Kimberley strongly encourages the Productivity Commission to review this report. The report builds upon the Mitchell Institute 2022 research which found that WA has the lowest overall centre-based long day care accessibility of all states and territories, with the highest level of childcare accessibility below the national median<sup>1</sup>.

The complexities of the Kimberley's ECEC sector is characterised by its remoteness; seasonal peaks; and socio-economic profile. There are 24 ECEC centres in the region comprising of for-profit and not-for-profit services. While the Kimberley has 909 approved ECEC places, the region is currently only operating at 69 per cent capacity (626 places) while simultaneously 80 per cent of Kimberley ECEC centres have a 12 – 24 month waiting period<sup>2</sup>.

At current operating levels, the Kimberley has only 0.15 ECEC places per child 0-4 years, compared to the licenced capacity ratio of 0.5 for Perth. There are currently no approved ECEC options in the most remote Kimberley Aboriginal communities leaving approximately 697 children with no access to ECEC services<sup>3</sup>.

Workforce shortages are at the heart of the current crisis. The inability to fill vacancies, cover staff leave, and meet educator-to-child ratios has seen centres reducing services or closing altogether. This is despite high unemployment figures in the region, with the Kimberley currently experiencing a 7.4 per cent unemployment rate (June 2023 quarter)<sup>4</sup>.

ECEC workforce shortages in the Kimberley are driven by:

- High attrition and low completion rates in training and workforce development programs.
- Perceived poor wages and conditions, particularly in the context of mining and government sectors.
- Lack of affordable housing for staff contributing to high cost of living.

The care and early education of young people is a critical enabler of economic and social function. The ECEC sector also plays a critical role in workforce attraction and retention. Across the Kimberley, there are many examples of workers finding it challenging or impossible to take on desired amount of work. Families are leaving the region or prevented from moving to the region amid the childcare crisis. This is exacerbating the Kimberley's workforce shortages in all other areas of the regional economy.

Universal access to ECEC services is a commendable and ambitious concept. The Draft Report identifies that ECEC workforce attraction and retention needs to be a priority before progressing to a universal access model. The report falls short, however, in identifying recommendations that would result in tangible workforce outcomes in a region such as the Kimberley. RDA Kimberley's submission focuses on additional workforce recommendations and suggests the Productivity Commission further considers how universal access would be delivered in remote Aboriginal communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Hurley, P., Matthews, H., & Pennicuik, S. (2022). *Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare?* Mitchell Institute, Victoria University.

<sup>2</sup> KDC (2022). *Childcare in the Kimberley*, WA State Government.

<sup>3</sup> KDC (2022). *Childcare in the Kimberley*, WA State Government.

<sup>4</sup> <https://economy.id.com.au/rda-kimberley/unemployment>

RDA Kimberley will expand on the following themes in this submission:

1. Qualification exception zone and mentoring model to support local employment.
  2. Access to an international workforce.
  3. Housing availability for workers.
  4. Using the Kimberley's towns and remote communities as a case study region in policy design.
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### **1. Qualification exception zone and mentoring model to support local employment.**

Many Kimberley ECEC centres are developing innovative approaches to developing a local workforce through micro-credentials or culturally appropriate entry-level training programs. Examples are listed below with more information provided as case studies in **Attachment 3**:

- ECEC Skills Set delivered by North Regional TAFE, Community Skills WA, and Nyamba Buru Yawuru in Broome.
- Playgroup qualification (Certificate II Community Services) pilot delivered by East Kimberley Job Pathways and Community Skills WA in Kununurra.
- 'Flooding the Floor' with locals from all language groups at Baya Gawiy Children and Family Centre in Fitzroy Crossing.
- Proposed 'Community Elders Pool' at Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek.

A significant barrier for participants in these programs to stay on as longer-term employees is the requirement that *every* ECEC worker must have, or be actively working toward, an approved Certificate III level ECEC qualification or higher. Despite many local ECEC centres offering to cover training costs, factors contributing to low formal training completion rates in the Kimberley include transient population cohorts, literacy and numeracy difficulties, and lack of social/family support structures. Kimberley ECEC centres have identified an opportunity of retaining willing workers through local micro-credentials and entry-level programs and ensure quality education and care with ongoing staff supervision and mentoring support. This can only be achieved if the Australian Government waives the level of qualification required by *all* ECEC workers. RDA Kimberley supports investigating a qualification exception zone at a region-wide level to engage and develop a local and diverse ECEC workforce.

One Tree Community Services is a Registered Training Organisation offering in-house training with some success across their centres in Northern Australia. One Tree in Kununurra has over 50 per cent Aboriginal workforce and acknowledges the essential role that ongoing mentoring plays as part of their local attraction and retention strategy. This is a resource-intensive approach but one that has contributed to One Tree's community reputation as a supportive workplace of choice.

One Tree is developing the Regional Early Years Learn and Lead (REYLL) Program to be customised and available to all Not-for-Profit ECEC centres across the Kimberley and Pilbara. The REYLL program intends to offer support to centres and ECEC workers through training, mentoring, professional development, operational support, and/or recruitment. RDA Kimberley has participated in discussions held with ECEC centres in the region and acknowledges the strong interest in accessing this level of wrap-around support, which individually, is difficult to sustain. This offers an opportunity to achieve 'economies of scale' in service delivery with a significant geographic outreach.

***RDA Kimberley encourages the Australian Government to investigate the opportunity of increasing local workforce capacity in Kimberley ECEC centres and their communities through a qualification exception zone supported by a resourced mentoring model.***

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## **2. Access to an international workforce.**

The region's ECEC workforce shortages can not be filled from domestic sources alone. A broader and more important need exists to fill semi-skilled and skilled permanent ECEC positions with a longer-term focus on attracting workers and their families to the Kimberley.

RDA Kimberley welcomes the recent Australian Government approval of the Kimberley Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) which builds upon the success of the East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce and Industry's East Kimberley DAMA. The region-wide DAMA is well supported by businesses as it will assist in attracting new skilled workers to the region and provide an avenue for businesses to keep existing international workers. The Kimberley DAMA will be an important 'tool in the toolbox' for the region's ECEC sector and will complement local employment and training initiatives contributing to addressing ECEC workforce shortages.

The National Skills Commission identified childcare workers (ANZSCO421111) as an occupation currently in short supply nationally with anticipated strong future demand. This occupation is listed in the top seven per cent of all occupations deemed in short supply on the Skills Priority List<sup>5</sup>. The Australian Childcare Alliance has also reported that the sector 'urgently needs at least 10,000 well-trained, competent early childhood educators and teachers to fill vacancies'<sup>6</sup>.

Despite this, a childcare worker is not included on the Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) List and cannot access a Subclass 482 Visa to migrate to Australia. RDA Kimberley welcomes the Australian Government's announcement to develop a new Skills in Demand visa replacing the TSS process. Australia's Permanent Migration Program can be improved to better address the complexity, timeframes, and cost of accessing the program. It needs to be adaptable to industry needs and cost-competitive in a global market. RDA Kimberley strongly encourages the Productivity Commission to work closely with the Department of Home Affairs to ensure ECEC workforce priorities are incorporated in the Core Skills and Essential Skills subclasses.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 87 per cent of permanent migrants lived in capital cities in 2021<sup>7</sup>. Utilising the DAMA will only go so far to addressing the Kimberley's ECEC workforce shortages without a more deliberate and holistic approach. There is a demonstrated track record of activating Department of Home Affairs resources to respond to specific industry and region priorities with expedited processing and regional incentives. ***There is opportunity to better coordinate and integrate Australia's migration program with industry needs and State and Territory training systems to target regional areas.***

This approach should be done in collaboration with State and Territory Governments to ensure that it is supported by appropriate infrastructure and service delivery. The recently announced delivery of Settlement Services by the East Kimberley and Broome Chambers of Commerce and Industry will contribute to assisting

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/skills-priority-list>

<sup>6</sup> <https://childcarealliance.org.au/latestnews/aca-backs-sba-2>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/permanent-migrants-australia/latest-release>

new migrants settle in the Kimberley. Any targeted regional migration program will need to be supported by a focus on addressing housing affordability availability.

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### 3. Housing availability for workers.

ECEC services in the Kimberley (particularly not-for-profit) struggle to compete with employment incentives offered by government and mining organisations such as higher wages, increased leave allowances, subsidised accommodation and electricity, and relocation support. A for-profit centre in Broome is funding incentives such as subsidised housing and free care for children of staff but acknowledges that this is becoming increasingly unfeasible with the current housing crisis in the region. This challenge is not unique to the Kimberley<sup>8</sup>.

Attracting local and international workers to the ECEC sector in the Kimberley requires available and affordable housing options (for purchase and rent). In their 2023 report, the KDC found that while the current housing crunch is part of national trend, it is magnified in the Kimberley by four structural challenges unique to the region:

- Workforce patterns driving housing market distortions (high rents, low sale prices).
- A near total exit of bank finances due to low property values and other factors.
- The absence of liquid markets across many parts of the region, and the high level of government- and employer-provided housing.
- Competition between housing for residents, temporary workers, and visitors<sup>9</sup>.

Kimberley Local Governments are working with stakeholders to identify projects and infrastructure investments to contribute to normalising the housing market. It is anticipated that the Australian Government will receive funding applications for several key worker accommodation projects from these regions as part of the recently announced Housing Australia Future Fund and other grant programs<sup>10</sup>.

***The Australian Government needs to establish strong partnerships with Kimberley regional and industry networks to deliver a comprehensive key worker housing program as workforce challenges in the ECEC and many other sectors are unable to be decoupled from the housing crisis.*** This approach will ensure there is cross-Government funding support in projects that contribute to addressing housing issues faced by the ECEC sector and their communities<sup>11</sup>.

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### 4. Using the Kimberley's towns and remote communities as a case study region in policy design.

The Kimberley is a remote and sparsely populated region. It represents one sixth of WA's land mass; equivalent to twice the size of Victoria. This poses complex challenges for service delivery. Another unique characteristic

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<sup>8</sup> National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2021). *"Shaping Our Future" A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031*. Education Services Australia.

<sup>9</sup> KDC (2023). *Kimberley Residential Housing and Land Snapshot*.

<sup>10</sup> Kimberley Regional Group (2023). *Kimberley Investment Prospectus 2023-24*.

<sup>11</sup> There are examples of successful region-led, Government supported responses to housing challenges, such as the 'Lakes and 4WD Well Aged Housing Project'. This saw 45 independent living units constructed across seven local governments in the Wheatbelt and Great Southern. It uniquely addressed the difficulty of achieving commercial development economies of scale by taking a regional approach instead of tackling the issue at a local-only level (e.g. cost efficiencies achieved by grouping procurement). This is critical in the Kimberley with a settlement structure vastly different to that of the Eastern States.

of the Kimberley is that approximately half of the population comprises Aboriginal people who live across its four Local Government Areas and more than 100 Aboriginal Communities.

RDA Kimberley strongly advocates for place-based approaches in policy and planning. The alternative to this fails our communities. As a recent example, the Australian Government invited applications for the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) – Establishing Child Care in Limited Supply Areas in 2023. This aimed to increase the availability of approved ECEC in communities experiencing disadvantage in regional and remote areas, with high unmet demand through capital works projects. The only two eligible Australian Statistical Geography Standard Statistical Area 2 (SA2) locations in the Kimberley included Halls Creek and Roebuck.

The existing ECEC service in Halls Creek is operating at limited capacity. Even if the thin margins could be resolved to build a second ECEC centre, it would further exacerbate the ECEC workforce shortages already experienced in the community.

