

REPORT ONE

**goodstart
early
learning**

Remote Access Matters



Goodstart Early Learning acknowledges all Traditional Custodians across Australia and recognises First Nations peoples' continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land, sky and waterways that surround us. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



**We thank everyone who participated in this work.
Through this, we have learnt together.**



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The Paul Ramsay Foundation's purpose is to help end cycles of disadvantage in Australia by enabling equitable opportunity for people and communities to thrive. This project was funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation. Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation. The Foundation would like to thank its partners who were involved in this work for their contributions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this report may contain images and names of deceased persons.

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Definitions

Human-centred design

Human-centred design (HCD) is an approach to problem-solving that puts people at the heart of the design process. HCD is an iterative practice that prioritises continuous feedback to address specific requirements, needs or challenges of the people the design is for, as a solution evolves.

Codesign

Codesign is a collaborative design methodology that emphasises ‘designing with, not for, people’. This small shift in preposition signals the efforts to sharing power and decision-making, elevating the voices and contributions of people with lived experience. Codesign uses inclusive facilitation that welcomes and works with many ways of knowing, being and doing.

Participatory design

Participatory design facilitates the direct involvement of people in the design of the products and services they use, aimed at making technologies, tools, environments, businesses, and social institutions more responsive to human needs.

Decolonising design

Decolonising design is a practice that acknowledges colonial impacts on diverse, indigenous communities. Decolonising design seeks to amplify these voices, values, and beliefs through their frame of reference and collaborative and place-based approaches rather than commercial and modernising aims.

Yarning

Yarning is a traditional conversational practice and sharing of knowledge, information, wisdom and traditions. It involves storytelling, deep listening and respectful dialogue which strengthens community connections and builds respectful relationships.

Introduction

In 2022, Goodstart Early Learning (Goodstart) embarked on a project to consider the question:

How might we address disproportionate developmental vulnerability for remote children by codesigning sustainable, scalable, high-quality education and care offerings that advance education within Australia?



This report provides detailed insights gained through our research and codesign activities with two remote communities. We share what we learned with them about their histories, cultures, strengths, and unmet needs. While each community is unique, there are also important similarities such as:

- The centrality of trusted relationships,
- The importance of following the heartbeat of community and family life, and
- The need for collaboration and integration between services.

I would like to thank these communities' members immensely for their trust and collaboration with the project team.

I would also like to thank the Paul Ramsay Foundation for its support of this project.

This report sits as a companion report to 'Codesigning with remote communities in response to complex social challenges' which details and critically reflects on the approach taken to this work.

Australia is yet to provide remote communities with the high-quality, accessible early learning their children deserve. We hope that by sharing our insights and approach we will help other organisations to further explore the development of sustainable, scalable, high-quality education and care offerings so vital to advancing education in remote communities.

We hope this report helps stimulate your thinking as you prepare for your own journeys – or as you support others with theirs – and we invite you to reach out and connect with us so that we can work together into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ros Baxter'.

Ros Baxter
CEO

About Goodstart Early Learning

Goodstart was founded by a partnership of four of Australia's leading charities who recognised a child's early years experiences had a huge influence on the rest of their lives – The Benevolent Society, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Mission Australia, and Social Ventures Australia.

For more than a decade Goodstart, as a not-for-profit social enterprise, has been creating positive social change by giving Australia's children, especially our most vulnerable, the best possible start in life through access to high quality early learning and care.

Today, Goodstart is Australia's largest provider of early learning and care and Australia's largest non-government provider of preschool and kindergarten programs.

With 15,000 employees including 2000 teachers we provide high quality early learning to more than 63,000 children across over 660 centres nation-wide.

Around one third of our centres are in rural and regional areas and around one quarter are in low socio-economic areas.

Our commitment to reconciliation is woven through everything that we do.

As part of our commitment Goodstart has invested in cultural awareness training with 16,000 team members completing the Arilla course since its introduction.

Our First Nations Leaders, First Nations Voices Group and First Nations Yarning Circles help us to deliver culturally safe spaces for the hundreds of Goodstarters who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

We recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work.

Our vision for reconciliation is for Goodstarters to engage with reconciliation on both a personal and professional level, creating the conditions that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice, equality and equity.

Through this vision, we are laying the foundations to grow future generations that value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared identity.

www.goodstart.org.au

About Today

Today are a globally-recognised design agency who create social impact through design, technology and innovation. They are a certified B Corporation with human-centred design at the core. Experts in managing complexity, Today are regarded as industry leaders in designing and delivering world-class project solutions that are community-led, with a particular focus on giving a voice to marginalised and vulnerable users. www.today.design



The project team arrives on Ngurupai for the first time in September 2022. From left to right: Katie Kaufmann, Marcus Procida, Angelica Scott, Magidama Enosa, Amanda Waters and Peter Pilot-Wakaisu

The Project

Over 10% of Australia’s children live outside of cities and major towns in parts of Australia classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as very remote, remote, and outer regional. These environments offer children and families a unique array of rich life experiences. At the same time, they are often significantly underserved by child and family support services (including education and care services such as long day care).

Children are significantly more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the Australian Early Development Census – recognising this is a partial measure of children’s strengths and capabilities, but still a powerful predictor of future school and life opportunities.

In 2022, Goodstart embarked on a journey to consider the question:

How might we address disproportionate developmental vulnerability for remote children by codesigning sustainable, scalable, high-quality education and care offerings that advance education within Australia?

We adopted a codesign approach, working closely with communities to understand their strengths and their unmet needs. Through this, the work aimed to identify sustainable and impactful ways forward, and to understand the implications for creating broader scale impact. Considering time, funding and prior work at Goodstart, we selected two focus communities.

The first was the **First Nations community of Ngurupai in the Torres Straits**. As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we had begun to establish relationships on Ngurupai over the past twelve months. Using an approach grounded in participatory action research and decolonising design, we immersed ourselves in community in order to work together to answer the question:

How can First Nations communities be supported to help their young children grow strong?

We saw that our insights would be both specific to the Ngurupai community and could potentially provide insight to help inform future work with other First Nations communities, recognising every community is unique.

Source - <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/early-learning/childcare-deserts-oases-how-accessible-is-childcare-in-australia>

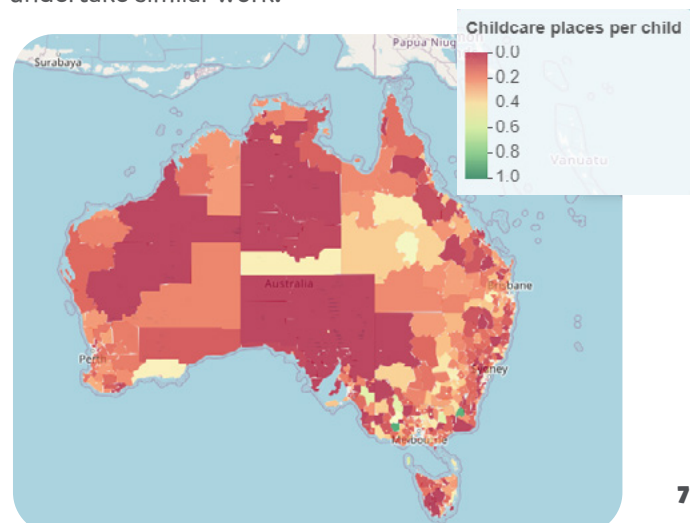
The second was a community in **Remote Queensland**. Building on our experience with providing virtual early childhood services during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we wondered about the potential of supporting in-home learning for remote families without access to long day care services. We used a virtual human-centred codesign approach to engage with families to understand:

How can in-home learning be supported in remote communities – and specifically, what is the role of digital technologies?

Through this, we sought to understand the role of virtual services and how these fit within the broader ecosystem. To this end, we also spoke to representatives from a number of Remote Queensland service providers to understand their perspectives.

To amplify our existing organisational capability, we engaged with the strategic design firm Today to help carry out this work.

This report shares insights into the strengths and needs of each community. We offer these up to support our sector to work in partnerships with communities to create a stronger early years ecosystem for remote children and families. This report accompanies the report on our approach, ‘Codesigning with remote communities in response to complex social challenges’, which outlines insights from the two codesign approaches we took to aid others seeking to undertake similar work.





Community One: Ngurupai

How can First Nations communities be supported to help their children grow up strong?

Learning together with the community of Ngurupai in the Torres Strait

The history behind this work

Goodstart has been on a journey to reconciliation since 2014 with our Stretch Reconciliation Action plan and our commitment to Reconciliation is woven through everything that we do.

In 2021 Peter Pilot-Wakaisu joined as our Torres Strait Islander Cultural Liaison to help deepen our awareness of Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage and to help us to support Torres Strait Islander children to achieve the learning, development, and wellbeing outcomes they need for school and life.

In 2021 and early 2022, Peter made several trips to the Torres Straits (where he had previously lived and worked) to foster connections with local communities. Community members on Ngurupai approached Peter about working together to reopen the long day care centre on the island.

The community formed an Early Childhood Advisory Group to represent the interests of the children and wider community. Yarning led to the development of

a partnership, to jointly explore how the community might be best supported to help their young children grow up strong.

The insights shared in this report are unique to the Ngurupai community and we hope and expect that Goodstart and others will continue to support the Ngurupai community to help their young children grow up strong.

By sharing this report, we hope others will also consider the possibilities of similar projects with other First Nations communities. By building partnerships in remote communities, we will continue to reveal community strengths and needs and mobilise around their vision.

For further details of the approach we took to work together with the community, please refer to the companion report 'Codesigning with remote communities in response to complex social challenges'.

About Ngurupai

The Torres Strait lies at the northern-most tip of Australia, with almost 10,000 people across 18 island and two mainland communities including almost 1,000 children aged 0-4 years. Ngurupai, otherwise known as Horn Island, forms part of the Inner Islands cluster situated closest to Cape York.

It is the traditional land of the Kaurareg Aboriginal people, who were dispossessed of their land in 1922 before securing Native Title in 2001. For further information on the history and ongoing healing on Ngurupai, please visit healingfoundation.org.au.

Often described as the "Gateway to the Torres Straits" Ngurupai is home to the Torres Straits' primary airport, with flights from Cairns running twice a day, and both ferries and small planes for travel to other islands. It is 15 minutes by ferry from the administrative capital of the Torres Straits, Waiben (Thursday Island).

Over two thirds of Ngurupai's 533 residents identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (reflecting the strong interfamilial cultural ties in the community almost all identify as Torres Strait Islander and four out of ten identifying as Aboriginal). Languages include the traditional language of the island (Kala Lagaw Ya - Kaurareg dialect), Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole), and English.

Census data indicates that the population includes 44 children aged 0-4 years, although through undertaking a recent count by mentally going through the households in Wasaga township street by street, community members believe there to be closer to 50-55 including more on the way. AEDC data (which we acknowledge is an incomplete measure

of children's strengths) indicates that 45% and 31% of young children on the Inner Islands (including Ngurupai) are developmentally vulnerable on one (or more) or two (or more) domains, respectively.

With a landmass of 53 square kilometres, over 90% of the Ngurupai is covered in undisturbed vegetation. The community lives in a single township, Wasaga. Businesses and services are scattered around the few streets, including a general store with a post office, supermarket, accommodation, pub, an indoor sports complex with meeting space available to hire, church, fire station, police station and healthcare centre.

