

27<sup>th</sup> May, 2019

To the Productivity Commission,

**RE: Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory**

**Issues Paper – Submission**

Please note: Information sourced for this letter is in reference to the attached letter to Hon. Nigel Scullion from Amanda Tootell, Coordinator of Katherine Isolated Children's Service.

Personal Context: I am a 26 year old female government employee, based in Katherine, NT. I have a Degree in Early Childhood Education with a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership. I travel remotely within the Katherine Region with the aim of improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and their parents through education.

This submission aims to report feedback and provide support to the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS), based in Katherine. It has come to my knowledge that KICS has received a reduction in funding. This will have a detrimental effect on many community groups in the NT including station families, town families, remote, very remote and isolated communities.

Travelling remotely to communities means that I witness first-hand the impact of KICS. Children and families look forward to the visit and are engaged while the program is delivered. These are often Aboriginal families that are disengaged from school and early learning services for a variety of reasons. The cultural appropriateness of the program is evident through attendance and as a service provider, I am able to approach families who would otherwise feel a sense of shame, guilt and fear in a more formal education environment.

KICS has two teams that aim to travel to each site at least 8 times per year. KICS visits over 30 pastoral stations, 20 Aboriginal communities and 3 townships. In 2018 KICS documented the attendance of 3125 children across the Territory. 76% of attendees identified as Aboriginal.

The Minister for Education has continued to express her support for funding in Early Year's Education and emphasised the importance of funding and access to quality early year's programs. KICS provides a play based program steeped in social and cognitive development. KICS also aligns it's delivery with the domains collated in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

KICS connects communities and families who may not have the opportunity to engage with an approved early learning provider and it is noted that only 10 of the KICS delivery sites have access to a Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program. An unexpected desirable outcome of the KICS delivery is the impact on mental wellbeing for families in remote and isolated locations.

KICS will not be able to offer the current delivery of service under the proposed reduction in funding that is, two full time teams with two staff each delivering playgroups to 50+ sites at least twice a term. KICS will need to reduce the service model by approximately 50% (this includes two full time staff and a part time administrator) in order to remain viable. KICS also requires funding to upgrade their two fleet vehicles which have accrued an unsafe amount of kilometres.

I implore the Productivity Commission to review the current funding allocation to the KICS program. The program estimates that additional funding of \$60,000.00 per annum is required to continue the service in its current capacity. Any funding additional to the requested amount would mean more remote and isolated sites could be visited, vehicles could be upgraded and resources could be purchased.

I thank the Productivity Commission for the consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,

Monique Marzocchi