Roebuck SA2 consists of pastoral leases, Indigenous protected areas, and nature reserves. There are no gazetted townsites. While there are several remote Aboriginal communities included in the SA2 boundary, their complex land tenure poses a major barrier to constructing new ECEC infrastructure.

Establishing the eligibility for this CCCF stream using statistics alone is an example of policy and programs designed with a lack of regional ‘ground-truthing’ and poorly informed central decision-making<sup>12</sup>. No outcomes will be achieved in the Kimberley from this funding. This feedback is relevant to the Draft Report’s request for information on the CCCF as a vehicle to address practical barriers to ECEC access.

In reference to the Draft Report’s recommendation to support universal access in persistently thin markets via supply-side funding, RDA Kimberley offers our support and established networks to coordinate regional intelligence and input from our ECEC providers and Kimberley stakeholders. The Kimberley’s remoteness, socio-economic profile, number of Aboriginal communities, population distribution, and thin– to no market proposition for ECEC services present important and unique challenges to designing a successful model that will address the Kimberley’s childcare crisis.

***RDA Kimberley strongly encourages the Australian Government to use the Kimberley as a case study region in developing the universal access model and future funding programs.***

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<sup>12</sup> The Department of Education used 2021 Australian Early Development Census results, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 child population data (aged 0-4 years), and Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas.

We look forward to working with the Productivity Commission ensure what is recommended to the Australian Government in the final ECEC report achieves on-ground outcomes for our regional communities and economy. Improving childcare services in the Kimberley is an important strategy for simultaneously achieving workforce, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal economic development empowerment, and childhood development objectives.

Please contact Janine Hatch, Director RDA Kimberley to discuss this feedback further on 0428 130 485 or [j.hatch@rdakimberley.com.au](mailto:j.hatch@rdakimberley.com.au).

Yours sincerely



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Attachment 1: Map of the Kimberley

Attachment 2: *Childcare in the Kimberley*, KDC 2022

Attachment 3: Kimberley ECEC Workforce Development Case Studies



# Attachment 1: Map of the Kimberley



## Legend

- Sealed major road
- - - Sealed minor road
- Unsealed road
- - - 4WD track
- - - 4WD track only
- 1 National highway
- 95 National route
- Marine park boundary
- Reef
- Conservation park
- Marine park
- National park
- ✈ Airport
- Local Government Area boundary

## Approximate driving distances (km)

	Perth GNH	Perth NWCH	Broome	Derby	Fitzroy Crossing	Halls Creek	Wyndham	Kununurra	Darwin
Perth GNH	-	-	2237	2391	2565	2843	3197	3202	4039
Perth NWCH	-	-	2374	2528	2701	2990	3345	3349	4176
Broome	2237	2374	-	221	395	683	1037	1042	1869
Derby	2391	2528	221	-	259	547	894	899	1733
Fitzroy Crossing	2565	2701	395	259	-	289	642	647	1474
Halls Creek	2843	2990	683	547	289	-	354	359	1186
Wyndham	3197	3345	1037	894	642	354	-	100	929
Kununurra	3202	3349	1042	899	647	359	100	-	829
Darwin	4039	4176	1869	1733	1474	1186	929	829	-

GNH = Great Northern Highway, NWCH = North West Coastal Highway





**Kimberley Development Commission  
Sector Profile #1**

# Childcare in the Kimberley





## About this series

The Kimberley Development Commission is an independent statutory authority responsible for promoting economic development and government service delivery across the Kimberley region. “Kimberley Development Commission Sector Profiles” are a series of reports examining the challenges and opportunities of particular industries and service delivery sectors in our region in depth. They are intended to provide a sound base of data and analysis to inform decision-making by the Kimberley community, governments and investors.

The entire series of Sector Profiles, as well as the Kimberley Development Commission’s Quarterly Snapshots series, can be accessed on our website [www.kdc.wa.gov.au](http://www.kdc.wa.gov.au).

**The Kimberley Development Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country, the Aboriginal people of the many lands that we work on and their language groups throughout the Kimberley. We recognise their continuing connection to the land and waters. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of our region, and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.**



## Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	4
Scope and methodology	5
Childcare sector attributes	6
Findings	9
Service availability and supply	9
Service demand	13
Sector constraints and workforce sustainability	16
Opportunities for sector growth and development	24
Industry responses to ECEC and OSHC challenges	25
Conclusion	28
Acknowledgements	28
Glossary	29
References	30
Appendix one - ECEC and OSHC provider interview questions	32



## Executive summary

**The care and early education of young children prior to their entry to the formal school system are critical enablers of economic and social function in any modern society. The care of our youngest people is amongst one of the most fundamental responsibilities of any community. In a modern society the sector also plays a critical role in the attraction, support and retention of a suitably skilled workforce. Across Australia the sector is struggling to meet the demands of an evolving workforce.**

In the Kimberley region the crisis is particularly acute. The Kimberley Development Commission (the Commission) has collected information that clearly indicates the constrained availability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) is a significant impediment to social and economic function in the region. The real and human face of that impediment is that families are either leaving, considering leaving or prevented from moving to Kimberley towns amid the reduction of available ECEC and OSHC services. This crisis is a serious economic concern for the region as ECEC and OSHC is a basic enabler of economic activity. Without it, workers can find it challenging or impossible to take on the amount of work they desire, exacerbating labour shortages in all other areas of the regional economy.

Because of the critical role of ECEC and OSHC in our economy, the Commission has undertaken a body of research to quantify the capacity and characteristics of the sector, understand its opportunities and challenges, analyse the demand and supply characteristics and illustrate the sector's situation. We have also sought to highlight local solutions being implemented to improve the situation. Our research included the review and analysis of all publicly available information on the sector, 1:1 consultations with key stakeholders and a detailed interview and survey of 22 of the 24 approved education and care providers in the Kimberley.

We found the following:

**1. Workforce shortages are at the heart of the current crisis.**

- Collectively, centres are operating at 69% of capacity despite high demand, largely because of staff shortages.
- To deliver at licenced capacity, the Kimberley would need an additional 59 FTE staff.
- The workforce shortages are driven by:
  - lack of affordable housing for staff;
  - high attrition and low completion rates in training and workforce development programs; and
  - perceived poor wages and conditions, especially in the context of conditions in the mining and government sectors.
- Bringing centres up to full capacity would create an additional 289 places. While calculating how many additional carers could increase their workforce participation is difficult it is reasonable to assume that at least 144 additional FTE employees could be unlocked.
- For the total underutilised ECEC or OSHC places the sector is unable to meet, the region forgoes Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy to the estimated magnitude of \$3.7 million p.a.



## **2. Centres employing long-term local workers and using appropriate culturally-adapted training are faring better than those that don't.**

- Not all centres have experienced workforce challenges equally. Centres that have focussed on employing long-term local workers have been better able to retain those workers and continue operating at or near maximum capacity.
- Training and development that is centre-based, rather than occurring off-site, strongly contributes to a more resilient and durable centre workforce and is generally more effective.

## **3. In the medium-term, additional licenced capacity is needed to unlock economic opportunity in the Kimberley.**

- At current operating levels, the Kimberley has only 0.15 ECEC places per child 0-4 years, compared to the licenced capacity ratio of 0.50 for the Perth metro area.
- There are no approved ECEC or OSHC options in most remote Aboriginal communities. The role the presence or absence of ECEC or OSHC plays in these communities where there are numerous other barriers to employment is not clear.
- Western Australian (WA) State commitments to increase Aboriginal employment through Closing the Gap imply a need for additional ECEC places as Aboriginal employment improves across the region. That is, increased demand will eventuate from achievement of Closing the Gap targets even before the base population increases.
- Raising Kimberley ECEC and OSHC levels to those available in Perth would imply the addition of 1,035 additional places (409 for ECEC and 626 for OSHC), creating an additional 213 jobs in the sector (150 for ECEC and 63 for OSHC) and contributing an estimated additional \$9.2 million annually to the Kimberley in Commonwealth Child Care Subsidies.

The Commission is acutely aware there is a much larger economic opportunity to be unlocked. A conservative analysis would suggest that reaching a level of metro parity in the availability of ECEC and OSHC would unlock a minimum of \$20.5 million p.a. in direct economic activity resulting from direct additional employment in ECEC and OSHC centres

and indirect employment from increased workforce participation. The increased output of those indirect employees would only increase that estimate. ECEC and OSHC providers in the Kimberley are adjusting their operating models, further compounding the reduction in available places. Some providers are doing their best to offer staff attraction incentives, including above award wages, housing subsidies, training, and access to free care and education for children of staff. However, even with these they struggle to meet the workforce demand.

There are, however, causes for optimism. At a national level, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, through the National Workforce Strategy (ACECQA, 2021) are addressing professional recognition, attraction and retention, leadership and capability, wellbeing, qualifications and career pathways, and importantly, increases to minimum wages for ECEC educators.

At a state level, ECEC has been identified as a priority occupation and as such, training costs have been heavily reduced. Further, the WA State government has committed \$5.1 million towards retaining ECEC workers in the regions and establishing sustainable models to support regional ECEC.

At a local Kimberley level, Local Governments have been supporting providers through advocacy and obtaining funding to support services. The business community has also rallied around providers with the implementation of a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) in the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley which will go some way to address local workforce needs.

This report is not intended to provide recommendations; its purpose is to illustrate the sector's situation and highlight local solutions being implemented to reduce the impact of limited ECEC and OSHC on communities. There is more to be done to increase the availability and access to these services. The Commission intends this report to be an important part of the evidence base available to stakeholders, policy makers and investors (including the Commission itself) as they consider and advocate for the quality services that are vital to the region's prosperity.



## Childcare in the Kimberley snapshot



 **24** Early childhood and education care centres in the Kimberley (ECEC\* and OSHC\*)

  
TOTAL APPROVED PLACES

**909**

  
CURRENT OPERATING CAPACITY PLACES

**625**

  
CURRENT OPERATING CAPACITY

**69%**



**59**

Additional staff required



**28%**

of parents are providing unpaid child care for their own or other children



**13** centres

operating at reduced capacity due to staff shortages



**697** Children (0 - 4 yrs) living in remote communities with no access to ECEC & OSHC

**ECEC**  
(0 - 4 years)

  
**0.23**  
APPROVED PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD

  
**0.15**  
CURRENT CAPACITY PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD

**OSHC**  
(5 - 12 years)

  
**0.05**  
APPROVED PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD

  
**0.04**  
CURRENT CAPACITY PLACES FOR EVERY CHILD



**12-24** months waiting period reported by 80% of the centres

Students enrolled in Early Childhood Education studies at NR TAFE and One Tree

  
**74 students** in Certificate III

  
**11 students** in Diploma

### The challenges

Regulation

Housing

Social Issues

Training

Wages & Incentives

ECEC\* Early Childhood and Education Care  
OSHC\* Outside School Hours Care





# Introduction

The childcare sector plays a vital role in the economic and community life of Kimberley communities. It is a key enabler of economic activity, an important economic sector in its own right, and perhaps most importantly, a crucial contributor to childhood development.

The general term “Childcare” includes many things. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) includes centre-based and home-based long day care for children 0-5 years, as well as kindergarten. Outside school hours care (OSHC) includes before-school, after-school, and school holiday care and education for children 5-12 years. Non-centre-based paid care arrangements includes governesses / early childhood educators (often utilised on pastoral stations), au pairs and nannies, and babysitters. Non-paid childcare includes a wide range of informal arrangements within families and communities, such as grandparents or other relatives looking after children.