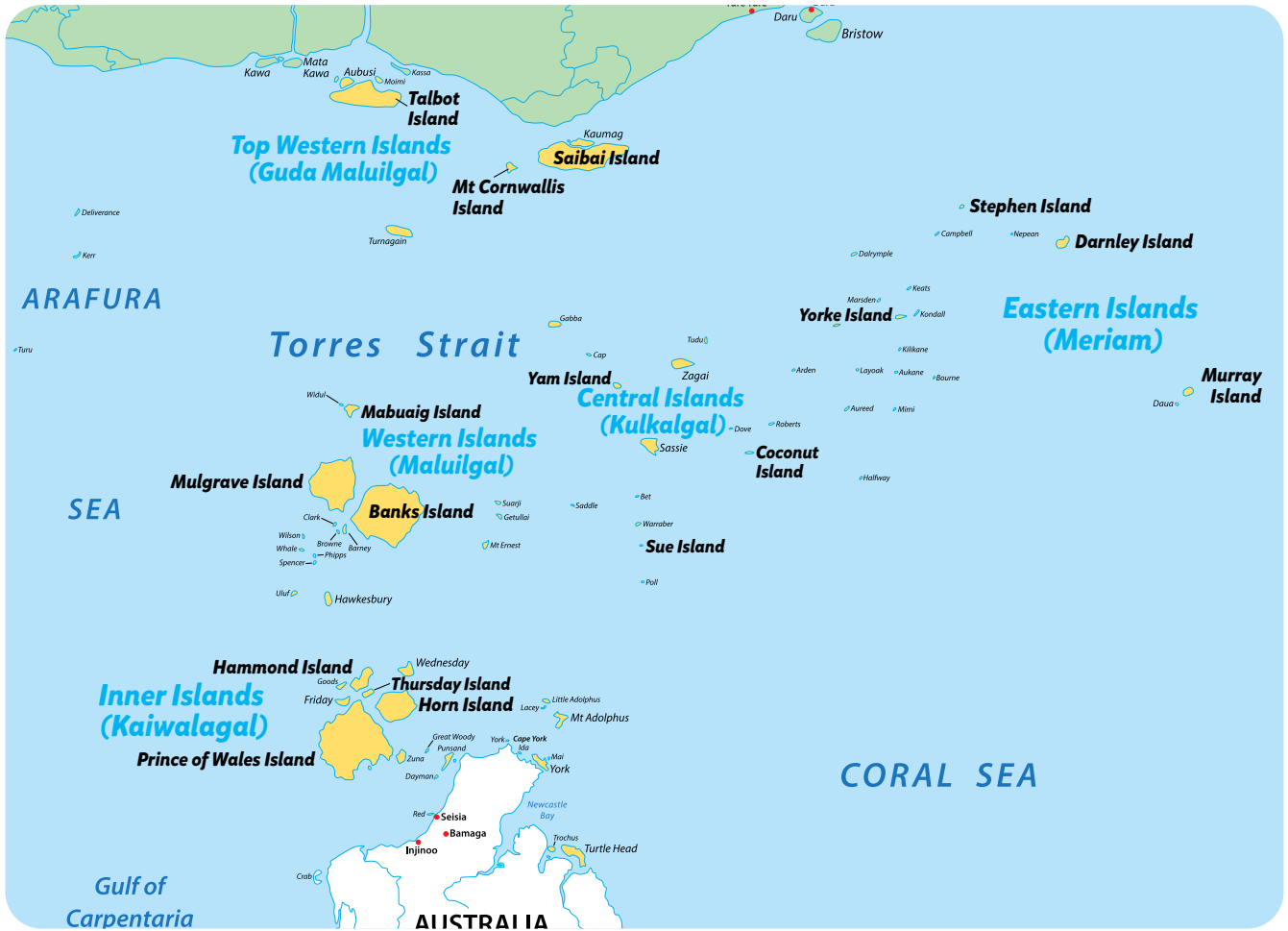
The township is quiet during the weekday, as many people travel to Waiben (Thursday Island) for work or school, and many of those remaining on Ngurupai retreat indoors to avoid the heat.

There is a primary school run by the Queensland Government but no early learning or senior education available on the island.

Wasaga township, Ngurupai



Ngurupai: Gateway to the Torres Strait



Top Western Islands (Guda Maluilgal)	Western Islands (Maluilgal)	Central Islands (Kulkalgal)	Eastern Islands (Meriam)	Inner Islands (Kaiwalagal)
Boigu (Talbot Island)	Badu (Mulgrave Island)	Iama (Yam Island)	Mer (Murray Island)	Kirriiri (Hammond Island)
Dauan (Mt Cornwallis Island)	Gumu (Mabuag Island)	Masig (Yorke Island)	Ugar (Stephen Island)	Muralug (Prince of Wales Island)
Saibai Island	Moa Island (Banks Island)	Poruma (Coconut Island)	Erub (Darnley Island)	Ngurupai (Horn Island)
		Warraber (Sue Island)		Waiben (Thursday Island)
AEDC developmental vulnerability on 1 or more domains (versus 22% all Australia)				
28%	41%	25%	N/A	45%
AEDC developmental vulnerability on 2 or more domains (versus 11% all Australia)				
17%	21%	19%	N/A	31%

Reference - AEDC data from [Torrens University Australia, 2022](https://www.torrens.edu.au/research-and-impact/research-projects/remote-access-matters)

See Appendix for a system map of 'Education in the Torres Strait'.

The community's story

We worked in partnership with the Ngurupai Early Childhood Community Advisory Group and other community members to craft their story, iterating until it felt right. Here is the story they would like to tell...

The community has fought hard for their children. In the 1980s and 1990s they opened a playgroup, a childcare centre, and a school. But today, only the school remains, along with 15 hours of kindergarten for children in the year before school. There are no other services on the island to support young children's learning, to provide care so that families can work, or to help parents learn how they can support their children's development and behaviour (except for basic services at the health clinic). With poor access to services, families do not always know when or how to seek help.

"Families are being driven down south due to lack of services and to earn a better income"

"I hate getting the ferry. It's so unreliable. My granddaughter lives on TI for the week so she can access the childcare centre without having to travel back and forth"

Most social, healthcare, aged care, education and employment services are on Waiben (Thursday Island) – including the only nearby long day care centre which has a year long waitlist. Travelling across by ferry is expensive, unreliable and sometimes dangerous; many people travel by dinghy instead if they can access one. A new affordable housing development will double the number of houses on the island over the coming years, adding further pressure to already stretched services, including the ferry.

There are also few opportunities on the island for children and families to come together. The weather is increasingly hot with heavy rain in the monsoon season, making outdoor gatherings hard. There are no lights in outdoor spaces, limiting gatherings in the cooler evenings. The only playground is unfenced and in urgent need of repair. There is no affordable indoor public gathering space – and restrictions on the way the sports complex can be used if this is hired. Homelessness and overcrowding make it difficult to gather in people's homes.

"The community doesn't get together very much. Mostly school sports days or things like that"

Community members sharing their story with the team



The land and sea provide rich opportunities for fishing, swimming and crabbing – and young children often follow their big brothers, sisters and cousins out to play and explore. However, teenagers often get bored and restless, making drinking and vandalism common. Families have limited money to spend on social activities, even if there was somewhere to spend it. The cost of living is very high – both housing and food are incredibly expensive. Many dads spend the weekend hunting to help provide enough for the family. Some families feel trapped and are looking for ways to leave the island for better opportunities for them and their children.

“When we were young it was better. We went to homework club, then played basketball or touch. There used to be a youth club on a Friday night at the old community hall. I don’t know who ran it or why it stopped”

Many people describe Ngurupai as a friendly community, and family groups are strong. Some community members are working hard to pass on traditions. Yet, the diversity on the island means there is not a single shared culture that brings people together. The rapid rise of social media has also pulled people away from community life – and away from Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Aunties and grandmothers of young children are busy working themselves. Many people say the community is not as connected as it was in the past, or as it is on other islands in the Torres Straits. Parents – particularly young parents – often feel unsure how to best support their children to grow up strong.

“When something happens to us, who is going to look after the place?”

Ngurupai is a “melting pot”, with people from all across the Torres Strait – and beyond – including the traditional owners the Kaurareg people. People have different reasons for choosing to live on Ngurupai. Some people grew up there or returned for family reasons. Others want to work on nearby Waiben where housing is also scarce. For the Kaurareg people it is their traditional land.

“I moved down south for better school and work opportunities, but I have moved back because my mum got sick”

“The strength of the community is the way it comes together. Different people play different roles in advocacy and fighting for support services”

In the face of these challenges, the community is once again rising up. They are coming together to imagine what the future could look like for the young children of Ngurupai. A future where young children are part of a thriving community that works together to give them great life and career opportunities. The long day care centre building is still standing, carefully cared for by the community. Eight early childhood educators and teachers live on the island. The time for change on Ngurupai is now.

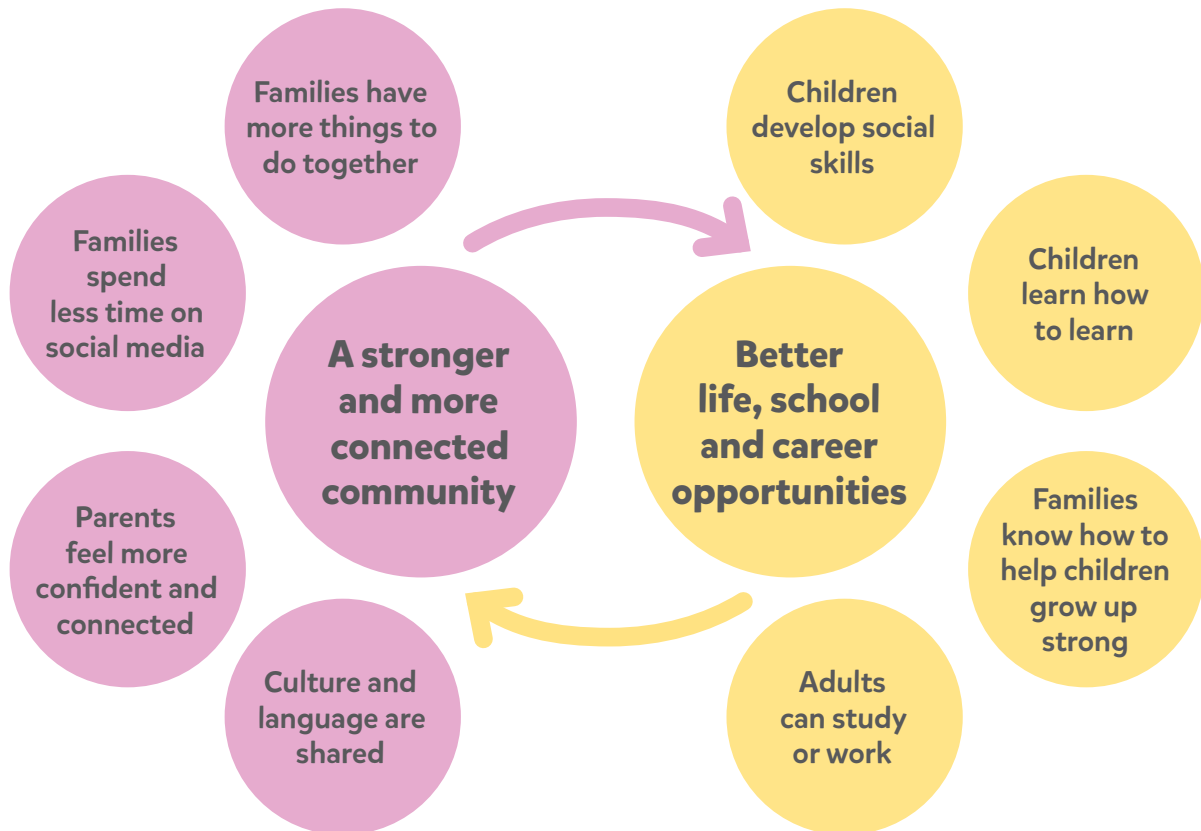
This story belongs to the Ngurupai community. However, the picture it paints of a complex array of sociopolitical, cultural, historical and environmental factors impacting the community’s ability to help their young children grow up strong is likely to ring true for many other First Nations communities as well.

Supporting communities to help their young children grow up strong therefore demands a strong integrated local early childhood ecosystem that responds to or works within and around the strengths and the challenges of the community.

Ngurupai's vision for the future

For the community on Ngurupai, their vision of a stronger and more connected community was inextricably linked with their aspirations for better life, school and career opportunities for children (and adults).

They shared that a strong, connected community creates a rich, nurturing environment for young children that helps them grow up strong, whilst young children that grow up strong with great life, school and career opportunities are well placed to nurture a thriving community. The community therefore expressed their hope for the future as:



Community strength and connection is essential to helping young children grow up strong now and in the future

What could the future look like?

