



www.kics.org.au

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Parliamentary Submission

To whom may be concerned by the educational outcomes of remote children,

I am the Coordinator of Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) which is a mobile playgroup service travelling 750,000 square kms of the greater Katherine region in the Northern Territory bringing the joy of play based learning and playgroup to remote geographically and socially isolated children on pastoral stations and in Indigenous communities.

We have two full time teams of two members (four playgroup facilitators) that travel out from Katherine and deliver playgroup at four venues each week, making eight playgroups in total per week during school term times. KICS visits approx. 25+ Indigenous Communities and 25+ stations on a rotational basis. KICS aims to visit each venue at least twice in a school term, making 8 – 10 visits to each venue per year. Katherine Isolated Children's Service establishes and maintains relationships with small children, their families, carers, governesses, teachers, principals, Family as First Teachers tutors, council engagement officers and many other stakeholders that live remotely in the Northern Territory. KICS communicates and supports with these stakeholders to encourage involvement in children's developmental early years to promote educational success later on.

KICS is currently funded federally by the Department of Education through Budget Based Funding and receives additional funding from the Prime Minister and Cabinet through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

In the past year (July 2015 – June 2016) KICS has had the absolute joy of having 2,718 children at playgroup, 72% (1,962) of whom identified as Indigenous. Similarly, 72% (1,944) of this number were in the 0 – 5 years age group. For many young children, KICS is the first Early Learning opportunity for them before formalised education through pre-school if available in a community or through distance education. KICS provides children with a safe place to play that is developmentally appropriate for their needs. Parents and carers are supported and encouraged to join in with their children, and the KICS Field Teams model and involve children in sensory activities, art and craft, science based learning, gross motor skill practices and fine motor skill activities. KICS' play based learning philosophy promotes children having fun and enjoying themselves at playgroup in their own community.

According to results from the most recent Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) one in five children are developmentally vulnerable and although significant improvements were made between

2009 and 2015 in some domains, children living in very remote communities remain more developmentally vulnerable. These are the very children KICS are targeting with the early learning skills necessary to be able to participate fully in compulsory schooling when they are old enough. While the Katherine Isolated Children's Service cannot supply a full course for the early years, the removal of the service will result in no exposure to these skills for children living in geographic isolation.

As a mobile playgroup service that does not provide childcare, KICS will not be funded under the new Childcare Scheme being mooted in parliament at present. This would be most unfortunate for our service, incorporated 1989, that has been operating for the past 28 years+. As the Coordinator of KICS I have met with a consultant from Child Australia to discuss the transition process. We are unable to transition to a model that requires payment from our playgroup participants as it is not a workable solution considering that we operate outside under a shady tree and welcome all little people who would like to stay and play. I have since been informed by my funding manager that the consultants hired by the Dept. of Education are no longer undertaking that role. We feel that the new 'safety net' does not adequately address our particular problems and concerns.

As we currently do not provide childcare, and are unlikely to in the future, the new funding structure seems to question our 'viability'. This in no way takes in to account the qualitative success that KICS has consistently experienced bringing the joy of playgroup through play based learning to socially and geographically isolated small children. The effects of these very important early learning experiences are well documented and we receive ongoing anecdotal evidence from children, parents, grown-up KICS kids and others of just how significant and important KICS visits were and are in their lives living 'out bush'.

I understand that the funding system needs to change, our very tight budget is evidence of this but we actually need more funds to continue our fantastic work rather than no funds and the dire situation of facing closure. We face additional costs due to the very long distances that our playgroup facilitators travel and the maintenance of our vehicles.

I beg you to support Katherine Isolated Children's Service and please advocate for the benefit of isolated small children in the Northern Territory. Our website is www.kics.org.au or I can be contacted at _____ or on _____ or _____.

Kind regards,

Amanda Tootell
Coordinator

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