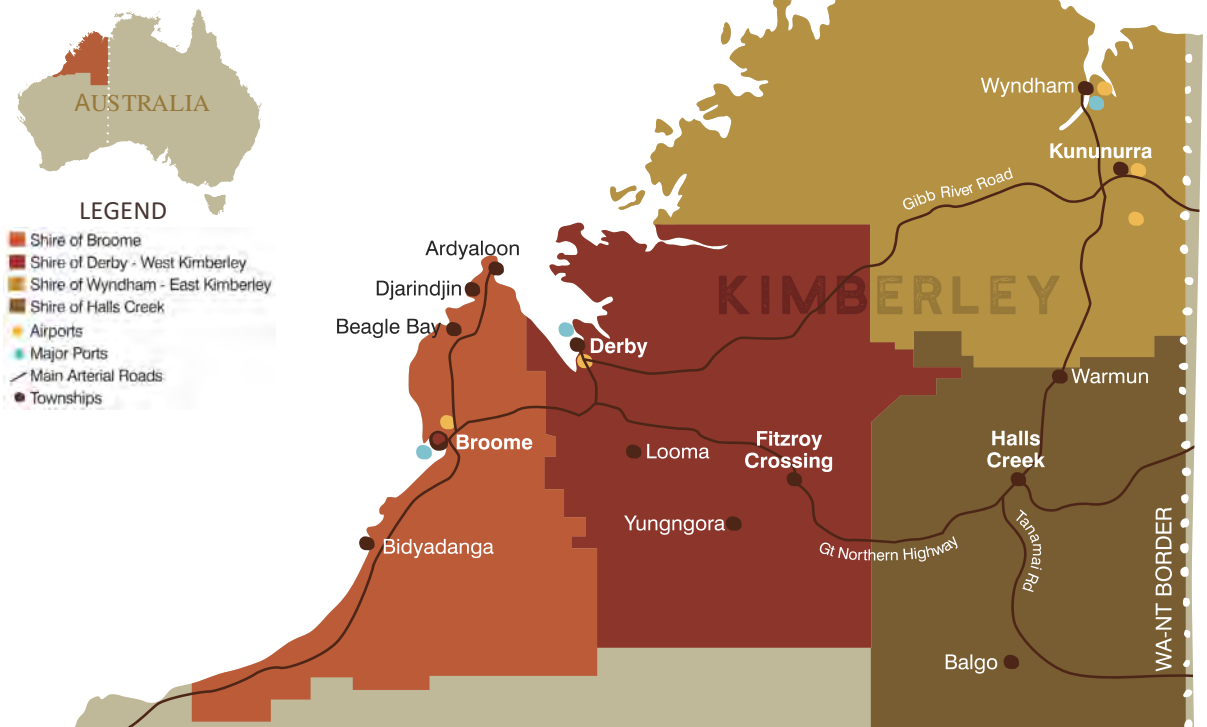
This report focuses primarily on ECEC (excluding kindergarten) and OSHC services, unless otherwise stated.

As with many other regional and remote areas, the Kimberley has been experiencing an acute shortage of ECEC and OSHC services in recent years. In 2022, this reached a point of crisis, as workforce shortages and other challenges led to some centres reducing services or closing altogether.

The lack of sufficient childcare services has rippled across the Kimberley economy. Employers have reported difficulty attracting staff due to lack of childcare. In some instances, families are either leaving or considering leaving Kimberley towns altogether, with media reporting that:

*“Centres in Broome and Kununurra have slashed existing places to keep within staff-child ratio regulations, leaving devastated parents to scramble to find new arrangements.”*  
(O'Connor, 2021)

This report presents the results of original data collection and analysis, aimed at understanding the current shortage of childcare services, as well as longer-term opportunities for growth in the sector.





## Scope and methodology

To understand the current state of the sector, its pressures and opportunities, the Commission surveyed the 24 approved ECEC and OSHC providers in the Kimberley. (See Appendix one for the survey form.) We spoke at length with 22 of the region's providers and gathered both quantitative data and open reflections about the sector's needs.

Our work also included a desktop review of expert reports and other relevant information. Particularly relevant are Deserts and oases: *How accessible is childcare?* (Hurley, 2022) and research undertaken by Empowered Communities backbone organisation binarri-binyja yarrowoo (BBY) in collaboration with the Wunan Foundation, *Barriers for Childcare in the East Kimberley* (2021).

Regional stakeholders, including the Broome and East Kimberley Chambers of Commerce, Kimberley Local Governments, and Regional Development Australia - Kimberley (RDA), have provided important additional perspectives and information.

Where needed, this report incorporates data from the 2016 and 2021 Census. However, the Census has well-known methodological shortcomings in remote areas with large Aboriginal populations.

At the 2016 census, the ABS estimated that as much as 28% of the Aboriginal population of the East Kimberley was not counted (Taylor, 2020).



of parents are providing unpaid child care for their own or other children

These are partly corrected in Estimated Resident Population (ERP) counts. Where we have access to ERP figures we have used them. Where we do not have access to new figures, we have applied a proportional allocation based on the 2016 census.

We have generally assumed that children accessing ECEC are 0-4 years of age. Children attending kindergarten may be four or five years, and some children at kindergarten will turn five between July and December. Children that attend ECEC services on the days they are not at kindergarten, will not be included in our analysis. In addition, some children will attend a kindergarten session through their ECEC service. Again, any five-year-old in this category will not be included in our analysis.

Data used to inform this report was collected during August - October 2022 and shows only a snapshot in time.



# Childcare sector attributes

## Regulatory context

In understanding the challenges being experienced by the ECEC and OSHC sector, it is important to recognise the regulatory environment in which it operates.

The Education and Care sector is regulated by the National Quality Framework (NQF), which provides a national approach to regulation, assessment, and quality improvement for ECEC and OSHC services across Australia, including training requirements and educator-to-child ratios.

In Western Australia, the approval and monitoring of education and care services is undertaken by the Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) (WA Department of Communities) pursuant to:

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2012 (WA);
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012;
- National Quality Standard; and
- Rating and Assessment process.

At a national level, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is the independent national authority that assists governments in administering the National Quality Framework (NQF) for children's education and care. ACECQA works with the Australian and state and territory governments to:

- implement changes that benefit children from birth to 13 years of age and their families;
- monitor and promote the consistent application of the Education and Care Services National Law across all states and territories; and
- support the child education and care sector to improve quality outcomes for children.

## Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

ECEC funding is based on a means-tested and activity-tested payment called the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and is funded by the Commonwealth. CCS is paid to the centre on behalf of families, who pay the difference between the subsidy and the fees charged by centres – known as the gap fee.

The Australian Government uses 'activity tests' to calculate the hours of subsidised ECEC a family is entitled to each fortnight. Activities include paid work, volunteering, undertaking an approved course of education or study, an internship or training, or actively looking for work.

Services that provide education and care to children that are funded through the national CCS include:

- Long day care: full-day centre-based care programs for children 0-5 years. Nationally, this is the most used service by children and families.
- Family day care: full-day services operated as small businesses from educators' homes. Family day care can also include before-school, after-school, and school holiday care for children 5-12 years.
- Outside school hours care (OSHC): centre-based before-school, after-school, and school holiday care for children 5-12 years.

## Other care

A wide range of arrangements exist for caring for children outside of a centre-based environment. These are termed "non-regulated care" and fall outside of the NQF and the CCS funding structure. Such arrangements include:

- Unpaid care by relatives and others. Over a quarter of people living in the Kimberley provide unpaid care for their own or other children (ABS, 2021).
- Ad hoc paid care, such as babysitters.
- Regular ongoing paid care in the child's home or otherwise outside of a centre, such as by au pairs, nannies, and governesses. This form of care remains common on pastoral stations and other remote locations.

Data on these types of non-regulated care are not readily available, and generally they are outside the scope of this report.



## Workforce qualification requirements

The NQF specifies required educator qualifications. Centres must structure their operations to meet these requirements to obtain licensing and achieve quality standards.

### *Centre-based long day care qualification requirements*

The education and care qualification requirements for educators at a centre-based long day care service are:

- at least 50% of the educators who are required to meet the relevant educator-to-child ratios for the service must have, or be actively working towards, at least a diploma level

education and care qualification; and

- all other educators required to meet the relevant educator-to-child ratios for the service must have or be actively working towards a certificate III education and care qualification.

The certificate III qualification is generally an 18-month course, and the diploma is two years; both must be delivered through registered training providers. These qualifications can be completed in a shorter time and undertaken on the job (traineeship).

In addition to the above educator requirements, services must engage or have access to an early childhood teacher (ECT) based on the number of children attending the service, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Early childhood teacher requirements

Number of children in attendance at any one time	Early childhood teacher requirement
Fewer than 25 children	The service needs to have access to an early childhood teacher for at least 20% of the time the service is operating. This may be achieved through information technology solution.
25 – 59 children	The service must employ or engage a full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher or have an early childhood teacher in attendance for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six hours per day, when operating for 50 hours or more per week; or</li> <li>• 60% of the time when operating for less than 50 hours per week.</li> </ul>
60 – 80 children	The service must employ or engage a full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher or have an early childhood teacher in attendance for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six hours per day, when operating for 50 hours or more per week; or</li> <li>• 60% of the time, when operating for less than 50 hours per week.</li> </ul> Additionally, from 2020, the service must employ a second early childhood teacher or suitably qualified person in attendance for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• three hours per day, when operating for 50 hours or more per week; or</li> <li>• 30% of the time when operating for less than 50 hours per week.</li> </ul> These requirements do not apply if the service has 60-80 approved places, employs or engages a full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher at the service, and employs or engages a second early childhood teacher or suitably qualified person for half the hours or full-time equivalent hours at the service.
More than 80 children	The service must employ or engage a full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher or have an early childhood teacher in attendance for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six hours per day, when operating for 50 hours or more per week; or</li> <li>• 60% of the time, when operating for less than 50 hours per week.</li> </ul> Additionally, from 2020, the service must employ a second early childhood teacher or suitably qualified person in attendance for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six hours per day, when operating for 50 hours or more per week; or</li> <li>• 60% of the time when operating for less than 50 hours per week.</li> </ul> These requirements do not apply if the service has more than 80 approved places, employs or engages a full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher at the service, and employs or engages a second full-time or full-time equivalent early childhood teacher or suitably qualified person at the service.



### Family day care qualification requirements

All family day care educators must hold or be actively working towards at least an approved certificate III level education and care qualification.

### Centre-based out-of-school hour care (OSHC) qualification requirements

There are no national qualification requirements for educators at centre-based services for school-age children in OSHC services. State and territory-specific qualification requirements apply. In WA, there are ratios of total (qualified and unqualified) educators to the number of children attending the OSHC service:

- first educator must hold a completed approved qualification; and
- depending upon the number of children and their ages attending the service, a proportion of the other educators may need to hold a qualification.

The list of approved qualifications for WA can be found on the ACECQA website ([www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)).

### Waivers

Centres can seek temporary or ongoing waivers from ECRU to assist them in maintaining service

when dealing with, for example, exceptional circumstances or unexpected events, such as the inability to recruit qualified staff or inadequate ventilation and natural light in a service.

An approved provider may apply to a regulatory authority for a waiver of an element of the National Quality Standard and/or the National Regulations. Approved providers can apply for a service waiver where an issue is likely to be ongoing, or a temporary waiver, where the issue can be addressed within 12 months.

A waiver gives an approved provider greater flexibility to operate a service.

In the Kimberley waivers have become an essential part of helping providers to maintain their services given the challenges around staff recruitment. The most common waiver is related to the requirement for an early childhood teacher.

### Educator-to-child ratios

The NQF also specifies educator-to-child ratios. Educator-to-child ratios for centre-based long day care and OSHC depend on age, as shown in Table 2.

Educator-to-child ratios for family day care providers are 1:7, with a maximum of four children preschool age or under. The ratio includes the educator's children if they are younger than 13 years of age.