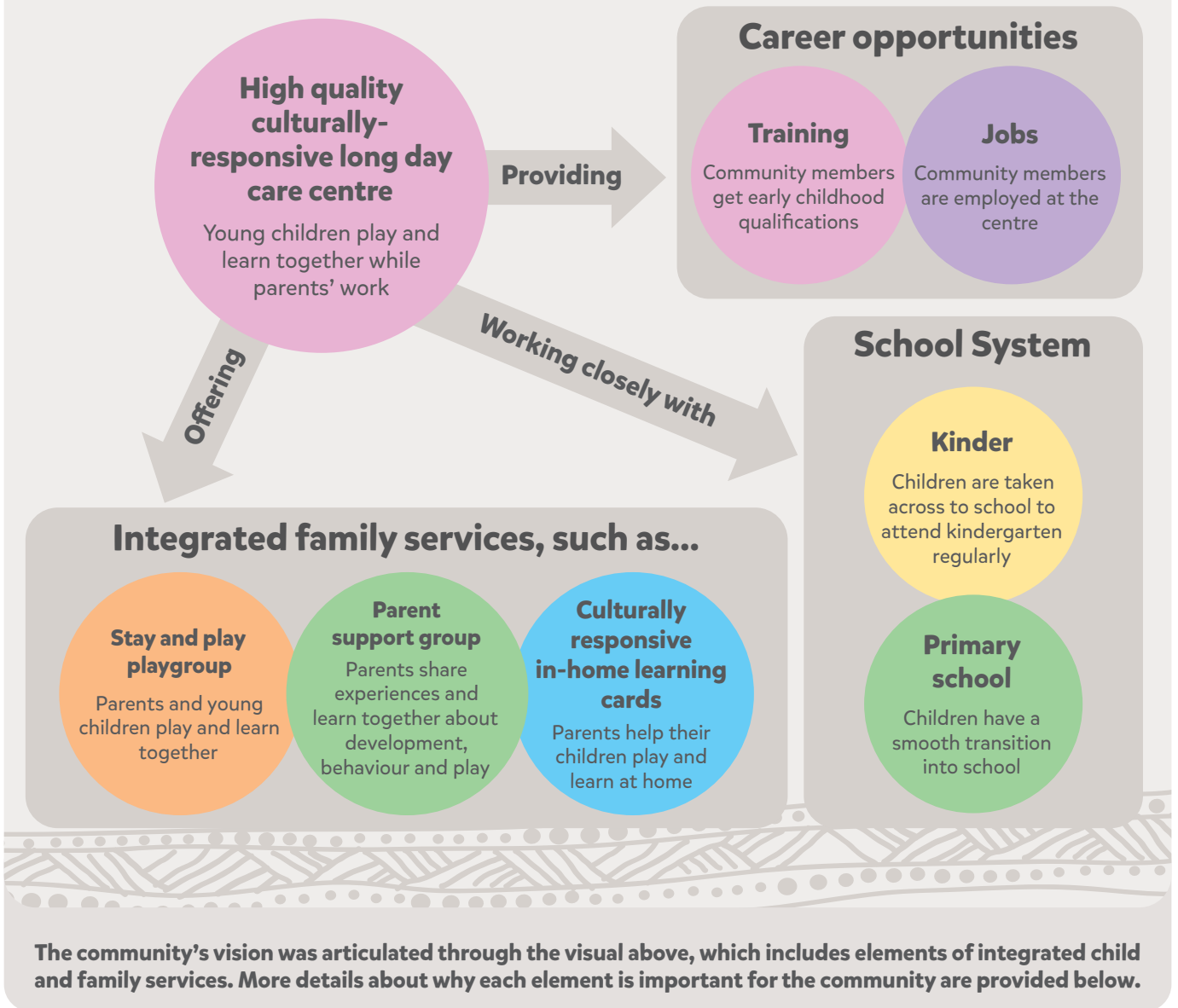
While we did not seek to direct the community towards solutions, our partnership began with a shared interest in the immediate provision of early learning and developmental support for the community's children.

As we yarned and listening deeply to the community it helped us to develop a shared vision of future services. Importantly it also built significant momentum within the community around the future vision.

For details on our approach, please refer to the companion report 'Codesigning with remote communities in response to complex social challenges'.



What might the future look like?



Long day care

Many mums on Ngurupai are seeking care that allows them to work. Current options are extremely limited:

- Like 15 of the 17 inhabited Torres Strait islands, Ngurupai has no operating long day care centre (although the building remains from the centre closed in 2016).
- The scarcity of housing and degree of overcrowding on Ngurupai means Family Day Care is not a viable option.
- Families value safe, regulated environments for their children, and often worry about leaving their children in homes of people they don't know well (or of overburdening those they do).

For some families, the educational aspects of long day care are important as well. This is particularly true for families who have experienced quality long day care before and have seen their children thrive.

Reopening the long day care centre remains a priority for the Ngurupai community.

The existing but non-operational early learning and care centre on Ngurupai



Stay and play playgroup

Through our yarns with the community, we learned that in the past a locally run playgroup was an integral part of the community (see section ‘Drawing on lessons from the past’ for more detail). As part of our work, we ran a live playgroup prototype to learn about how this may now meet the needs of children and families. This generated significant buzz in the community.

“Everyone’s talking about playgroup now down at the supermarket!”

“I want to play with my child - but I’m not sure how to.”

“That’s how we did it 40 years ago - we started with a playgroup and then got a centre.”

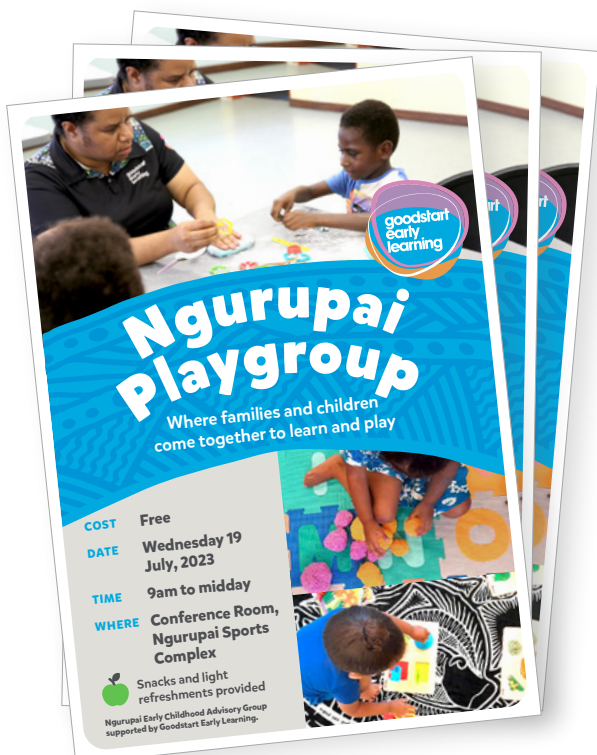
The concept of a playgroup resonated strongly with families for many reasons:

- Many mums and older community members said that mums were often unsure how to play with their child - as grandmothers and aunts were working there were fewer opportunities to pass on knowledge. Changes in social norms (for example, greater limitations on children’s outdoor activities to keep them physically safe) meant new play strategies were needed.
- With no infrastructure for family activities on Ngurupai (for example, no library, swimming pool, or cinema) and weather extremes that limited outdoor activities, mums and carers were excited by the idea of something to do together with their children.

Through the prototype, it became apparent that attending playgroup with their child was important for some mothers (and carers) to build trust in new services and feel confident about potentially using long day care when available.

The community’s commitment to the playgroup is strong, they self-organised a monthly playgroup immediately at the end of this project. While longer term partnership opportunities are being finalised, the playgroup has continued to meet.

The stay and play playgroup’s success highlights the value of codesigning together with community.



In-home learning resources

On Ngurupai, most families don't seek out parenting support online. Patchy internet, device limitations, language barriers, and a lack of culturally relevant information online all contribute.

As we explored opportunities both families and community members spoke about the value of being able to take learning experiences from the playgroup into the home environment.

We began to work together to develop culturally relevant in-home learning resources in local languages to assist with accessibility and help nurture ongoing use of local languages.

We found some families emphasised the importance of children developing strong English language skills whilst others focused on the importance of their children retaining their family's traditional languages. For the community overall however, sharing culture and language was identified as an important part of a strong, connected community.

Mocked up in-home learning cards in Creole that were shared and tested with the community

What could culturally responsive in-home learning cards look like?

Wata plei
Water play



Wanem po mekem:
Yu go need smol tray po wata, den put'eh wata insid lo dah tray, ip yu wandem yu can add food colouring po makeh da wata colour . Den yu can just add dem sea animal insid da wata po yu pikinin po plei.
If yu wandem yu can even tekeh prapa seaweed and puttim insid just so yu pikinin can lok wisnt prapa seaweed lok lik and experience that feelin blo that prapa seaweed.
Yu can also add'eh other things to like san or leaves kasa for makeh dat sensory feeling po pikinin po plei.

Pleido
Playdough



Wanem po mekem:
1 cup salt
3 cups plain flour
60ml vegetable oil
food colouring
250ml (1 cup) warm water
Yu go mix ol dem dry ingredients inside bowl den wen yu pinis mix'em, yu add dah oil inside dah bowl, and stir'em togetha.
Yu go add any color inside dah warm water. Den apta yu go slowly add dah wata go inside po dah bowl and mix'em till e go come rite po yu po knead'em por makeh dah pleido yu wandem.

Drawing
Drawing



Wanem po mekem:
Blank paper and sum crayon, colouring pencil or oil pastel po pikinin po drawing and show'eh thempla creative skills ol gat.
E gud po pikinin po use thempla imagination wen ol draw coz upla stap lo beautiful ilan and ol kin beautiful things e surround upla.

Culturally responsive in-home learning cards
Parents can help their children play and learn at home

- Popular learning activities turned into cards for families to use at home
- Local educators (and families) help provide Kaurareg and Torres Strait Islander "flavour" (style, language, content, ways of knowing)
- Cards written in Creole, Kaurareg and English
- Resources could be provided or loaned by the playgroup/centre

Parent support services

Families and community members expressed the need for more support for parents (and carers).

The community said they wanted to:

- Help parents build their confidence and competence – especially around children’s development and behaviour guidance. They said disciplinary norms had changed across the community over the last two decades, with previously accepted measures such as “growling at” children or physical discipline no longer considered acceptable. Many parents and community members were unsure of what could and should replace these when it came to supporting children’s behaviour.
- Strengthen connections between parents – some mums said they didn’t know any other mothers with children of a similar age, and that they would value building these connections.

Making it safe and accessible:

- Many community members expressed concerns about participation in a parent support program as they feared being judged or seen as not being capable.
- Parents expressed a variety of views about whether they would feel culturally safer with one-on-one or group support (with a slight bias towards the latter).
- Positively, several mothers highlighted the positive impact of attending playgroup first, as it would help them build the relationships needed to feel comfortable to participate in parent support services.

Although our initial work revealed the importance of services in this space, it also evidenced the need to give the time and space to codesigning a service model that would work, and the potential need to sequence the delivery of services so that families felt safe to access services that may be more daunting to engage with.



Study and work pathways

The interdependency of living and working across island communities will be a major factor in planning for future provision of services. Therefore, creating sustainable services for Ngurupai and the broader Torres Strait community will require intentional partnerships and investment in study and work pathways.

At the time of this project eight qualified early childhood educators and teachers lived on Ngurupai, some working in adjacent fields and others traveling to Waiben (Thursday Island) to work in early childhood services there. A balance would be required to ensure that meeting the need for the Ngurupai community did not leave other communities and services without the support they need. This should include building the longer term talent pool by providing study opportunities and incentives.

An integrated child and family service will also provide broader work pathways aside from ECEC qualified roles within a centre, for example:

- Project roles to stand up the integrated child and family service
- Other support roles for the services, such as maintenance and administration
- Caregivers, particularly mothers, will be able to work as care is available for their children.

Study and work pathways are considered important by the community to create better work and life opportunities – particularly for women.

Magidama Enosa, Educator – modelling career outcomes for young community members.

Magidama (Magi) Enosa, a Torres Strait Islander and Cairns based educator, was an integral part of the project team. Magi played an important role in creating a safe and accessible way for community members to yarn and interact with us, even translating in some conversations so that people could speak freely in Creole. Magi continues to support the monthly playgroup, and build the communities understanding and support of early learning for their children.

Community members said Magi's presence was inspiring to young adults – especially women – on the island. This highlights the value of creating the conditions for young First Nations people to step up and lead the way.

“When the young people see what Magi is doing they see what is possible. She shows them what they could do.”

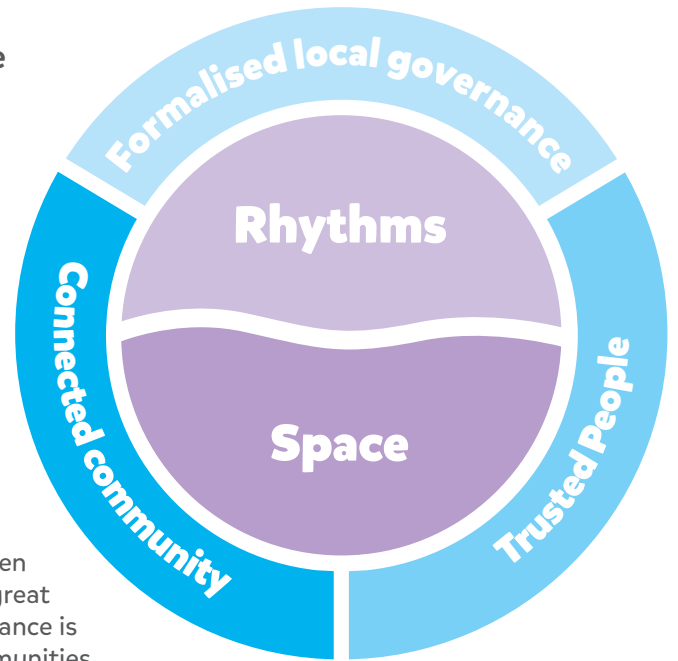


Local ingredients for success

Throughout our yarns with the community, five factors shone through as critical for realising sustainable services on Ngurupai. We share these here along with what we learnt about the importance of each of these through our work.

Local governance

supports services that are culturally appropriate, responsive to community needs and accountable to the people they serve. It also empowers communities to take control of their own services, sustain them and build capacity within their communities. Without this, communities are far away from decision making and easily forgotten. However when governance relies on volunteers, the weight can become too great over time. Appropriately supporting and funding local governance is critical to ensuring this is sustainable for individuals and communities.



Connected Community

supports services to thrive. Together, communities advocate for services, tell others in the community about the services, and help create the conditions for the services success – for example, by offering up venues that may have otherwise been off-limit or by upskilling to work at the service. Without the momentum of the community behind them, services fall away. Elders emphasised the importance of younger people taking up the mantle to support services. Engaging the community in codesigning and operating services is critical for building a connected community behind the service.

Trusted people

are at the heart of successful services. They make parents feel safe to use services for themselves or their children, and give them confidence they are receiving quality services. Not all trusted people need to be from the local community, but all must appreciate (and learn about) the unique cultural, linguistic and contextual factors that impact the community. Taking the time to establish trusted relationships is a critical foundation for any service.

Rhythms

Services must honour the rhythms of daily life. Afternoons are often too hot for walking about town (and many people don't have cars). The rainy season is extremely hot and wet too. The ferry schedule limits when people can travel for work or to access services. Early mornings can be difficult with young children. Working with community to design services that work with these rhythms is critical for service uptake.

Space

Services need a suitable space to operate. Overcrowding limits the use of family homes. There is no free community hall, and the basketball stadium is the only space available for rent. There are no empty buildings in good condition. The only playground is damaged. Working with community to navigate and fund appropriate venues is critical to establishing and sustaining services.



Drawing lessons from the past

While Ngurupai has no early childhood services today, this has not always been the case. Learning from the past highlights both the determination of the community and the challenges in sustaining services in remote communities. The importance of the five local ingredients for success discussed previously all feature in the story of Ngurupai’s early childhood services as both enablers and barriers of sustainable service delivery.

Ngurupai’s First Playgroup

In the mid-1980s, the first playgroup was established on Ngurupai, running independently for almost two decades until being absorbed into the long day care centre upon its opening.



Formalised local governance

Established by a passionate group of local women (pictured) under the auspices of the Residents and Rate Payers Association. The playgroup relied on volunteer labour and the group was extremely active at the time, also advocating for improved infrastructure such as roads and electricity.

No external regulatory requirements were in place, reducing governance requirements.

The structures that supported the playgroup laid the groundwork for the long day care centre.

Trusted people

Staffed by volunteer local mums, one of whom had a teaching background.

Connected community

At the time the playgroup was established there were only 100-200 people living on the island, creating a close-knit community working together. As the population rapidly expanded in the late 1980s, the playgroup was an important part of the community.

Rhythms

Playgroup ran from 9am-12pm in the cooler part of each day.

It also incorporated traditional ways of life – for example, foraging for food together, sharing preparation and meals between children and adults.

Space

Playgroup operated in the old community hall (now gone). Poor sanitation, particularly in the rainy season, caused health and safety concerns.

The loss of the community hall also saw the demise of other services for young people, such as Friday night youth group.

Once the centre closed, a lack of alternate free space was a barrier to restarting the playgroup.

Playgroup in the past - Pages from the Horn Island State School Newsletter from 26th February 1993 and 31st March 1993

Parents & Citizens Association

On Monday 1st February, the P & C was formed.

Congratulations to

President	John Yorkston	Ann-Marie Tisley	Rosa Solomon,	Dulcie Nakata,	& Agnes Fox.
Vice President	Ron Wasaga	Meeting will be held on the second Tuesday of the month, 7.30pm at the school.			
Secretary	Ahina McKeown	All mail should be addressed to -			
Treasurer	Ella Doolah	The Secretary P & C			
		of Horn Island State School			
		Navie Street.			

Other members include - John Mulholland, Aay McKeown, Jenine Butcher, Sue Holland,

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

All uniforms are now in stock at Col Jones. If you wish to order material for girls shorts or dresses - it is available from Harris Brothers, Midgrave Road, Cairns

Dresses - St Michaels Convent Maroon check 112/114 cm polycotton at \$7.95 / metre.
skorts - Ceaserella (maroon) \$11.95m



TUCKSHOP

WANTED - we need more parents, to help out on a voluntary basis. Any one who is interested, please contact Sue Holland on 691 558 or Angie Viti on 692 031. Your help would be appreciated.

Horn Island Playgroup

The Horn Island Playgroup recommenced on Wednesday 3rd February. It is held 3 days a week Monday, Wednesday & Friday at the Community Hall 9.00am-12.00pm - children are not allowed at the Hall prior to 9.00am. Parents are asked to provide a sandwich or piece of fruit - no sweets or softdrinks please. There are 2 supervisors in attendance at all times - Heidi Stuart and Ruth Doolah. The playgroup operates under the guidelines set down by the management committee and is funded by the Department of Health Housing and Community Services. Taking your child to playgroup allows the opportunity for parents and children to meet regularly, provides learning experiences for your child and make new friends. The activities are varied and encourages the children with developmental skills. **Playgroup is fun for all.**

The Committee would like to thank Bryce Butcher for changing the door to the playgroup room at the Community Hall. **BIG ESSO.**

HORN ISLAND PLAYGROUP

The Horn Island playgroup goes back 10 years and more...we remember humble beginnings, conscientious parents determined to make a go, to give their children a place for social interaction, building good developmental skills and just having fun. Today we can proudly say that our organisation is looked upon as a model by other communities wishing to start "Playgroups" in their communities.

What we did in Playgroup this month

- Vegetable printing
- Leaf printing
- Ice cube painting
- Drawing

Congratulations to ...
"Kirirri Playgroup" Hammond Island & "Kubin Playgroup"

We wish you well & offer our support.

If there are any children from infants to 3 years old, not already attending playgroup - mothers are invited to come along and join in.

"Leaf Print" by Jessica Sabatino

Mrs Deidre Ford, is the Development Officer for the North for the Playgroup Association of Queensland and will be making contact with all playgroups when she visits (scheduled for late April early May).

Her proposed itinerary is

Sunday	Arrival
Monday	Thursday Island
Tuesday	Bamaga
Wednesday	Horn Island
Thursday	Kubin
Friday	Hammond

Deidre has visited us many times and we have valued her highly qualified help in providing initial setting up, direction and support in all areas from Resourcing to solving conflicts.


Her address is North Queensland Development Officer
P.O. Box 96
Edge Hill, Q'land, 4880

Horn Island State School

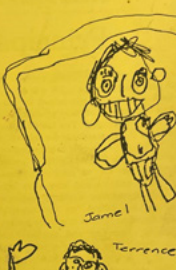
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HORN ISLAND NEWSLETTER

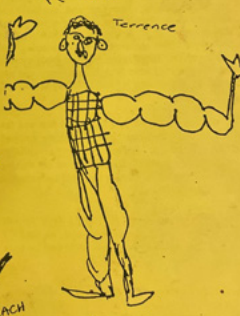
SCHOOL & COMMUNITY working together




Jerry



James



Terrence



ZACH

Friday, 26th February 1993 **20¢**

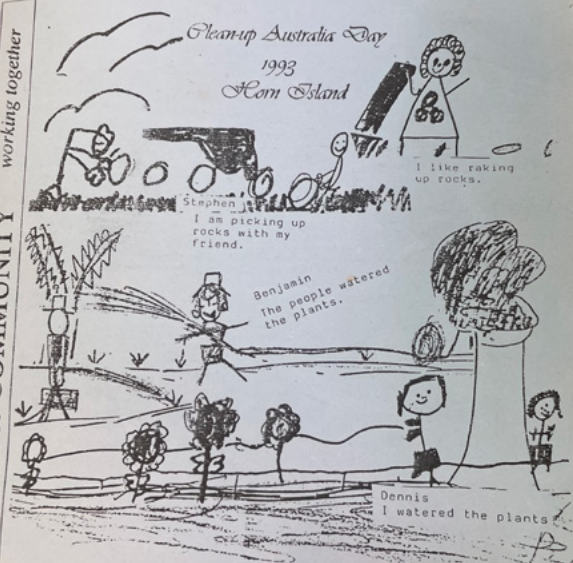
Horn Island State School

No. 2

HORN ISLAND NEWSLETTER

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY working together

Clean-up Australia Day
1993
Horn Island



I like raking up rocks.
Stephen
I am picking up rocks with my friend.

Benjamin
The people watered the plants.

Dennis
I watered the plants.

Wednesday, 31st March 1993 **50¢**

Ngurupai's First Long Day Care Centre

The long day care centre opened in the early 2000s, operating for just over a decade before governance and operational challenges forced its closure. For most of its time in operation, it was well attended, providing an indispensable service that enabled women to work and young children to learn together. It also provided a playgroup and after-school care.

Formalised local governance

For most of its years of operation, the centre was governed by volunteers through the Residents and Rate Payers Association. Over time as life grew busier on Ngurupai, people drifted away from the Association, and it became difficult to obtain a quorum for decision making. A key advocate and leader passed away. Additional government regulatory requirements also became burdensome and challenging for the volunteer team. Eventually the Residents and Rate Payers Association committee decided they were unable to continue to operate the centre.

The centre was briefly operated as a Montessori style centre but did not regain sustainable occupancy and closed shortly after.

Community advocates were unable to identify a suitable local governing body to reopen the centre.

Trusted people

Staffed by local educators, many of whom obtained their qualifications while working within the centre.

Incorporation of the playgroup into the centre provided mothers the opportunity to build trusted relationships with educators that helped them feel comfortable to then utilise the long day care services.

Connected community

Through the Residents and Rate Payers Association the community advocated for the reopening of the centre. When the centre changed hands, it lost community support which contributed to its second closure.

Rhythms

The centre was open all day which enabled mums to work – including on Waiben.

Provided a 'walking bus' service to the kindergarten program at the school, which enabled children to attend their 15 funded hours of kindergarten in the year before school.

Supported education and care of school aged children outside of school hours.