Table 2. Centre-based long day care and OSHC ratio requirements

Age of children	Educator-to-child ratio
Birth to 24 months	1:4
Over 24 months and less than 36 months	1:5
36 months up to and including preschool age	1:10
Over preschool age	If no kindergarten children present 1:10 for first 12 children, then 1:13 (e.g. If 11 or 12 children are present two staff members are still required)



# Findings

## Service availability and supply

There are 24 approved education and care services operating across the Kimberley region, employing approximately 174 staff (approximately 139 full-time equivalent positions) and providing care and education for an estimated 625 children every day.

 **24** Early childhood and education care centres in the Kimberley (ECEC\*and OSHC\*)

These include for-profit businesses, family day care, and not for profit services. Thirty-eight percent of services offer both ECEC and OSHC at the one centre.

To contextualise ECEC and OSHC availability in the Kimberley, our work considered critical aspects of the recent Mitchell Institute report (Hurley, 2022) on centre-based long day care accessibility. This report is the most recent work completed on the childcare industry in Australia and received significant media attention when it was released in March 2022.

The report found that Western Australia has the lowest overall centre-based long day care accessibility of all states and territories, with the highest level of childcare accessibility below the national median. The report also found a negative correlation between access to centre-based long day care and socioeconomic status. Our analysis, however, has not considered the link between socioeconomic status and childcare accessibility in the Kimberley.

Table 3. Number of childcare services in the Kimberley by location, service and management type

Location	Service type			Management type			
	ECEC	Before and after school hours care	Vacation care	Private for profit business (excluding family day care)	Family day care	Not for profit	Total number of centres
Kununurra	5	2	2	-	3	2	5
Halls Creek	1	1	1	-	-	1	1
Warmun	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
Wyndham	1	1	1	1	-	-	1
Broome	9	7	5	6	4	3	13
Derby	2	1	1	-	1	1	2
Fitzroy Crossing	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>24</b>





The total number of approved ECEC and OSHC places in the Kimberley region is 909; however, only 625 places are being utilised. This means the overall operating capacity across the region is 69%, as illustrated in Figure 1

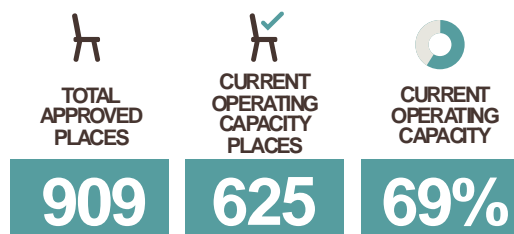
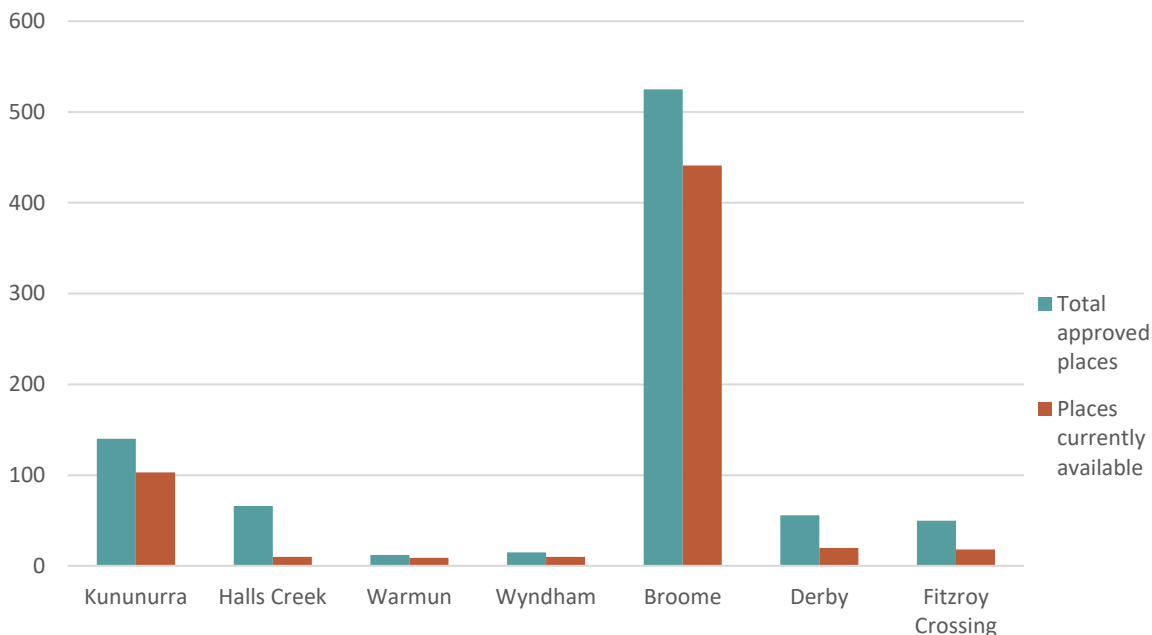


Figure 1. Approved and actual capacity of Kimberley childcare centres



Of the 24 centres operating across the Kimberley, less than half (four centre-based and seven family day care centres) are operating at their approved capacity. Of the remaining 13 centres, 12 operate at reduced capacity due to staff shortages. The remaining centre operates at reduced capacity by choice to maintain their preferred higher educator-to-child ratios (refer to case study on page 17).

The gap between approved and actual capacity is 284 places. Each of these unused places represents a worker unable to work their desired hours; an employer unable to locate staff; and a substantial subsidy left unutilised by the region. We estimate the Kimberley forgoes approximately \$3.7 million p.a.<sup>1</sup> in Commonwealth Child Care Subsidies because of these unused places.

Our discussions with the sector have identified workforce shortages as the main driver of reduced centre operating capacity. Although a national issue, this is especially acute for regional and remote services (Jackson, 2020). Currently, there are approximately 59 staff vacancies across the Kimberley, with half of the centre-based services reporting the use of waivers to address the shortage of early childhood educators.



<sup>1</sup>This is a conservative estimate based on:

- ECEC: a daily rate of \$130 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy (applies to families with an annual income of \$174,390 – \$253,680), 48 weeks annual access, and a total of 220 underutilised places.

- OSHC: a daily rate of \$45 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy (applies to families with an annual income of \$174,390 – \$253,680), 40 weeks annual access, and a total of 69 underutilised places.



***“Australia's childcare sector is emerging from the Omicron wave [of COVID] in "crisis", with more than one in 10 centres needing a government waiver to legally operate because they do not have enough workers.” (Duffy, 2022)***

In addition to seeking waivers, centres report that over the past two years, families have regularly been asked to reduce their ECEC and OSHC days voluntarily to manage staff shortages. If families do not agree to reduce days, centres have had to impose a reduction in days. In some instances, centres can also move children to different age rooms to manage staff shortages and educator-to-child ratios.

***"It's a crisis really ...It feels a bit like we're on Survivor. Who's going to get evicted this week? Who's going to get voted off the island next?"***

Kununurra parent impacted by the ECEC crisis talking with ABC Kimberley (O'Connor, 2021)

However, waivers, voluntary reductions and room consolidation are stopgap measures, and they have limits. In some cases, centres have had no choice but to close their services altogether. In May 2022, Kununurra's only centre-based OSHC service was forced to close after a trained supervisor could not be recruited despite a months-long search, leaving 35 children and their families per day without OSHC for more than four months.

***"My son will have to sit outside on his iPad at one of our workplaces. It isn't great for his development. He's not moving around, he's not socialising, he's not learning."***

Kununurra mum talking about the juggling act to care for her eight-year-old son with the closing of the OSHC service in Kununurra. (O'Connor, 2021)

In Broome, the Broome CIRCLE House offering long day care closed in August 2021 as it was no longer financially viable. In August 2022, a Broome family day care business closed after it was unable to secure insurance for a strata property with a home-based business with a Broome postcode.





### Approved education and care service provision in remote Aboriginal communities

With the sole exception of Warmun, there are no ECEC or OSHC centres operating in the 74 Aboriginal communities across the Kimberley (Department of Communities, 2022). This means the families of approximately 697 children 0-4 years and 1,152 children 5-12 years have no access to centre-based childcare in those locations.

Nationally, only 32% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 0-4 years attended ECEC in the September 2020 quarter, compared to 44% for all other children (DESE, 2021). Formal early learning can help give children the best start in life and supports their future health, wellbeing, working potential and social participation (Harvard University, 2022). Relatively low ECEC attendance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and limited availability of ECEC in Aboriginal communities is therefore particularly concerning.

The Wanyanyaken Taam Early Learning Centre (Wanyanyaken Taam) in Warmun has been operating a not for profit long day care service for over 12 years and currently has four local Aboriginal staff employed at the centre. The centre is currently funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services Communities for Children program, and is in the process of transitioning to CCS to unlock additional funding. Notwithstanding, Wanyanyaken Taam has challenges similar to those facing larger Kimberley towns such as attracting workers, workforce training and succession planning. The centre currently has children with undiagnosed developmental needs and no formally trained staff with the skills to support these children. They need dedicated staff experienced with helping these children with complex needs. The current funding model makes this unachievable.

 **697**  
Children

**(0-4 years)**  
living in remote  
Communities  
with no access to  
ECEC & OSHC

Some Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley have or have had approved education and care models in place, however the sustainability of these services can be a challenge under prevailing funding models.



## Service demand

The Kimberley has a relatively young population, with almost a quarter (23%) of the 38,717 residents aged 14 years and younger (compared to 20% for WA and 18% for Australia). Of 29,135 working-age adults, 16,993 (58%) are part of the labour force (March 2022). The unemployment rate in the region sits at 7.3%, more than twice the overall WA and Australia figure (3.4%) (DJTSI, 2022).

A third (33%) of working-age Aboriginal adults are engaged in the workforce compared with 40% in WA and 45% across Australia.

### ECEC

Current operating capacity for ECEC places is 446 compared with the total approved places of 666, as illustrated in Table 4. This equates to an

underutilisation of 220 approved ECEC places across the Kimberley.

Access to ECEC in the Kimberley is significantly lower than in the Perth metropolitan area. There are 0.23 approved ECEC places for every child 0-4 years in the Kimberley, but only 0.15 places in practice because of workforce-related capacity shortages. This is less than a third of the metropolitan Perth rate of 0.50 approved places per child 0-4 years.

**ECEC**  
(0 – 4 years)



Table 4. Measures of ECEC supply and demand

Location	Total approved ECEC places	Current operating capacity ECEC places	Waitlist*	Total families in the labour force with children 0-4 years 2021	Total children 0-4 years 2021 ERP	Number of approved ECEC places per child 0-4 years	Number of current operating capacity ECEC places per child 0-4 years
Kununurra	134	97	194	188	437	0.31	0.22
Halls Creek	47	10	25	20	153	0.31	0.07
Warmun	12	9	-	16	55	0.22	0.16
Wyndham	15	10	-	19	68	0.22	0.15
Broome	355	285	487	547	1,138	0.31	0.25
Derby	53	17	50	57	258	0.21	0.07
Fitzroy Crossing	50	18	14	19	95	0.53	0.19
Rest of Kimberley	No services	N/A	N/A	130	697	0.00	0.00
Total Kimberley SA3	666	446	770	996	2,915	0.23	0.15
Perth City SA3	Data not available (d.n.a)	(d.n.a)	(d.n.a)	(d.n.a)	(d.n.a)	0.50	(d.n.a)

\* Where there is more than one ECEC provider in a town (Broome & Kununurra), families will often have their children on more than one waitlist, so raw waitlist numbers will not reflect the number of individual families actively seeking a place.

Source: ABS, 2021; ACECQA, 2022; Hurley, 2022; and KDC analysis (2022).