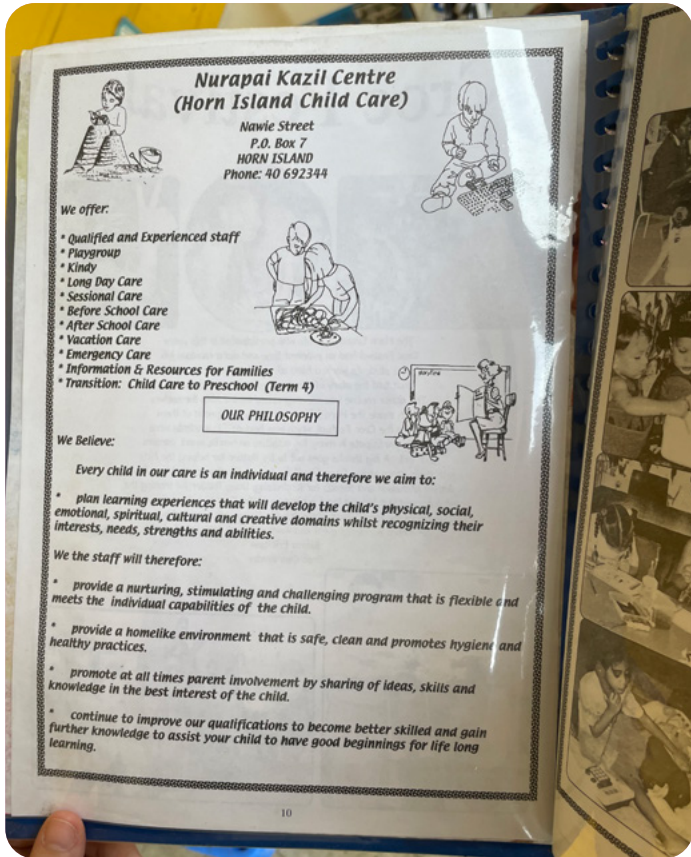
Space

The purpose-built centre was expected to expand to better accommodate nursery aged children. The centre enrolled children from 15 months due to having only one shared indoor learning space for all children. We have been told that prior to its closure the centre was licensed for 18 places.

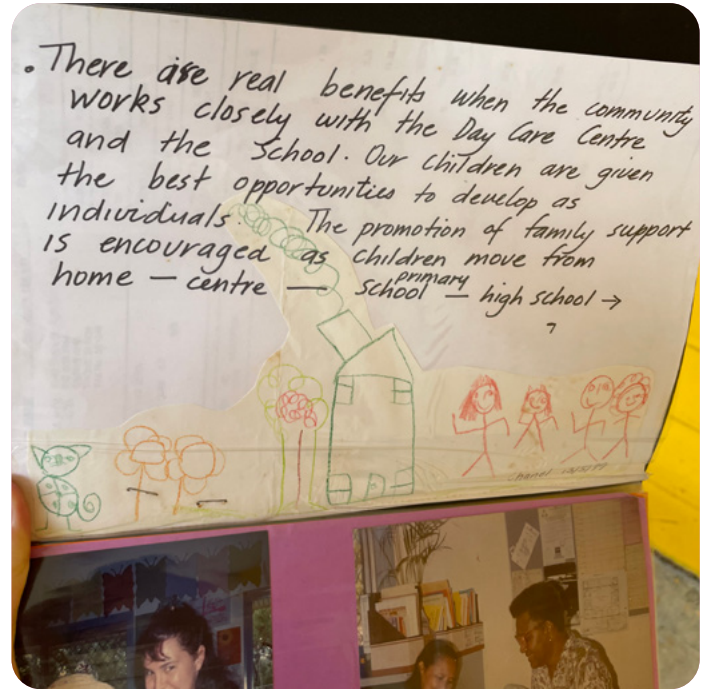
A lack of clarity – including lost records – around ownership of the land and building have complicated attempts to reopen centre.

Understanding the history and the contribution of each of these five factors will help the community to build on its strengths and find new ways of navigating challenges as it works towards their vision for the future of establishing integrated child and family services, including early learning and care, on the island.

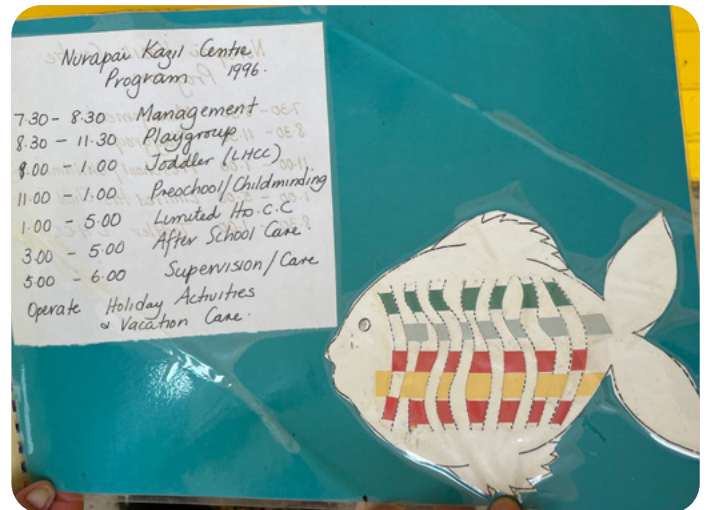
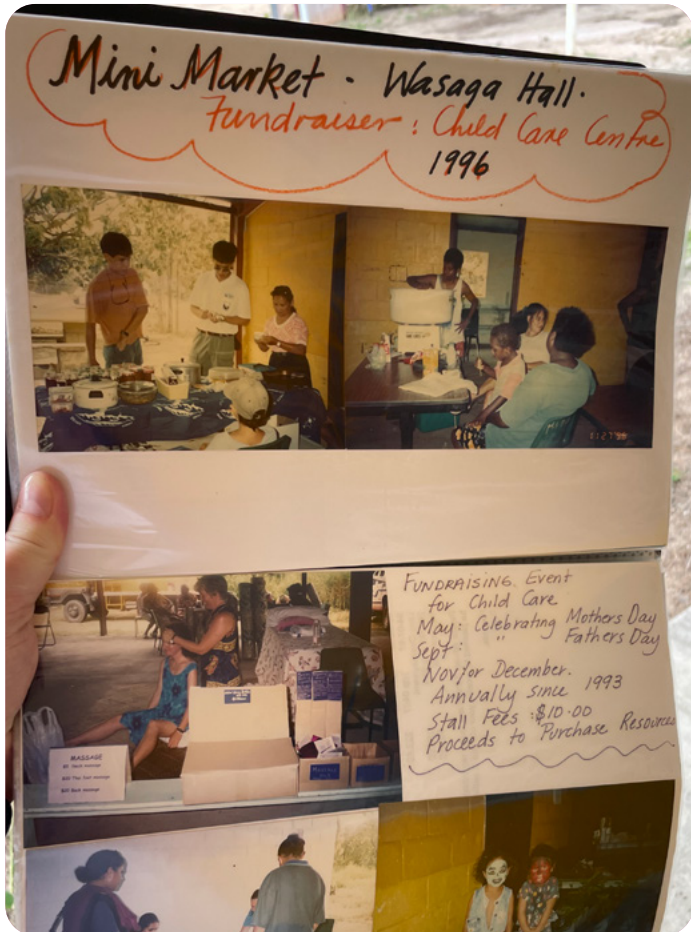
Nurapai Kazil Centre (Horn Island Child Care) which operated until 2016, had this centre philosophy:



Programming and documentation records from when the Nurapai Kazil Centre was previously operating.



Fundraising events helped to purchase resources for the centre and were a great opportunity to bring the community together.





What comes next?

The project has given us a rich understanding of how to better engage with First Nations communities and has allowed us to deliver a practical outcome and pathway forward with the local community.

Ngurupai's Early Childhood Advisory Group has, with the support of Goodstart Early Learning, started a monthly playgroup.

A twelve-month commitment has been agreed, which provides resources and monthly support from Goodstart's Torres Strait Islander Cultural Liaison and a First Nations educator.

This allows the community to facilitate the playgroup and build on-going momentum in the community around the bigger vision.

Six playgroups have been held as of the writing of this report (June 2023), and the playgroup itself has become an important vehicle for change as community members have seen and yarned about the value of early learning.

Work continues meeting the community's longer-term goal of re-opening its long day care and early learning centre.

We have continued to meet face-to-face with local stakeholder groups and organisations to plan next steps, including working to forge the partnerships necessary to establish a sustainable service model with local governance.

Maintaining momentum with this work after the initial codesign phase has been critical for continuing to strengthen trust with the local community. Peter, Magi, Amanda and Kylie have continued to be a consistent presence in Ngurupai, nurturing the relationships established through the initial project

and progressing what was started. Many community members have commented that this shows our ongoing commitment to the children and families of Ngurupai, where others in the past may have simply come and never returned.

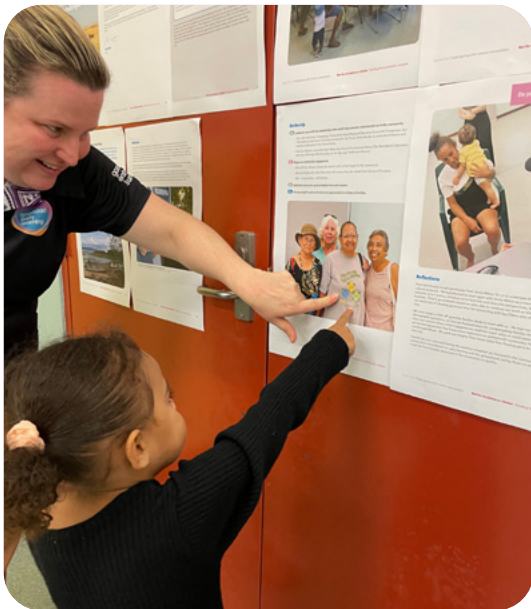
This project has also allowed Goodstart to begin conversations with other Torres Strait Island communities - the Ngurupai community project has led other communities to express interest in undertaking similar work with us. In this way, our ongoing presence on Ngurupai is building for change across the Torres Straits and highlights the importance of ongoing presence in community to ensure initial codesign work translates into sustainable - and scalable - impact.

For this project, we sought to adopt an approach which decolonised codesign work with a First Nations community and we drew on academic research and the deep cultural knowledge and relationships of our advisors.

We strove to be reflexive practitioners, who acknowledged and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait ways of knowing, being and doing; uncovered our own assumptions, biases, and racial prejudices; and recognised and responded to the power imbalances in the designer-participant relationship.

(Abdulla et al., 2019; Bird et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2019; Haynes et al., 2021; Laird et al., 2021; Lowitja Institute, 2022; Satour & Goldingay, 2021).

Throughout 2023, community engagement and consultation has continued in Ngurupai and beyond.



Provocations for change

Supporting First Nations communities like Ngurupai to help their young children grow up strong means collaborating with community to shift the broader systems impacting the strength and connection of the community, as well as those that affect children's life, school, and career opportunities.

For Ngurupai, we offer the following provocations to our readers:

- How might we partner with the community in the development of integrated child and family services that realise their vision and help young children grow up strong?
- How might we evolve policy and funding models to support the sustainable delivery of integrated child and family services – including creating the time and space for the ongoing learning and collaboration needed to build local capacity and innovation?
- How might we partner with the community to help address challenges in housing, employment, adult education, transport, cost of living, health, and public space that also impact young children's ability to grow up strong?

And for other First Nations communities, we offer these provocations:

- How might we partner with communities through collaborative decolonising codesign practices that forefront self-determination to help create better outcomes for young children?
- How might we create the policy and funding conditions necessary to hold the space for work like this to occur – recognising the need to allow the space to develop trust and working with the rhythms of the community?





Community Two: Remote Queensland

How can in-home learning be supported in remote communities – and specifically, what is the role of digital technologies?

Informed by insights from Remote Queensland mothers and early childhood service providers

The history behind this work

With a vision for all of Australia's children to have the best possible start in life, Goodstart holds a strong interest in how to support the learning, development and wellbeing of children living in remote communities without access to long day care services.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted long day care attendance across Australia, especially in Victoria and later New South Wales. During this time, Goodstart acted at both the national and local level to support children's ongoing learning. Nationally, we rapidly developed the [Goodstart@Home](#) platform – a portal for accessing evidence-informed activities and advice for supporting children's learning at home. This was made available for free to all Goodstart families and was purchased by the Victorian government and for all kindergarten families across the State. The resources were also available to non-Goodstart families in Australia and overseas via subscription.

At the same time educators in Goodstart centres across the country took the initiative to support their children and families through web-based classes, videos, home delivered activity packs and more.

These national and local offerings were valued by families during the pandemic. We began to wonder:

Could the potential of digital offerings enhance learning at home for children and families in remote communities for whom physical isolation and lack of long day care access were simply factors of everyday life?

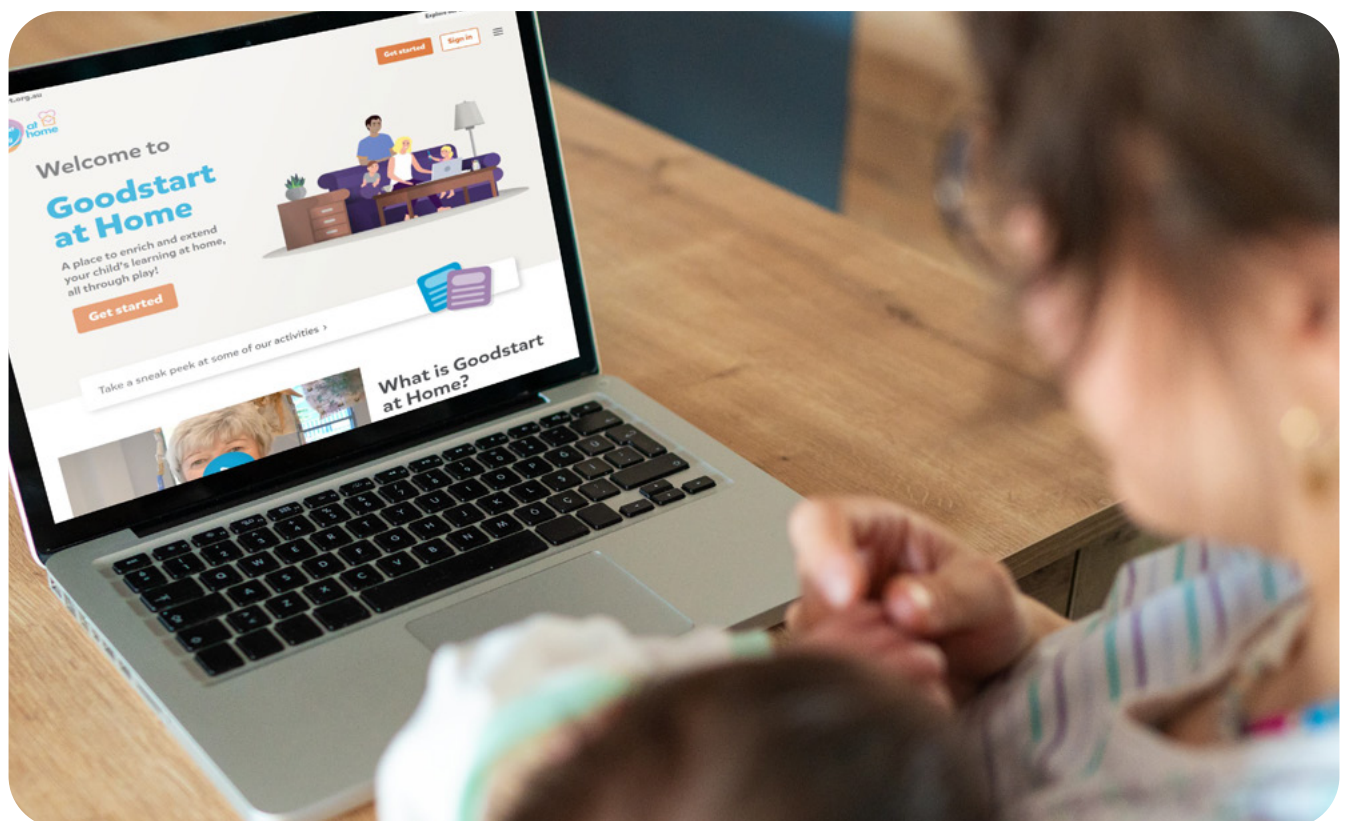
There were reasons to be excited about this potential. Goodstart families spoke highly about the content Goodstart had developed, and other providers such as Playgroup Victoria had also found success with digital learning services during the pandemic. Digital products or services therefore offered a potential avenue for responding to existing inequities in service access in remote communities.

There were also reasons to temper excitement. For example, repeat visits and new subscriptions were relatively low to the existing Goodstart@Home platform amongst the general community, and we knew remote internet could be patchy. There was therefore much to learn about how in-home learning could be supported in remote communities, and what the role of digital services, like Goodstart@Home, might be.

If the Federal Government is to deliver universal access to early learning regardless of postcode it was clear that different thinking would be required.

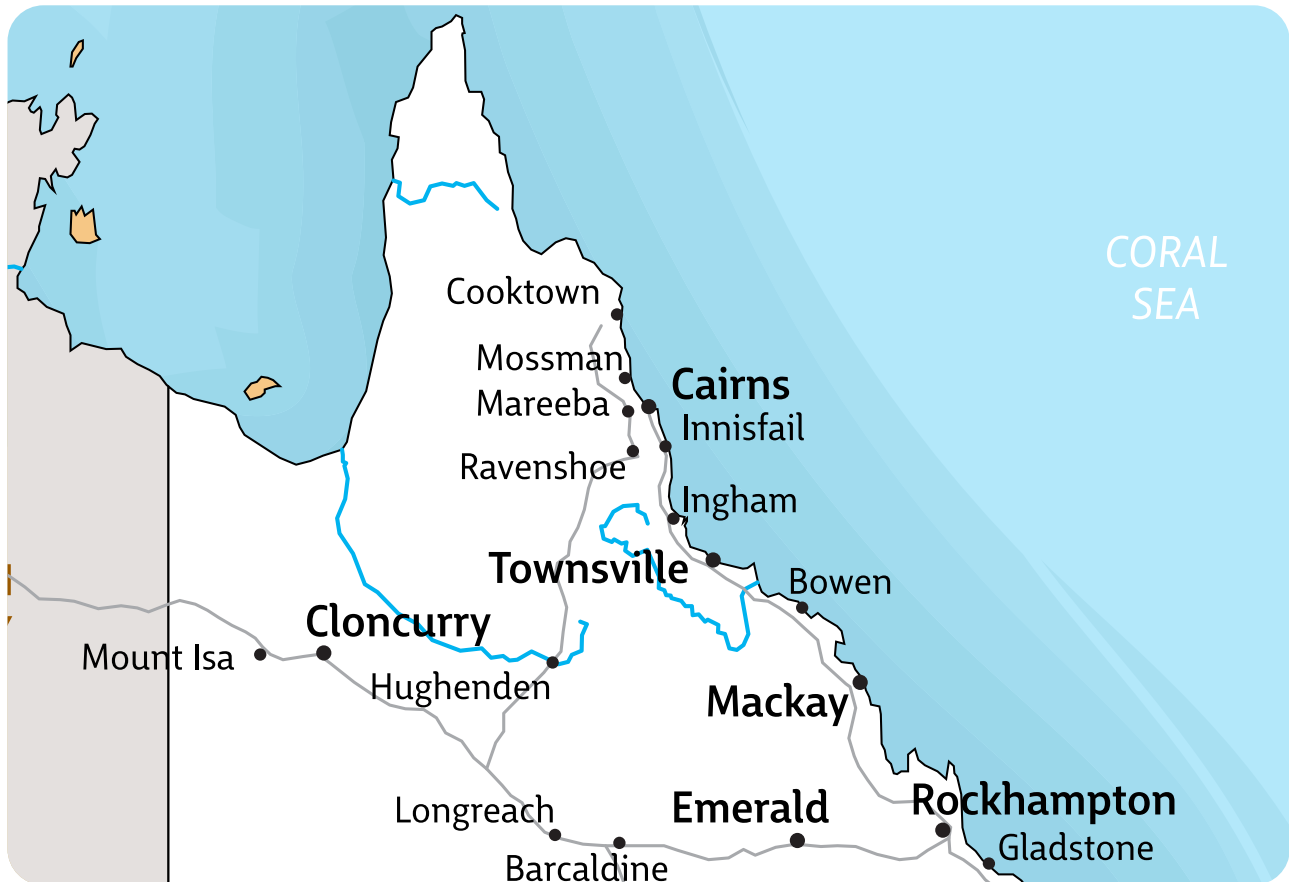
We therefore sought to get inside the strengths and needs of families with young children in one Remote Queensland community and to build an understanding of what these meant within the context of the broader early childhood landscape across remote Queensland.

The intent of the project is to provide an understanding of the broader early childhood landscape across remote Queensland.



About Remote Queensland

Our second community lives in a particularly isolated part of Remote Queensland. Due to the small number of families with very young children living in the selected area we have chosen not to identify the exact location to protect their privacy.



Our focus community is spread across many tens of thousands of square kilometres in Remote Queensland with a hot semi-arid climate, averaging in the mid-30s in summer and over 20 degrees Celsius in winter. Most of the area is used for farming and the nearest regional hub is many hours' drive away, and the State's capital, Brisbane, is more than a day's drive away.

Distance, and poor communications infrastructure, can make access to a range of government and non-government services difficult.

Fewer than 500 people live across the area - under half call the township home and the rest live on stations or in smaller communities. Around a third of the population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

It is important to note that the virtual codesign approach we undertook did not enable us to engage with First Nations communities in the area, and so our insights reported here do not speak to their strengths and needs. An alternate approach is needed to reach these communities, as discussed in our report 'Codesigning with remote communities in response to complex social challenges.'

The approach had limitations (also outlined in our companion report), including challenges with recruitment. Ultimately, eight mothers were recruited and the insights they shared were rich and help point the way forward. We also had fewer opportunities to share feedback with participants for their interpretation.

Almost 10% of the population is aged 0-4 years. The community itself is too small to report on AEDC outcomes, but across Remote Queensland 34% of children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, and 21% of children are developmentally vulnerable on two or more. This contrasts with 25% and 13% across Queensland as a whole.

Like much of remote and very remote Queensland, the area is predominantly classified as a "childcare desert" according to the 2022 Mitchell Institute report [Childcare Oases and Deserts: How Accessible is Childcare in Australia?](#) with little access to education and care services.

An evolving mix of services both local and state support children and families in the early years:

Education and care

- No **long day** care services.
- No **family day care** services.
- Some families on stations access intermittent **in-home care** through Uniting Care. Uniting care also offer activity kits to use at home.
- Some families have used **nannies** or **au pairs** previously, but these are difficult to find.
- 15 hours of **4-year-old funded kindergarten** available at the primary school in the year before school for those children that can access it.

Kindergarten

- **eKindy** (delivered by the Brisbane School of Distance Education under the auspices of the Queensland Department of Education) available as an at-home kindergarten program in the year before school.
 - This provides a 15-hour program each week, with up to one hour delivered by an eKindy teacher each week and the remainder delivered by parents/carers in the home.

Playgroup

- Weekly **playgroup** with local facilitators under the auspices of Play Matters (the Queensland playgroups association).
 - At the time of our research, the highly regarded weekly playgroup service had ceased due to the facilitator's maternity leave.
 - This has since restarted in 2023.
- Mums described a second local playgroup as more of an opportunity to gather rather than a learning environment for children.
- Since our research, a weekly online **playgroup** for babies aged 0-12 months has been introduced in 2023 run directly by Play Matters and advertised through the local playgroup.
- **Story, rhyme, and music time** are offered at the library as part of the First 5 Forever program supported by the State Library of Queensland.

Health and wellbeing

- Outback Futures offers a hybrid **mental health and wellbeing** service combining in-person clinics, telehealth, and other services to both children and adults in the area, and currently has a focus on services for families with children aged 0-2.
 - **Maternal and child health** services are offered through the Primary Health Centre and Wellbeing Centre.
-

Listening to the stories of mothers in the community

To share the experiences of mothers in the community, we have created two composite profiles to provide a sense of the lives of women in the town and on the land, to protect privacy while recognising that every parent's experience is unique.