## OSHC

OSHC is significantly less utilised than ECEC. In the September quarter 2021, only 18% of children 5-12 years in Australia accessed OSHC compared with 50% of children 0-5 years (DoE, 2021).

There are 243 approved OSHC places available across the Kimberley (Table 5); however, only 179 of those places are being offered by centres - an underutilisation of 64 places. There are 0.05 approved OSHC places, but only 0.04 operating capacity places, for every child 5-12 years in the Kimberley.

In major cities around Australia, 23% of children 5-12 years accessed OSHC in the September quarter 2021. Assuming demand is comparable in the Kimberley's major regional centres, 177 children in Kununurra and 470 in Broome would require OSHC. There are currently 36 operating capacity places available of the 51 approved in Kununurra, and 140 operating capacity places available of the 170 approved in Broome. A significant shortage of OSHC places across these towns seems clear enough.

In interviews, providers and employers alike stated that the lack of ECEC and OSHC has led working parents to reduce work hours or leave employment altogether. This has had a detrimental flow-on effect on the regional economy. Some employers have increased part-time staff due to childcare constraints. A district director of a major state government department estimated that, for every position advertised in the region, at least one interviewed candidate has withdrawn from the recruitment process due to lack of childcare. That department has had a critical family violence-related position vacant for more than six months; a strong candidate had been offered the position but could not accept due to lack of childcare.

## OSHC (5 – 12 years)



Table 5. Measures of OSHC supply and demand

Location	Total approved OSHC places	Current operating capacity OSHC places	Total families (couple and single) in the labour force with children 5-12 years 2021	Total children 5-12 years 2021 ERP	Number of approved OSHC places per child 5-12 years	Number of current operating capacity OSHC places per child 5-12 years
Kununurra	51	36	379	771	0.07	0.05
Halls Creek	19	-	48	246	0.08	-
Warmun	-	-	21	69	-	-
Wyndham	-	-	52	146	-	-
Broome	170	140	1,160	2,042	0.08	0.07
Derby	3	3	111	426	0.01	0.01
Fitzroy Crossing	-	-	49	166	-	-
Rest of Kimberley	No services	N/A	288	1,152	-	-
Total Kimberley SA3	243	179	2,108	5,048	0.05	0.04

Source: ABS, 2021; ACECQA, 2022; and KDC analysis (2022).



*"Any female worker on maternity leave isn't coming back. If so, they come back for one day a week."*

East Kimberley employer interviewed

### Capacity and Waiting Lists

80% of ECEC and OSHC providers reported waitlists ranging from eight to 220 children, with waiting periods averaging between 12-24 months. Waitlists across the Kimberley may also be lower than actual demand as one provider shared:

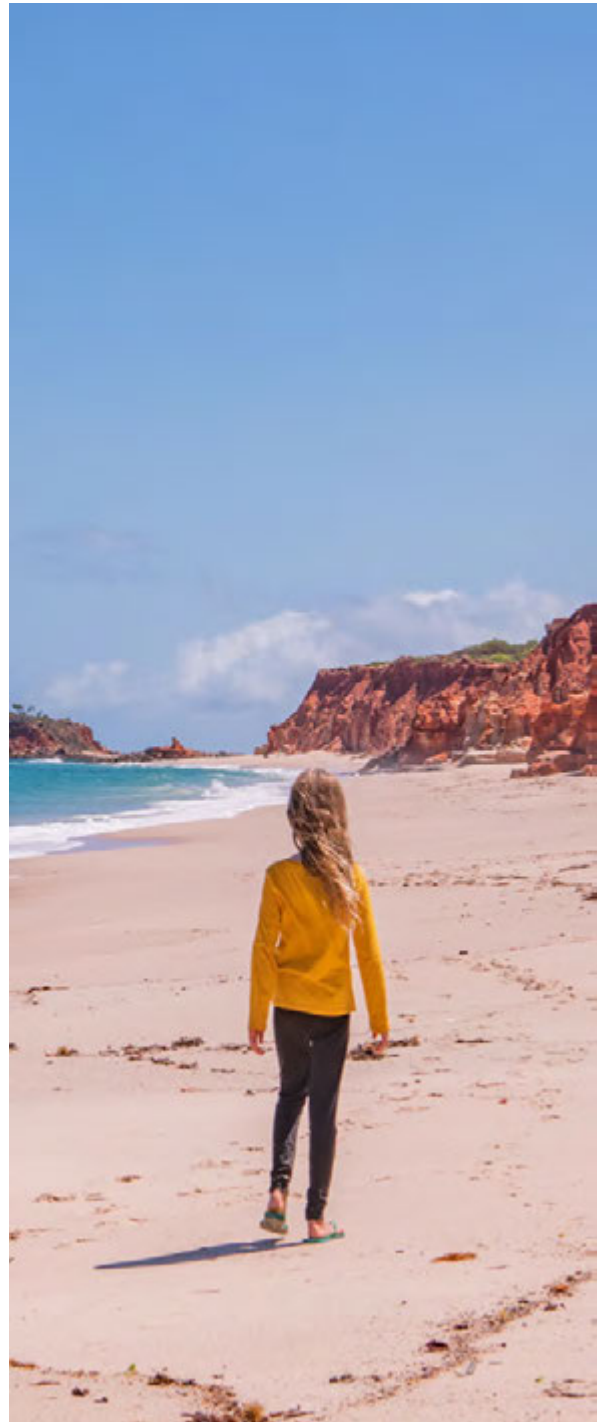
*"We potentially have another 30 children you could add to the waitlist based on people that ring up to enquire but don't put in their form because of the high numbers. We receive on average two to five enquires per week for places."*

East Kimberley ECEC provider

Priority of access requirements exist for children in the care of the Department of Communities, at-risk or single parents. A number of centres told us these requirements are unable to be accommodated in many instances due to a lack of available places, adding more stress on these families and the system.

 **12-24 months** Waiting period reported by 80% of the centres

 **59** Additional staff required







## Sector constraints and workforce sustainability

Staffing, regulation, housing, social issues, training and wages are some of the key factors constraining the supply of ECEC and OSHC services across the Kimberley. These factors are multidimensional and compound the need for centres to make ongoing adjustments to their service. As a result, many centres are operating well below their approved licensed capacity.

*“I have recently spoken to four parents in the boat of nearly losing their house because their job is linked to their house and they can’t get childcare to be able to return to work after having children.”*

Kimberley family day care provider

### Staffing

Kimberley ECEC and OSHC providers are currently short approximately 59 workers. This represents the workforce needed to enable all providers to offer their full licenced capacity.

This includes 28 diploma level and 26 certificate III level qualified staff, as outlined in Table 6.

The current workforce challenges also limit the ability of centres to strengthen early childhood and learning aspects. For example, several centres interviewed reported a desire to have more than the minimum required staff to meet educator-to-child ratios. This would create a more supportive work environment for educators, enable better mentoring for those in training and provide greater opportunities to support the developmental needs of children. In addition, some centres would like to offer split shifts to staff across the workday,

although fulfilling this would require even more additional staff.

The current staff shortages also limit the casual pool of relief staff. As a result, when staff are unwell centres often need to close rooms and reduce the number of children attending on that day. Many centres report having to ask families to remove days of care to support the service to manage staff shortages.

*“The issue is you have this very overworked, undertrained workforce and when you are trying to get trainees into the positions, they don’t get a good vibe”*

Kimberley long day care provider

The following case study reflects how one service provider, Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jarndu yani u Centre (Baya Gawiy) in Fitzroy Crossing, is setting higher educator-to-child ratios to meet the needs and education and care philosophies of their community. It also reflects how the service is using the support of other training and ECEC services to assist meeting qualification requirements, and how transitioning to CCS has been necessary for the centre’s financial sustainability.

## Case Study

### *Maintaining high educator-to-child ratios*

**The Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jarndu yani u Centre (Baya Gawiy) in Fitzroy Crossing offers an early childhood learning unit (centre-based long day care), a child and parent centre, mobile playgroup outreach and a child and parent support program. These programs are auspiced by the Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (Marninwarntikura), a not for profit organisation.**

The Baya Gawiy Early Childhood Learning Unit (the Unit) has been operating for 10 years and although having 50 approved places they operate with a limit of 26 children to ensure high quality. The Unit can fluctuate between 18-26 places depending on the availability of educators. They aim to maintain a 1:3 educator-to-child ratio to better support the high needs of some children and honour the philosophy of the community Elders to have an exemplary centre in which their children can learn and flourish. The centre also ensures two emergency places are available for children in care that might be referred through the Department of Communities, increasing the places to 28 for short periods.

Maintaining high educator-to-child ratios provides cultural security for local Aboriginal children. The approach reduces burnout and fatigue of staff and acknowledges the vicarious trauma experienced by some local children, bringing meaning and quality to the education and care unit. Recruitment of local staff is a priority, and a two-way learning model honours traditional child-rearing practices, which is key to the retention of local staff and families.

Language, culture, and wellbeing are critical to this service model, and seven local Aboriginal staff are employed to work alongside three non-Aboriginal educators. Goodstart Early Learning

(Goodstart) is providing two diploma qualified educators through secondment arrangements to ensure regulatory requirements can be met.

Baya Gawiy's service model relies on the following:

- Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS): transitioning to the CCS resulted in a considerable fee increase for families and a significant administrative burden for management supporting families with paperwork, but was necessary for the centre's financial sustainability;
- Marninwarntikura, the auspicing body, provides human resources and covers much of the programs' overheads, including subsidised housing, maintenance, and utilities. Housing is shared by at least two educators per house due to accommodation shortages;
- Baya Gawiy pool staff work across multiple programs to meet regulations and maintain stability; and
- the Goodstart Secondment program is a philanthropic contribution to Baya Gawiy's sustainability, providing costs associated with two of their educators year-round, including wages, housing, vehicle and travel expenses. These educators can be seconded to Fitzroy Crossing for up to three, six and 12 months.



Table 6. Staff

Location	Number of staff employed	Number of staff vacancies	Breakdown of staff vacancies				
			Early childhood teacher	Diploma	Certificate III	Director/ coordinator	Other roles
Kununurra	35	26	-	12	13	-	1
Halls Creek	8	5	-	4	1	-	-
Warmun	4	3	-	1	2	-	-
Wyndham	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Broome	106	19	-	8	8	2	1
Derby	8	4	-	2	2	-	-
Fitzroy Crossing	13	2	1	1	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

There are examples of centres employing long-term local workers that have been better able to retain workers and operate at or near maximum capacity. These include Kimberley Kids in Broome and One Tree Community Services in Kununurra.

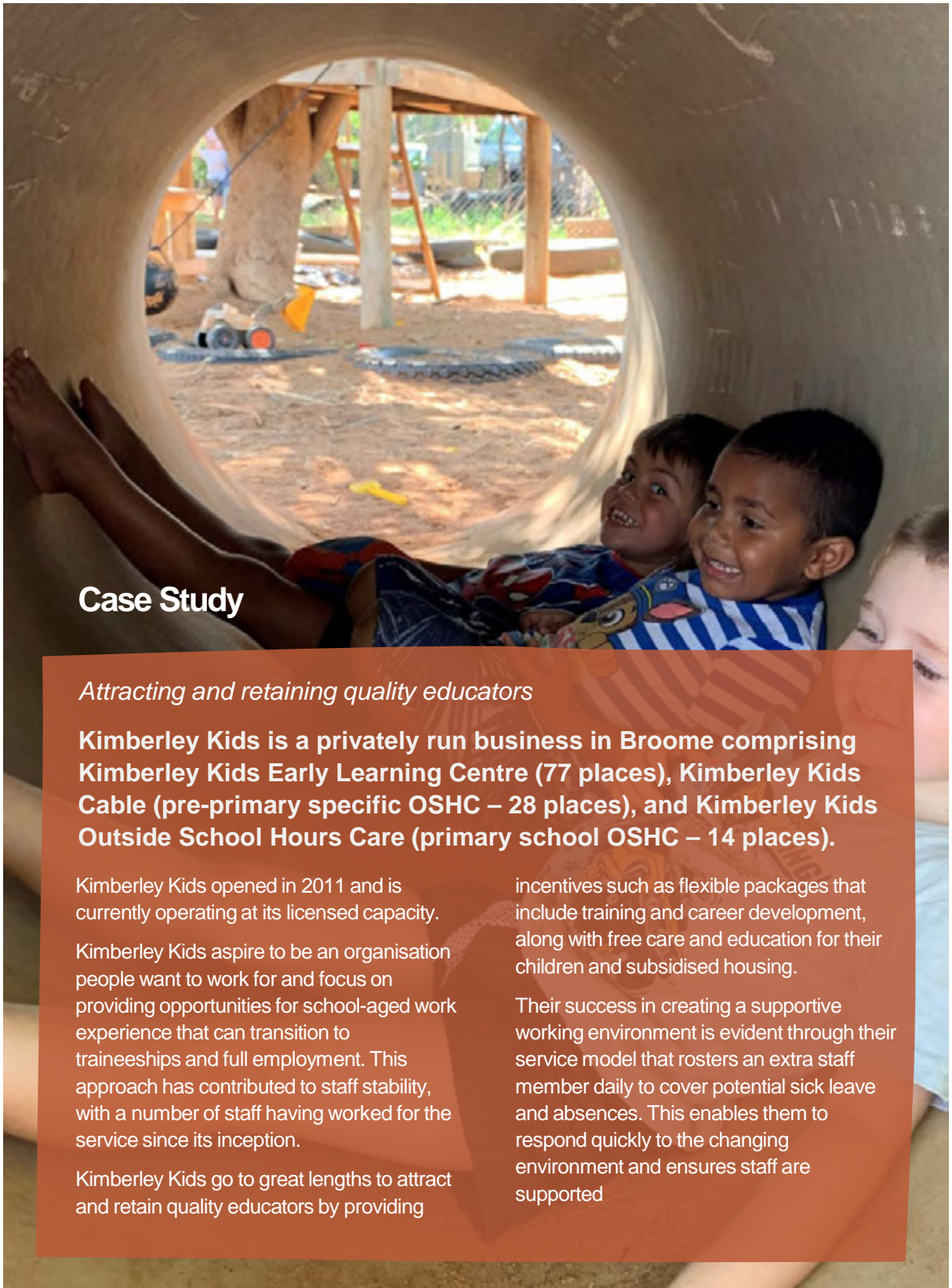
One Tree has 11 local Aboriginal staff (over 50% of all staff) working at the centre, including the current director, a local Aboriginal woman who started at the centre as a receptionist six years ago.

The development of the local workforce is a key priority for One Tree and through their RTO status, they can internally support training opportunities for staff. It is not uncommon for the centre to have people coming in looking for a career opportunity based on One Tree's positive reputation in the community.

## The challenges







## Case Study

### *Attracting and retaining quality educators*

**Kimberley Kids is a privately run business in Broome comprising Kimberley Kids Early Learning Centre (77 places), Kimberley Kids Cable (pre-primary specific OSHC – 28 places), and Kimberley Kids Outside School Hours Care (primary school OSHC – 14 places).**

Kimberley Kids opened in 2011 and is currently operating at its licensed capacity.

Kimberley Kids aspire to be an organisation people want to work for and focus on providing opportunities for school-aged work experience that can transition to traineeships and full employment. This approach has contributed to staff stability, with a number of staff having worked for the service since its inception.

Kimberley Kids go to great lengths to attract and retain quality educators by providing

incentives such as flexible packages that include training and career development, along with free care and education for their children and subsidised housing.

Their success in creating a supportive working environment is evident through their service model that rosters an extra staff member daily to cover potential sick leave and absences. This enables them to respond quickly to the changing environment and ensures staff are supported



## Regulation

The regulatory environment in which the ECEC and OSHC sector operates has been reported as one of the fundamental constraints on the delivery of these services throughout the Kimberley.

For example, the regulations specify 50% of the educators in centre-based services must have, or be actively working towards, at least an approved diploma level education and care qualification. All other educators must have, or be actively working towards, at least an approved certificate III level education and care qualification. Further, the regulation also determines the ratio of educators-to-children. Centres must structure their operations to meet these regulatory requirements to obtain licensing and achieve quality standards. Centres recognise regulations are required to ensure high quality education and care however in the current environment regulations present challenges in meeting demand given regulations are so intrinsically linked to the workforce.

In the family day care space, businesses face increasing regulations which constrain flexibility and the level of service offered. This is also perceived as a disincentive for new businesses to establish. Issues raised by providers include increased risk assessment paperwork which limits regular outings, costly Shire Council regulations (licences, driveway/parking, and ability to provide food), and fluctuating ratios for supervision and space.

New WA State regulations from September 2022 specify no family day care approved provider that oversees individual family day care educators can take on new educators with a pool or spa at their residence. This may have a disproportionate impact in regions such as the north west of WA, where household pools are ubiquitous.

## Training

Training staff is key to the ECEC and OSHC sectors as many centres face the challenge of finding staff with appropriate qualifications, so often take on unqualified staff to fill the gaps. Current requirements mean these staff can only work for a maximum of three months before needing to enrol

in TAFE and work towards an appropriate qualification. Some centres cover these costs for staff and in return, the trainee commits to working at the centre for the length of their training. This is in theory a good solution. However, due to the transient nature of this region, it is not always possible to get this commitment from an employee. Centres report paying for employees to study, only for them to leave town during their study, creating further staffing challenges.

Training has historically been difficult to access in the Kimberley. North Regional TAFE (NR TAFE) currently has three early childhood education trainers (two in the West Kimberley and one in the East Kimberley) and is one of two local options for training. One Tree Community Services (One Tree), in Kununurra and Derby, is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and trains its own staff.

There are currently 70 certificate III and 10 diploma students studying through NR TAFE. One Tree through their own RTO have four certificate III and one diploma students. Many of these enrolled students are already working in the sector, therefore, the additional staff required to operate at approved licensed capacity is not being addressed in its entirety through these enrolments.

Several service providers reported significant challenges experienced by local students concerning literacy, numeracy, and resourcing which impedes the student's ability to complete training.

The Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek has a largely Aboriginal workforce and is currently accessing a training program that ACECQA has developed and is delivering called the 'Quality and Safety Training Program'. It is a simple program about the safety and supervision of children, covering some aspects of a certificate III delivered in a culturally sensitive way. Little Nuggets would like to see more of this type of flexible on the job training developed for Aboriginal workers.

One Tree in Kununurra is a good example of how training and development that is centre-based, rather than occurring off-site, strongly contributes to a more resilient and durable centre workforce.

**Students enrolled  
In Early Childhood  
Education studies at  
NR TAFE & One Tree**

  
**74 students  
in Certificate III**

  
**11 students  
in Diploma**





## Case Study

### *Growing your own workforce*

**One Tree Community Services (One Tree) in Kununurra is a not for profit ECEC centre. One Tree has ECEC centres across Australia.**

One Tree opened in 2012 and is currently operating at full capacity (38 places) and have done so throughout 2020 and 2021 despite the negative impacts of COVID.

The development of the local workforce is a key priority for One Tree and through their Registered Training Organisation (RTO) status, they can internally support training opportunities for staff. It is not uncommon for the centre to have people coming in looking for a career opportunity based on One Tree's positive reputation in the community.

One Tree has 11 local Aboriginal staff (over 50% of all staff) working at the centre, including the current director, a local Aboriginal woman who started at the centre as a receptionist six years ago. This large

local workforce reduces the pressure to provide accommodation for new staff, which is often a key issue for many regional centres. One Tree notes this success would not have been achieved without additional funding provided by the Commonwealth through successful grant applications.

One Tree believes providing mentoring and training support for staff is key to their success and they are working more broadly to explore funding opportunities to employ staff for these roles in centres.

One Tree is exploring innovative models to provide more flexible service delivery for Aboriginal families, including the availability of casual places. However, further funding is required to make ideas like this happen.





### Wages and incentives

Low wages, compounded by the current housing crisis and high cost of living in the region, are constraining the ability to attract and retain staff in this sector.

***“We need more monetary incentives to get people up here to work for us in the first place.”***

Kimberley long day care providers

Some ECEC centres offer above award wage but consider it a low base rate to start with, especially considering the level of training, responsibilities and hours. One of the larger providers in Broome (operating three services) is operating at full capacity and offers free care and education for the children of staff and subsidised housing as staff attraction incentives. The only other service

operating at full capacity (with the exception of family day care providers) provides free care and education for the children of staff and has a strong focus on local training opportunities. This service currently has 69% Aboriginal staff, therefore reducing the need to provide housing for staff relocating to the region.

ECEC and OSHC services (especially not for profit organisations) struggle to compete with the employment incentives offered by schools (such as only working school hours, school holidays, better wages, subsidised accommodation and electricity, discounted flights and full relocation to Kununurra and a return relocation pack if they work for 12 months) and regularly lose staff to the Department of Education. This challenge is not unique to the Kimberley (ACECQA, 2021).

### Financial models

The financial model of most centres relies heavily on the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). This is a means-tested and activity-tested payment introduced in 2018. The means-tested element of the CCS means families who earn less receive a greater subsidy.

CCS is paid to the centre on behalf of families, who pay the difference between the subsidy and the fees charged by centres – known as the gap fee. This however does not allow services flexibility around programming such as lowering their educator-to-child ratios as needs arise or recruiting appropriately qualified staff to support undiagnosed developmental needs in children. A common theme amongst centre-based long day care centres was educator-to-child ratios being too high, especially when there are developmental needs amongst children.

As a result, some centres rely heavily on alternative funding sources to maintain service delivery.

***“The only way we can support the financials is applying for grants over the next few years.”***

Comment shared by two East Kimberley long day care providers



## Infrastructure

The number of children licensed to attend a service is based on a particular square metreage of indoor and outdoor space. For services to increase the number of licenced places, they generally need to increase the size of their premises.

One Broome-based centre reported infrastructure constraints on their ability to increase places. For all other centres, reduced capacity stems from staffing issues. Infrastructure is therefore unlikely to be on their agenda until they have a full staff cohort operating at full capacity.

## Housing

The limited supply of affordable housing options is restricting the ability of ECEC and OSHC services to attract skilled staff to the region.

This is supported by current housing data showing an undersupply of social housing and private rentals across the Kimberley (reiwa.com, 2022). In addition to difficulties due to low supply of housing, low wages make it even more difficult for ECEC and OSHC workers to secure suitable affordable housing.

To address housing issues, some ECEC and OSHC services are providing accommodation options for

a limited number of staff. In some cases, this includes share houses which often restricts recruitment to a single person only. In addition, some services are offering wages above award to support staff to cover higher accommodation costs.

## Social issues

Several ECEC and OSHC centres reported negative media regarding crime in the Kimberley being a key issue related to a centre's ability to recruit staff into the region.

## Fees and CCS application process

ECEC and OSHC fees and application requirements related to the CCS are key demand constraints for many Kimberley families accessing ECEC and OSHC. During the consultation, some families reported that fees are a limiting factor for ECEC accessibility, particularly if they are not yet employed or have family care options.

Some families also reported struggling to complete the required application process for CCS. As a result, staff at centres are spending significant time supporting families to complete required documentation, further adding to the workload of already stretched staff.