"I love my kids but I struggle so much being the default parent. I have to be on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I am mentally tired."



Sophie

I'm Sophie, and I have three highly active boys under five.

I live and work on a station outside of town where I care for and feed the animals, prepare meals for all the workers on the station, and manage occupational health and safety.

My daily activities revolve around work and keeping my children fed, clothed and alive. I don't have much support as my parents live hundreds of kilometres away and we only see each other twice a year. My husband Dave is a farmer and can be out for days. When he is home, he's too exhausted to help with the kids so it all falls on me. I'm good friends with my closest neighbour, but she is 70km away and living in similar circumstances which makes it hard to see and support each other.

If only I had an opportunity to take a break, I could get on to sanding my deck!

I occasionally travel into town to attend local playgroups. Still, it's not always worth the effort as it takes over an hour to get there, and we often arrive to find activities have been cancelled. I try to keep the children entertained, but it is a struggle as they mostly get dragged around with me while I work. They do love helping with the animals – collecting the eggs, filling up the dogs' water bowls and giving the dogs their dinner. When Dave's around, they also like being out on the buggy or "fixing things" with him in the shed.

While I'm going about my day, I listen to a lot of podcasts like Motherland, Married to the Land and The Mother Day. I love to hear from people who live the way we do. They don't directly give me parenting advice, but they help me feel more normal and like I'm doing a great job as a mum living on the land.

"I really had to fight to take my child to work with me. I'm pregnant with my second child and I won't be able to take two children with me, so we'll probably have to move."



Lara

I'm Lara, and I live and work in town.

Fortunately, I have a role where I can take my almost 2-year-old daughter Chelsea to work with me. While I am working, Chelsea plays on her iPad; I try to find educational programs for her to watch and use.

My husband Dan works in construction as part of a road crew repairing the roads and sometimes can be away for up to a week at a time, so I am often at home on my own. I'm expecting my second child soon, therefore I won't be able to return to my role as they won't let me bring two children and there is no childcare in town. It costs so much to live out here – if I can't work, we'll have to move.

I do many activities at home with Chelsea – I've found some good ones on Facebook pages. My favourite one is run by a local mum who role models activities. I really like it because I know she knows what it's like being a mum in a place like this, and I can relate to her.

Don't ask me to do art and craft though. Occasionally we get sent resource packs. It is a great idea, but they are filled with glitter and messy stuff. I'd do it if the activity would last more than 5 minutes, but Chelsea just walks away after a couple of minutes, and I get stuck with the clean-up. The last couple of times I got those packs I just stuffed them in the cupboard.

Unfortunately, we're mostly limited to indoor activities as it's so hot out here. There used to be a fantastic playgroup in town voluntarily run by a local teacher, but when she had her baby, there was no one to keep it going. There are sometimes other playgroup options, but they're not that good – you might as well go to a BBQ because the kids play, the mums just chat, and it doesn't seem educational.

I don't know if I'm a good mum. At work you can tick off the tasks as complete. But how do you measure whether you are doing a good job as a mum? I don't know if Chelsea is getting enough from me and if she is learning.

Based on the compelling stories that the mums shared with us, three key themes emerged - support to parent, support to work and support to thrive. More details are provided in the following sections.

Support to parent

Feeling confident I am doing a good job as a parent

Mums shared many ways they intentionally supported their children's learning throughout the day, through activities they set up for their children to the way they integrated learning into tasks on station.

However, they still expressed low confidence in supporting their children's learning. Some described themselves as not naturally maternal people. With limited access to child and family services, it was harder for them to learn about child-rearing practices and to get support when they needed it. Being isolated from other mums also made them feel more uncertain about their parenting skills.

"There is no black and white as a mum. I don't know that I am doing it right. I am so hard on myself"

Finding inspiration for activities my child would love to do

The mums spoke a lot about needing to find activities to do with their children. The heat of the day often kept families inside for long hours. There were few venues or activities they could take their children to, and these were often closed or cancelled without much notice. Obtaining resources was often difficult or costly. Art and craft activities were seen as time-consuming and sometimes not worth the effort.

Despite these challenges, the women recognised the importance of engaging children in meaningful activities and were willing to try new ideas and adapt them to their circumstances. They most commonly turn to social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram as a convenient source of ideas.

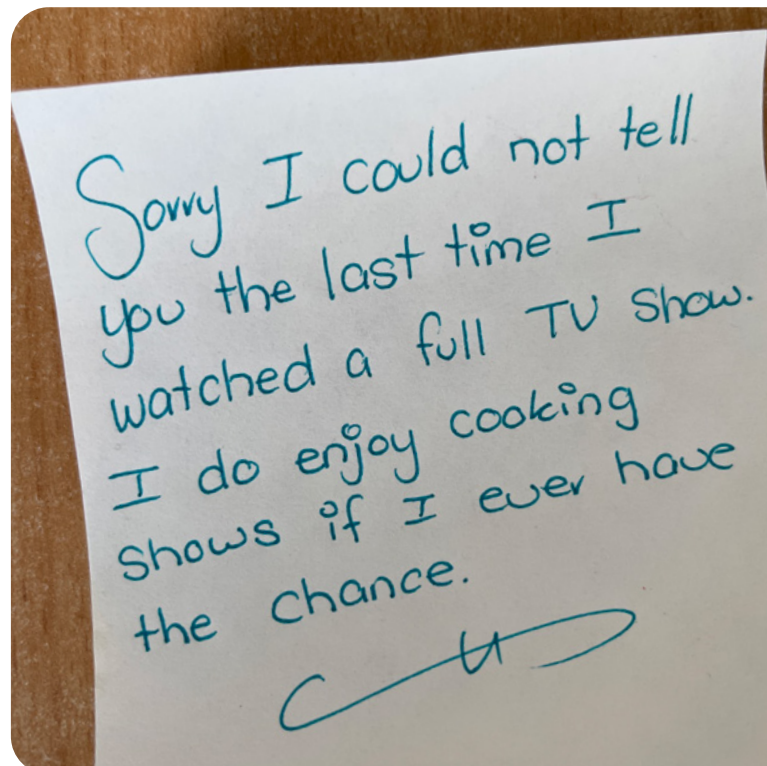
"I just google activities blindly. There is a local mum who role models activities with her own daughter. If she didn't put the post up (on facebook), I wouldn't have the ideas".

Having some time to myself

The demands of work and child-rearing take their toll. With fathers often working away from home for days at a time, mums said they were left to manage work and family tasks on their own. They told us that the pressure of their responsibilities often led them to feel exhausted, stressed and burnt out. Some spoke about more serious mental health challenges. Together, this sapped their energy to support in their children's learning.

With most mothers having few local family supports and the lack of any care services, there were very few opportunities to take a break, rest, and recharge so that they could continue to be strong, capable, and loving.

The nature of life in this community means that "taking a break" is more likely to involve completing chores they rarely get time for rather than sitting down to recharge.



Support to work

Our research focused on how children's in-home learning could be enabled, not on how to provide care for children while mothers worked. However, a complex picture of unmet care and employment needs emerged.

Mums in the township either:

Didn't work

Took their children to work

Worked from home when children were occupied

Mums on stations:

Took their children with them as they worked

Non-working perspectives: mums who weren't currently working had complex feelings about work. Affordability was an issue; it was unclear to some if they would be able to find economically viable work if they were paying for care. Others who had previously worked were concerned they would need to move for employment if they were unable to find affordable, suitable care solutions.

Working in town: of those who lived in town some had found a 'work-around' and had complex feelings about their care solutions. For some, working odd hours from home allowed them to achieve a desirable balance, earning an income without putting their children into care. For others, it was an imperfect solution that negatively impacted both their work and their children. For these families, formal care options could be desirable – if it was affordable.

Working on stations: women on stations were generally paid by the hour, creating an ongoing tension between working more hours (and therefore maximising income) and spending more time with their children. On stations, care would need to come to them, but cost (and lack of availability) made this untenable for most.

Barriers to care

All respondents felt a long day care centre would be a terrific addition to the town, but some expressed potential barriers to using this service, such as:

- unsuitable work in the area
- jobs with hours outside of regular business hours
- income levels making paid care unaffordable
- a desire to be home with their children
- requirements to travel long distances.

Opportunities

Regular occasional care services aligned with community rhythms that enable mothers to work or take time for themselves was universally appealing.

We do not seek to offer solutions but note the complexity of the situation and the need for solutions that are embedded in place in a way that meets the various needs of different families across the community.



Support to thrive

Our research also surfaced four deeper themes that impact children's lives and learning.

These cannot be addressed through child and family support services, but present broader system challenges to address for children and families to truly thrive.

Gender roles: highly traditional gender roles predominated. For mothers, this brought heavy parenting (and work) loads that negatively impacted mental health and wellbeing. For fathers, long hours on the job and away from home reduce the opportunities to connect with their children. While these rigid gender roles remain, the same parenting challenges will be perpetuated.

Jobs opportunities for woman: attractive jobs for woman are sparse. Work on stations only suits mums with partners who also work on the station. Work in tourism is often seasonal and outside of regular working hours. Work at the council and school is limited. Work in other services around town is often low paid. While mums continue to have few practically and economically viable employment options, their options for supporting their children and families remain limited.

Cost of living: regardless of income bracket this looms large for all families. This contributed to men working long hours, and women feeling tension between time at work and time with their children. While cost of living pressures remain high, both parents will continue to have less capacity to support their children's lives and learning.

Climate change: weather dominates family lives. Heat keeps families indoors during the hottest time of the year. When heavy rains fall, families can be trapped on stations for weeks or months at a time. With increasing weather extremes these issues are being exacerbated. Ongoing climate change will negatively impact young children's learning opportunities.



Interactions with Goodstart@Home

Participants were given free ongoing access to Goodstart@Home content. As part of our (paid) research, we asked them to login, have a look around and tell us what they liked and did not like. Mums were exceptionally positive in their feedback, said that the content was useful, the interface was (mostly) simple to use, and the activities were easy to put into practice even with the limited resources available to them. Yet, when we reconnected with them several weeks later, none had logged back in. They explained that despite their positive feedback the content (which was delivered by professionals) they did not find it compelling enough to drive them to return to the stand-alone Goodstart@Home website.



Local ingredients for success

Families in the remote Queensland community had three clear requirements which they felt would help them to support their children's learning and development.

Trusted people

Mums told us about the importance of support that comes from someone they trust. This takes two forms.

People like me: creating the opportunity to learn from and with other mums living in remote communities who understand their unique challenges and opportunities. Sharing lifestyles and experience helps build trust and make them confident to share ideas and resources. Many already follow families that live like them on Facebook and Instagram, and listen to podcasts featuring remote mums or families.

Experts who know my child: mums are keen to learn from professionals, but specifically from professionals with whom they have built a trusted relationship, and who know them and their child. Many felt uncomfortable reaching out to an unknown professional for personalised support and were not interested in generic pre-published expert advice. However, when they had the opportunity to build a relationship with a compassionate and expert professional in a low-pressure face-to-face environment, they were then open to seeking further personalised advice and guidance from this person, including online.

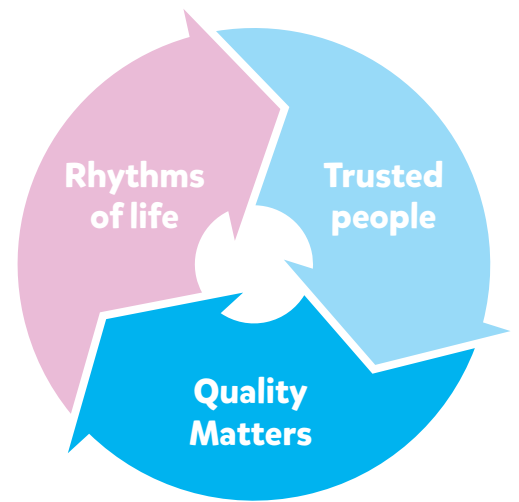
Rhythms of life

The mum's shared their lives are busy and extremely full, so it is important that access to resources and services fits within the existing flow of their lives.

Social media: whether it's looking for ideas for things to do, checking whether the playgroup is running, connecting with friends and family far away, or reaching out to ask if any other mum in the community can make the trip to deliver some paracetamol for a sick child after hours, Facebook and Instagram are mums' go-to sites. Mums reported that they engage through social media and want to be able to login to linked sites directly through their social media accounts. Many experience patchy internet and some only have access via mobile phones, an important prompt for resource design.

Podcasts: mums living in this remote community spend extended periods of time out on the land or driving long distances. This makes consuming content on the go very appealing. Podcasts and audiobooks help them consume information and be entertained while driving or doing other tasks.

Community heartbeat: In addition to the business of their lives, many travel long distances to access physical services. Together, these factors make it even more important that physical services reflect the rhythms of the community. The most highly valued services are those that are aligned to the days and times of other events, such as when fresh food is delivered to town or when complementary services are running. If services are frequently cancelled, families question whether it is worth planning to attend.



Quality matters

Delivering services in remote communities presents its own set of unique challenges, often making it harder to deliver high-quality services but it is a key requirement for remote families.

Skill: an important part of forming a trusted relationship with a professional is feeling they can trust their expertise. For example in health, care is often provided by young graduates who don't yet have the practical, life and remote experience to be able to appropriately support remote families. Mums felt they were often receiving conflicting information and found themselves following up.

Consistency and reliability: consistent people are a necessary foundation for mums to build trusted relationships. Reliable services that operate regularly are also important. Staffing challenges along with a heavy reliance on a small pool of people means services can cease to operate or are cancelled at short notice. For example, both the local pool and the favoured playgroup closed for an extended period when the individual providers were on maternity leave.

Affordability: with the high cost of living and limited work opportunities, affordability is always top of mind. Many city counterparts receive access to highly subsidised early learning services through the federally funded Child Care Subsidy for long day care. With the exception of funded kindergarten in the year before school, remote families are missing out on comparable financial support for their young children's early learning.

What could the future look like?

We set out to understand how in-home learning could be supported in remote communities, with a particular focus on understanding the role of digital technologies. Our insights point the way towards two promising directions.

People like me digital resources

The mums we spoke to predominantly use social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to access information to support their parenting journey and child's learning. They are drawn to content that features others like them in remote communities who are experiencing similar challenges and opportunities. This helps build their confidence that they are doing ok as a parent, whilst inspiring them with ideas for things to do with their child.

Our existing Goodstart@Home platform, whilst praised for the quality of its content, does not meet these criteria and therefore is not currently fit-for-purpose for supporting in-home learning in remote communities.

However, evidence-informed resources featuring 'people like me' delivered through preferred digital channels have the potential to positively support families to support their children's learning and development.



A flourishing hybrid ecosystem

Families have told us they would value digital services involving 1:1 or group interaction with education professionals, provided to parents and/or children – but only if they are accompanied by face-to-face services.

Face-to-face services, like playgroups, provide a low stress environment for families to establish trusted relationships with professionals, and for children and adults alike to get to know one another. This provides the foundation from which families can feel comfortable and confident to engage with these professionals in a virtual environment.

The combination of periodic face-to-face services coupled with ‘always on’ online support also offers the potential of providing attractive job opportunities for skilled staff who are able to combine working-in-the-community with work-from-home, helping to create a sustainable workforce.

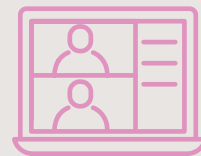
Collaboration between providers will be key to creating a flourishing hybrid ecosystem that follows the heartbeat of family and community life.



Families come together with familiar, skilled professionals through **in-person** playgroups and other events that foster mutual trust, understanding and learning

**Periodic
face-to-face
services**

Always available for online support



Families continue to access trusted professionals through virtual playgroups and **virtual 1:1 parenting support** grounded in an understanding of ‘me and my child’



Sustained by

Ongoing close work with **families and communities** to understand needs and learn from strengths

Close collaboration between **service providers**

Workforce models including:

- Local capacity building
- Hybrid working (travelling to community + virtual support from home)
- An increased overall **funding** envelope

Evidence of holistic impact intentionally gathered over time.



Considering the broader ecosystem

We were fortunate, in considering the wider eco-system, to engage with two larger-scale services providers operating in our focus community. Both offer services aligned with the vision of a flourishing hybrid child and family ecosystem outlined on the previously.

Outback Futures focus on mental health and wellbeing for children and adults in Outback Queensland, including in our focus community.



We were struck by the similarity of our insights into what was needed to create a flourishing hybrid child and family ecosystem and Outback Futures' Community Facilitation Model. This is characterised by features including:

- Visiting face-to-face
- Community clinics offering appointments with multidisciplinary teams.
- Community workshops providing tips and tools communities can use to support themselves.
- Critical incident responses following tragedy or disaster.
- 'Stay with Me' telehealth for regular support.
- Support for communities to put wellbeing ideas and initiatives into action.
- The WiWO (Work In Work Out) allied health workforce model which sees professionals combining face-to-face work in communities with remote telehealth services from home (wherever that may be).
- First 1000 Days Together initiative focused on supporting children and their parents from conception to 2 years.

Outback Futures provides consistent and accessible mental and allied health support for children and adults in Outback Queensland, including our focus community. Their multi-disciplinary teams of speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, counsellors and psychologists work with parents and carers to identify potential developmental delays in children, and provide both face-to-face and telehealth therapy to help children reach developmental milestones.

The potential for partnerships that leverage and extend on this model to deliver in-home child development and education are significant.

Play Matters Australia, originally Playgroup Queensland, supports children and families in the early years through a variety of services, including playgroups and online digital resources for both families and playgroup facilitators.



In our focus community, the highly respected playgroup run by a local (qualified) volunteer was a member of Play Matters.

The local Facebook page was used to share information including:

- photos of different learning experiences offered
- share Play Matters resources for families
- provide links to an online Play Matters playgroup for families with children under one.

Many mums commented on their trusted relationship with the facilitator, and the value they placed on the resources she shared.

In communities where Play Matters plays a similar role, this could create a foundation for a partnership to build a flourishing hybrid child and family ecosystem.

There are a range of other important players in the remote Queensland community already working to support young children’s learning, development and wellbeing whose impact could be further amplified by creating the conditions for providers and communities to work together to create a flourishing hybrid child and family ecosystem. These providers include:

Uniting Care have been supporting families in the bush for over 100 years, and today provide early childhood services to remote communities through two arms of their organisation.



Remote Area Family Services provide a range of family support services including playgroups and in-home visits to support families on the land. They also give out resource packs and provide remote support via phone following trips into remote communities.

54 reasons (part of the Save the Children Australia Group) offers its national early childhood development service ‘Play2Learn’ in remote Queensland communities and elsewhere. Play2Learn is an evidence-informed, targeted playgroup model delivered with tailored parent education, skill coaching and therapeutic family support.



C&K is a large not-for-profit provider of kindergarten and long day care, delivering and supporting high-quality early childhood education and care across a network of 330 centres in Queensland, including in rural and remote communities.



C&K provides Kindy Uplift support and advice to over 320 centres across the sector, and provides considerable support for children with additional learning needs through Communities for Children partnerships.

The Queensland Department of Education provides funded kindergarten programs through the state school system.

Children may be part of a composite class with two-or-more year levels per class.

FGP Moreton are a not-for-profit provider of long day care services in remote communities. It was born from the experience of a teacher in Toowoomba who observed poor literacy of children coming from rural locations of Southeast Queensland.



Currently, there are five centres in townships of 400-2,500 people (that is, twice the size or more as the township in our focus community).

FGP Moreton are run by a dedicated volunteer management team which impacts their ability to support further communities.

Childcare Leadership Alliance was founded in 2022 to address the unique challenges of providing early childhood education and care in regional communities.

Representatives from BHP Mitsubishi Alliance, Isaac Regional Council, and community are working together to develop strategic and innovation solutions to the attraction, retention and upskilling of early childhood educators and teachers. Strategies are currently being piloted in two outer regional townships of under 10,000 people.



Royal Queensland Bush Children's Health Scheme (BUSHkids) is a not-for-profit organisation which has been supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families in regional and remote Queensland since 1935 with a specific aim to reach and support disadvantaged families.



Their free services include speech pathology, occupational therapy, psychology and family health support. They also work together with the Department of Education to deliver eKindy pods.

The Isolated Children's Parents Association is a voluntary, non-profit, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated children's educational needs and aspirations are not disadvantaged because of where they live. They were instrumental in advocating for eKindy, and continue to advocate for improved access for remote children, including in the years before school.



Provocations for change

After our consultation with the existing providers, we pose the following questions:

- How might we support local communities to design and own local solutions?
- How might we innovate to create new sustainable solutions to attracting, housing, retaining and upskilling staff in remote communities?
- How might we develop sustainable funding models that truly reflect the cost of delivering services in remote communities – reducing the reliance on a patchwork of shifting funding and passionate but often overloaded volunteers?
- How might we respond rapidly to shifts in demographics, as the number of young children in remote communities grows and shrinks over time?

Working in partnership to answer these questions is key to creating a flourishing hybrid child and family support ecosystem in communities across Remote Queensland.

Final reflections

We are grateful for everyone in the two communities we worked with who opened up with us about their lives, families, communities, and their hopes for the future.

Our collaborating communities are in different places regarding service provision, the Remote Queensland community enjoys access to limited but fundamental services while there are few of these operating in the Torres Strait.

While both communities are geographically very remote, the Ngurupai community is concentrated in a small township while the Remote Queensland community is spread over tens of thousands of kilometres, creating quite different dynamics of distance.

Virtual offerings – done right – showed potential in Remote Queensland but would not currently resonate with the community on Ngurupai.

There are also important similarities:

- the centrality of trusted relationships
- the importance of following the heartbeat of community and family life
- The need for collaboration and integration between services

As we look forward, we ask ourselves: **How can we work in partnership to codesign, implement and evidence strategies and service offers that strengthen local child and family ecosystems in remote communities across Queensland (and ultimately, Australia) to improve holistic outcomes for children?**

We look forward to exploring this question in partnership with you.



Appendix

Education in the Torres Strait



Location	Education type	Providers
Banks Island (Moa Island)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College (Kubin Village Campus) Kindy to Year 6 Tagai State College (St Pauls Village campus) Kindy to Year 6
Coconut Island (Poruma)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6
Darnley Island (Erub)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6
Hammond Island (Kirriri)	Kindy/Prep Primary	After School Care Centre - TSIRC School-aged children Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School Prep to Year 3 (older students catch ferry to TI campus)
Horn Island (Ngurupai)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6
Mabuaig Island (Gumu)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6
Mt Cornwallis Island (Dauan)	Kindy/Prep Primary	Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6

Location	Education type	Providers
Mulgrave Island (Badu)	<p>Early Learning</p> <p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Aragun Child Care Centre - TSIRC (Badu) Birth to 3.5</p> <p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Murray Island (Mer)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Northern Peninsula Area	<p>Early Learning</p> <p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p> <p>Secondary</p> <p>Higher Education</p>	<p>Bamaga Kazil Ama Lala Childcare</p> <p>Injinoo Day Care Centre</p> <p>Nai-Beguta Agama New Mapoon Day Care Centre</p> <p>Umagico Childcare</p> <p>Northern Peninsula Area State College, Injinoo & Bamaga Junior Campuses Kindy to Year 6</p> <p>Northern Peninsula Area State College Bamaga Senior Campus Year 7-12</p> <p>TAFE Qld (Northern Peninsula campus)</p>
Saibai Island	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Stephen Island (Ugar)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Sue Island (Warraber)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Talbot Island (Boigu)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Thursday Island (Waiben)	<p>Early Learning</p> <p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p> <p>Secondary</p> <p>Higher Education</p>	<p>Mura Kaimel Playgroup (Port Kennedy Association)</p> <p>Lady Gowrie Child Centre</p> <p>Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School Prep to Year 6</p> <p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p> <p>Tagai State College Year 7 to Year 12</p> <p>TAFE Qld, James Cook University</p>
Yam Island (Masig)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>
Yorke Island (Iama)	<p>Kindy/Prep Primary</p>	<p>Tagai State College Kindy to Year 6</p>