# Opportunities for sector growth and development

## Economic activity and investment

Economic activity across the Kimberley is forecast to increase with a number of large development projects planned for the region. This is likely to significantly increase the already high demand for ECEC and OSHC services.

Key projects include the proposed cotton gin and Sorby Hills base metal projects in the East Kimberley, the Thunderbird Mineral Sands mine south of Derby, and the upgrade and sealing of the Tanami Road across 2022-2028. These projects are expected to create significant employment and business growth, as well as increased Aboriginal employment.

Further, WA State commitments to increase Aboriginal employment through procurement policies and Closing the Gap, and the potential of a new Commonwealth Employment Program to replace the Community Development Program are likely to further increase the need for additional ECEC and OSHC places to support Aboriginal people transitioning into sustainable employment. Closing the Gap cannot be achieved without an increase in childcare places as parents and caregivers (mostly mums) are unable to participate in the workforce if they are unable to access a childcare place for their children.

The ECEC and OSHC sector is in itself a gateway to Aboriginal employment. ECEC and OSHC are

professions with qualifications that can be acquired in the region, and with clear examples in the region of success in Aboriginal employment.

This means investment in childcare pays a “double dividend” in terms of Aboriginal economic participation: it removes a general barrier and creates a specific opportunity for Aboriginal employment.

Our data illustrates a gap throughout the Kimberley in ECEC and OSHC places at both current operating levels and licensed capacity. This gap will be further increased by the additional licensed capacity that will be required to support future economic development in the region.

By way of comparison, raising Kimberley ECEC and OSHC levels to those available in Perth would imply around 1,035 additional places (409 for ECEC<sup>2</sup> and 626 for OSHC<sup>3</sup>), creating an additional 213 jobs in the sector (150 for ECEC and 63 for OSHC) and drawing an estimated additional \$9.2 million<sup>4</sup> annually to the Kimberley in Commonwealth Child Care Subsidies.

The Commission is acutely aware there is a much larger economic opportunity to be unlocked. A conservative analysis would suggest that reaching a level of metro parity in the availability of ECEC and OSHC would unlock a minimum of \$20.5 million p.a.<sup>5</sup> in direct economic activity resulting from direct additional employment in ECEC and OSHC centres and indirect employment from increased workforce participation. The increased output of those indirect employees would only increase that estimate.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated by applying the ECEC licensed capacity of 0.50 for the Perth metro area. This calculation only includes the Kimberley’s six regional centres of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Kununurra to reflect where the majority of demand for these services is focussed.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated by applying the major cities access to OSHC rate of 23% of total children 5-12 years. This calculation only includes the Kimberley’s six regional centres of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Kununurra to reflect where the majority of demand for these services is focussed.

<sup>4</sup> This is a conservative estimate based on:

- ECEC: a daily rate of \$130 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy (applies to families with an annual income of \$174,390 – \$253,680), 48 weeks annual access, and a total of 409 additional places.
- OSHC: a daily rate of \$45 per child, a 50% CCS subsidy (applies to families with an annual income of \$174,390 – \$253,680), 40 weeks annual access, and a total of 626 additional places.

<sup>5</sup> This is a conservative estimate based on 1,035 additional places if Kimberley ECEC and OSHC levels were raised to those available in Perth, a conservative multiplier of 0.25 based on every new place available resulting in 0.25 FTE employees able to enter the workforce, and ABS data on the average private sector weekly wage for a female being \$79,227.20 p.a.  $1,035 \times 0.25 \times \$79,227.20 = \$20,480,231$ .



# Industry responses to ECEC and OSHC challenges

ECEC and OSHC providers in the region are responding as best they can to the challenges they face in providing quality education and care. However, the multidimensional challenges require collective responses to address the supply of ECEC and OSHC. Other stakeholders including Local Government, State and Commonwealth Government, training providers and industry experts are responding and some of these strategies and actions are discussed below.

## **ACECQA's National Workforce Strategy**

ACECQA's National Workforce Strategy (ACECQA 2022) sets short, medium and long-term goals to address the challenges facing the ECEC workforce. Priority actions centre around six themes:

- professional recognition;
- attraction and retention;
- leadership and capability;
- wellbeing;
- qualifications and career pathways; and
- data and evidence.

The strategy recognises that collaboration across governments, service providers, peak bodies, education and training providers, educators and teachers, and representative bodies is required to effect sustainable change. It provides a path forward if the strategies are funded, implemented and findings shared and scaled.

## **OSHC**

In WA, the Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) are developing a proposal to change regulations to broaden accepted qualification requirements for OSHC educators. It is hoped

these changes will enable an increase in OSHC services with more flexibility around the qualification requirements of staff.

## **Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD)**

The DTWD through the Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative has identified ECEC as a priority occupation and have reduced training fees to enable the upskilling of the existing workers, to meet the sector's mandatory accreditation requirements for a qualified workforce, and to encourage new people into the industry.

## **Early childhood education and care (ECEC) Job Ready pre-employment program**

Broome has been identified as a trial site for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) Job Ready pre-employment program to better engage and quickly upskill the local workforce in the sector to help reduce the strain on the sector.

The ECEC Job Ready program is a unique collaboration between the State Government, North Regional TAFE, Community Skills WA, Broome Local Jobs, and local industry. It is being delivered as an outreach program at Broome CIRCLE, to provide local mothers returning to work with access to crèche facilities while they complete their training. Participants will also be supported by Nyamba Buru Yawuru, through their Warrmijala Murrgurlayi (Rise up to Work) Sustainable Employment Program.

The skills acquired will count towards a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care with support, financial advice and assistance for this training included as part of the program.

A recent announcement of funding awarded to CommunitySkills WA through Lotterywest means this program will launch in Term 4 of 2022.

Job Ready programs are part of the State Government's \$5.5 billion investment in WA Recovery Plan initiatives to upskill the WA workforce and enhance employment and training opportunities following the COVID-19 outbreak.





### **Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) National Intermediary THRYVE pilot project**

The THRYVE Pilot Project has been established to support and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early years services to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible and culturally strong support for children, families, and communities.

Initially, the Pilot is working in three States – New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria. The THRYVE Project aims to respond to local priorities to strengthen service design and governance, delivery and compliance in service quality, workforce development and training. It also offers critical support to access sustainable funding.

Baya Gawiy in Fitzroy Crossing is participating in this pilot with other Kimberley Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs).

#### **Commonwealth funding**

Recently, the Commonwealth Government increased the Child Care Subsidy by 30% for a second child and subsequent children aged under six years in care. This will likely increase demand for ECEC and OSHC services, further increasing the gap within the Kimberley between operating capacity / licensed places and total demand.

#### **Community Child Care Fund Restricted (CCCFR) program**

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment will provide funding of \$29.9 million over four years to help services address community-level barriers to ECEC participation and to increase the number of children from vulnerable or disadvantaged communities, including

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, accessing quality ECEC.

This measure will fund up to 20 additional high-quality and mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-run ECEC services, mainly in remote and very remote areas, with low or no supply of subsidy-approved education and care. It will also fund the expansion of existing Community Child Care Fund Restricted (CCCFR) services to engage families to increase ECEC participation and attendance, taking into account higher costs of service delivery in remote areas, training needs for educators and outreach to strengthen community engagement.

In Halls Creek, the Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre has recently been awarded CCCFR. This funding provides the service with a level of flexibility that is key to their financial sustainability, especially in enrolling families who might not engage with Centrelink.

In Kununurra, Wunan Foundation is awaiting the outcome of their recent submission for the CCCFR (Closing the Gap) non-competitive grant opportunity. Their submission is to extend services by taking the lead role in establishing a new Kununurra Community Early Childcare Education Centre in a consortium arrangement with One Tree Community Services.

The new service will implement strategies to break down barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families face in accessing early childhood education. Strategies include engaging families through community outreach, marketing and promotion of the service, participation in community events and the waiving and discounting of service fees.



### **Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)**

In response to workforce issues more generally, the East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce led the process to have the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley recognised as a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA). From April 2022 businesses in the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley have access to additional workers across more than 100 occupations, including childcare.

The Ewin Early Learning Centre in Kununurra is pursuing this opportunity to address their workforce needs and reports they have received an increase in interest from potential employees since the East Kimberley DAMA announcement.

The Broome Chamber of Commerce and the Shire of Halls Creek are currently exploring the potential of extending the East Kimberley DAMA to include the Shire of Broome Local Government Area (LGA) and Halls Creek LGA.

### **Department of Communities Local Government funding to support childcare in the regions**

The WA Government has committed \$5.1 million towards retaining ECEC workers in the regions and establishing sustainable models to support regional childcare. A total of \$1 million has been allocated to local government authorities over four years to develop attraction and retention workforce packages specific to their regions to assist with workforce shortages.

A further \$4 million will go towards supporting the viability of services in the regions through the development of new models of early childhood education and care services specific to a region.

In the first round of funding announced in July 2022 the following Kimberley Shires were allocated funding:

- Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley received \$17,340 to address training needs in ECEC across the Shire; and
- Shire of Derby West Kimberley received \$25,000 to provide workforce support to the Shire's ECEC centres.

A second round of funding will be announced in the 2022/23 financial year.

### **Empowered Communities binarri-binyja yarrowoo**

BBY is committed to supporting Aboriginal-led development and policy reform through building a well-researched and meaningful evidence base. They recognise that one of the most important uses of data and evidence in their work is giving Aboriginal people the power to tell their own story and advocate for change.

BBY are working to build a common understanding on early childhood and outline opportunities to improve the health, wellbeing, and education of East Kimberley Aboriginal children to inform the development of a shared agenda.

### **Broome opportunities**

A national Request for Proposal process closed in September 2022 for the development of a childcare site in Broome North expected to accommodate around 80-90 places.

In September 2022, the Shire of Broome published an expression of interest for an experienced operator to provide OSHC services from the Broome Recreation and Aquatic Centre. It is anticipated the space could hold up to 27 children. The Shire is currently reviewing responses. If successful, the program will be operational in early 2023.

### **Derby growth**

In April 2022 Little Bilbies Family Day Care in Derby were awarded a \$170,000 Regional Economic Development (RED) Grant to increase building space capacity to accommodate and provide education and care services for an extra 22 children.

### **CommunitySkills WA**

CommunitySkills WA provide strategic industry advice to the DTWD and the WA State Training Board in relation to the social assistance and allied health workforce. They are currently working on the establishment of an Early Childhood Job Ready Program across the State.

In addition, CommunitySkills WA has been awarded funding through Lotterywest to assist with launching the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Skills Set Pilot Program in Broome as outlined above and with the potential for expansion across the Kimberley.





## Conclusion

High-quality, widely available childcare is a vital enabling condition for regional economies and communities. In the Kimberley, improving childcare services is perhaps one of the best strategies for simultaneously achieving workforce, Aboriginal economic empowerment, and childhood developmental objectives.

Workforce shortages are at the heart of the current childcare crisis in the Kimberley. Lack of affordable housing, combined with low wages and high regional cost of living, means quite simply that childcare is not an attractive or even viable employment option for many workers. High attrition in training and workforce development programs exacerbates these issues.

As a result, actual childcare places in the Kimberley are less than a third of the per-child licenced capacity rate in the Perth metropolitan area. With the sector currently short 59 workers, centres are operating at only 69% of licenced capacity across the region.

Given ongoing housing and cost-of-living concerns, this is unlikely to self-correct any time soon.

Not all centres have experienced these challenges equally and there are some great examples of success in the region including a number of centres operating at full capacity (Kimberley Kids in Broome and One Tree in Kununurra). Centres employing long-term local workers, and using appropriate culturally adapted training, are faring far better than those that don't. Training and development that is centre-based, rather than occurring off-site, also strongly contributes to a more resilient and durable centre workforce, as can be seen at One Tree in Kununurra.

In the medium-term, additional licensed capacity is needed to unlock economic opportunity in the Kimberley. WA State commitments to increase Aboriginal employment through Closing the Gap imply a need for additional ECEC and OSHC places, on top of existing community demand.

There are strategies and actions being undertaken by the ECEC and OSHC sector, Government and other stakeholders both within the region and at a national level to address some of the issues constraining ECEC and OSHC. These include training programs and incentives to better engage and upskill the local workforce; an East Kimberley Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) providing businesses access to additional workers across more than 100 occupations, including childcare; a Request for Proposal process for the development of a childcare site in Broome North expected to accommodate 80-90 places; Commission RED grant funding to Little Bilbies Family Day Care in Derby to accommodate and provide early education and care services for an extra 22 children; and local government funding to support ECEC and OSHC in the region.

## Acknowledgments

The Kimberley Development Commission wishes to express thanks to the ECEC and OSHC providers and stakeholders who provided critical input to this report.



# Glossary

*Actively working towards* – The National Regulations set out the level of qualification educators must hold to be included in educator-to-child ratios. ACECQA publishes approved qualifications on their website. If you are ‘actively working towards’ an ACECQA approved qualification (certificate III, diploma or early childhood teaching (ECT)) you may be counted towards qualification requirements.

Actively working towards provisions apply under regulations 126(1) and 127 of the National Regulations.

*Activity test* – An assessment of the combined hours of work, training, study, recognised voluntary work or other recognised activity undertaken by a family. The activity test is used to determine the number of hours of subsidised care to which a family will be entitled.

*Approved places* – the number of children licensed to attend a service, based on a particular square metreage of unencumbered indoor and outdoor space.

*Approved provider* – A provider of ECEC and OSHC that has been approved under Family Assistance Law to receive and pass on Child Care Subsidy on behalf of the Australian Government.

*Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)* – The national body established under the National Law to support states and territories to deliver best-practice regulation of early learning and care and ensure national consistency in improving quality outcomes for children.

*Centre-Based Day Care* – ACECQA define centre-based care as long day care and OSHC.

*Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS)* – CCS is paid to the centre on behalf of families, who pay the difference between the subsidy and the fees charged by centres – known as the gap fee.

*Community Child Care Fund (CCCF)* – A fund designed to help eligible ECEC services address barriers to ECEC participation, particularly in disadvantaged communities, including Aboriginal communities.

*Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)* – Includes centre-based and home-based long day care for children 0-5 years, as well as kindergarten.

*Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ERCU)* – ERCU undertakes the approval and monitoring of

education and care services, part of the Western Australian Department of Communities.

*Educator* – A person who provides care for someone else’s child or children at a ECEC or OSHC service, in their own home or, in the case of In-Home Care, in the child’s own home.

*Family Day Care* – A type of education and care that is usually provided in the home of an educator. Family day care can also include before-school, after-school, and school holiday care for children 5-12 years.

*Family unit* – couple and single parent families in the labour force (i.e. both parents in a couple are in the labour force).

*Long day care* – full-day programs for children 0-5 years. This is the most used service by children and families.

*National Quality Framework* – A jointly governed uniform national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of education and care services, including a national legislative framework that consists of the National Law and National Regulations; a National Quality Standard; and an assessment and rating system.

*Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)* – Provides care before and after school hours and during school vacations for children who normally attend school.

*Provider* – A person or business entity that is responsible for operating a ECEC or OSHC service (or services).

*Regulatory authority* – The state and territory authority responsible for the administration of the National Quality Framework within that jurisdiction.

*Service* – The ECEC or OSHC that is delivered by a provider in a site or setting. One provider may deliver one or more services, which may include different service types and/or different service sites.

*Vacation care* – Where a parent only utilises education and care during school holidays.

*Waivers* – Waivers play an important role in helping providers maintain their level of service to families while dealing with special circumstances or unexpected events.

An approved provider may apply to a regulatory authority for a waiver. Applying for a waiver should be a last resort; providers should explore other avenues before making an application.



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# Appendix one

## ECEC and OSHC provider interview questions

### SERVICE TYPE

- Is your service a:
  - private business,
  - family day care,
  - not for profit, or
  - local government run centre?
- Which of the following services do you provide:
  - long day care,
  - after school hours care, and/or
  - vacation care?
- What other early childhood education and care or outside school hours care providers do you know of in the Kimberley we can get in touch with?

### NUMBER OF PLACES, WAITING LIST AND FEES

- What is your licensed capacity?
- Are you currently operating at your full licensed capacity?
- If not, why not?
- How many families/children do you currently have on your waitlist?
  - Need to acknowledge or account for the fact one family will most likely be on the waiting list at every centre in town.
- What is the average turnover period for a family/child on the waitlist to secure a place?
- Do you prioritise families?
- If yes, how?
- What are your fees

### STAFFING

How many staff do you employ? What is the FTE equivalent? (i.e. a centre might employ 10 staff at 0.6FTE which equates to a total of 6 fulltime equivalents.)

- Is staffing an issue for your centre?
- Do you rely on agencies to access staff?
- If so, do have any issues with agency staff?
- Do you currently have a waiver due to staff shortages? If so, what type of waiver.
- What staff vacancies do you currently have? What positions?
- What are some of the key issues related to this? (E.g. lack of applicants, quality of applicants, lack of qualifications, cost of qualifications, housing, wages.)
- Do you provide housing for staff?
- If not, is this an issue?
- Have you had staff experience trouble accessing housing? Please provide details.
- Do you pay above award?



## SERVICE PROVISION

- Have you needed to make changes to service delivery due to staff shortages?
- What types of changes have you had to make due to staff shortages?
  - Reduce the number of children able to attend?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - About once per month
    - About once per term
    - Once
    - Never
  - If you have experienced the above, what notice is generally given to families?
    - Morning of
    - Day before
    - Other
  - Combine groups/sessions?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - About once per month
    - About once per term
    - Once
    - Never
  - Close a room?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - About once per month
    - About once per term
    - Once
    - Never
  - Change a program?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - About once per month
    - About once per term
    - Once
    - Never
  - Close your service for a session or more?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - About once per month
    - About once per term
    - Once
    - Never
- What changes would you most like to see to improve your ability to operate and increase the quality and availability of early childhood education and care in the Kimberley? (Responses could relate to award wages, qualification requirements, changes in sponsorship regulations and backpacker workers).

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- Are you currently experiencing any limitations in service delivery with regards to your infrastructure?
- If so, what are these?





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### Attachment 3: Kimberley ECEC Workforce Development Case Studies

#### Case Study 1: Broome Early Childhood Education and Care Skills Set Pilot

Broome was identified to launch the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Skills Set Pilot Program to engage and quickly upskill a local workforce and in-turn, help reduce the strain on this crucial industry. The pilot program was delivered in October 2022 through North Regional TAFE, Community Skills WA, and Department of Training Workforce and Development. The program was supported by Nyamba Buru (NBY), RDA Kimberley's Broome Employment Facilitators, Kimberley Kids, Broome CIRCLE and Broome Lotteries House.

The cohort of interested participants were primarily women with children who were going to find it difficult to participate in the training without access to childcare in Broome. To address this barrier, the partner organisations identified and connected Kimberley Kids (existing childcare business), Broome CIRCLE House and Broome Lotteries House to the program. These organisations offered a short-term childcare service and venues with on-site training rooms and a creche space. Along with the successful grant application through the 'Lotterywest Capacity Building Grants' Program, the ECEC Skills Set Pilot Program was able to incorporate childcare for participants.

The program was delivered over 10-weeks and provided an opportunity to better contextualise skills required for the ECEC sector with a greater level of in-place training support to gain the further qualifications needed. The skills acquired count towards a Certificate III in ECEC with support, financial advice, and assistance for onward training. The Broome program also offered a softer approach and exposure to the industry, with the objective to encourage employment retention.

Trainers and Aboriginal Support officers were supplied from North Regional TAFE and 10 workplace training placements were confirmed across multiple Broome childcare centres. A further unique addition to this pilot program was the involvement of NBY's Warrmijala Murrgurlayi (Rise up to Work) Sustainable Employment Program. Warrmijala Murrgurlayi delivers culturally integrated training and employment services aligned with the Mabu Liyan (good well-being) Framework. It provides on-going mentorship for participants throughout training and employment placement. Integrating the two programs aimed to contribute to employment retention and ongoing training and career pathways for all participants.

#### Outcomes:

- Seven participants engaged in the 10-week program.
- Two participants completed the course and continued working in their placements. They also enrolled in further ECEC studies. As a consequence, one major childcare centre in Broome was able to have eight children return to the centre after closing one room due to previous staff shortages.
- Through the NBY Warrmijala Murrgurlayi program, a further two participants are completing the course and gaining further support to continue their Certificate III Studies.
- The program empowered local women to enter/re-enter the workforce by providing culturally supported training and employment placements in local childcare centres.
- Following the success of the pilot program, a second ECEC Skills Set Program was delivered in Broome in 2023.

## Case Study 2: Playgroup qualification (Certificate II Community Services) pilot delivered by East Kimberley Job Pathways and Community Skills WA in Kununurra.

Community Skills WA and the WA training sector are developing a playgroup qualification that will assist with a pathway into the Certificate III ECEC. The qualification will be a Certificate II Community Services contextualised to the playgroup setting with two new accreditations covering children's development and caregiver engagement:

- Support children's learning and development.
- Engage with caregivers and families of young children.

In undertaking this Certificate II, the student would receive four units towards the Certificate III ECEC. This qualification could also be used in Vocational Education Training Delivered to Secondary Students. This will contribute to addressing some of the pathway challenges to the Certificate III without affecting the integrity of the qualification and may improve student completions, including within schools.

Community Skills WA is partnering with East Kimberley Job Pathways in the East Kimberley to trial the playgroup qualification in Kununurra, Wyndham, and Halls Creek. The pilot would have significant impact if the qualification is then recognised as part of the current ECEC regulations.

## Case Study 3: 'Flooding the Floor' – Baya Gawiy Children and Family Centre, Fitzroy Crossing

The Baya Gawiy Children and Family Centre practices 'Flooding the Floor' with locals from all language groups welcomed to participate in work experience. Along with formal studies, the Centre offers tailored training which includes trauma informed courses aligned to a healing model designed by June Oscar. This aims to deliver culturally safe and informed training to improve the quality of care provided and encourage local workforce development.

The approach is not formally recognised under the regulated training mandates, however, it is acknowledging the high needs and trauma experienced by some local children in the Fitzroy Crossing area. This Centre is also aims to maintain a 1:3 educator-to-child ratio to better support the high needs of some of their children in care.

## Case Study 4: 'Community Elders Pool' proposal at Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek

The Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek struggles with workforce shortages and reliability. This has a flow-on impact to families accessing service and the daily operating capacity. The Centre has engaged with the local community to build a workforce. As a result, creating a Community Elders Pool with Recognised Prior Learning has been proposed.

The initiative is investigating rostering on a small number of people for set hours to support existing staff and calling on the pool when a staff member is unable to come to work at short notice.

Intended Outcomes:

- Better guarantee access to the only ECEC service in Halls Creek for families requiring care.
- Allows the Centre to respect and allow cultural responsibilities of current workforce with the goal of increasing workforce retention.
- Greater collaboration with local community and gaining learnings from respected Community Elders.

The pool initiative is unlikely to be successful on a volunteer basis, however, the mandated training and qualification regulations apply if members are receiving a salary. This is a barrier, particularly to attracting an older workforce.