



October 18th 2022

The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee:

Moriarty Foundation thanks the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee for its invitation to provide a submission on the "Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022 [Provisions]".

Moriarty Foundation has been providing best practice, culturally appropriate early years education through our Indi Kindi program for over 10 years in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

Indi Kindi's holistic and culturally embedded program solidifies the intrinsic links between child, culture, and community to provide the best possible start to life for children who are amongst Australia's most vulnerable.

Moriarty Foundation welcomes the opportunity to join this conversation to elevate equal access to appropriate early years learning for all Australian children.

Yours sincerely,

Ros Moriarty
Honorary Managing Director





Submission - Inquiry into the provisions of the Family Assistance Legislation (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022

The Moriarty Foundation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022.

The Moriarty Foundation is an Aboriginal-founded organisation established in 2011 to enable families and communities to unlock their children's potential. Since 2012 we have operated **Indi Kindi**, a ground-breaking early years program for children under five years of age in remote Aboriginal communities, integrating a physical and mental health, wellbeing, education and development program to give children the best start in life.

Indi Kindi reaches an unprecedented 80 per cent of Indigenous children in its remote Northern Territory communities where it was established, Borroloola and Robinson River, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The program commenced in Tennant Creek in 2021. Importantly, Indi Kindi provides culturally appropriate, excellent quality early years programming to a high number of families where the parent(s) or caregiver(s) is/are long term unemployed. These families are not eligible nor can afford to access childcare that is covered under the family assistance legislation. Yet their children are amongst Australia's most vulnerable, and early years education is critical to breaking the lifelong cycle of disadvantage they are likely to continue to experience. Currently, Indi Kindi supports approximately 100 children between 6 weeks and 5 years of age each year. The program focuses on the first 1,000 days of an infant's life within Indigenous communities and addresses the importance of nutrition, protection, education, and childhood development.

Indi Kindi has a strong focus on addressing health outcomes by working closely with local Primary Health Care services, through regular sessions with practitioner visits and, parent information sessions. The program is delivered in a culturally appropriate and relevant framework with the aid of local knowledge and local languages that has helped tackle entrenched inequalities in school readiness and health outcomes for Indigenous children. It allows children to be connected to Country and learn traditions unique to their culture while growing experience of, and trust in mainstream education, health and wellbeing measures.

Indi Kindi is the only Indigenous early childhood service to be selected to partner with UNICEF Australia in its early childhood development program. Indi Kindi has established a partnership with the Menzies School of Research's (Menzies) project, HealthLAB Under 5, further building the capacity of Indi Kindi's staff to become health educators and advocates in their own communities.

As an organisation with more than a decade of experience delivering early education in remote communities, we strongly support and welcome the Bill's objective of helping more Indigenous children access these vital services. This submission welcomes the proposed measures in Schedule 3 and outlines additional recommendations that should be prioritised to have a meaningful impact on early education and broader health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous Australian children.



Recommendations

- 1) Adjust the rules of access to early education in remote communities through better fitting the measures proposed in the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022 to children of unemployed or underemployed parents or caregivers.
- 2) Acknowledge the barriers to providing service delivery in very remote and disadvantaged communities.
- 3) Identify and support culturally appropriate early education services for Indigenous Australian children.
- 4) Increase access to holistic, results-driven early education in remote communities.
- 5) Invest in data and reporting for early education programs to support targeted investment and reform to Close the Gap.

1) Increase access to early education in remote communities

The Moriarty Foundation supports the introduction of 36 subsidised hours of child care per fortnight for Indigenous Australian children, regardless of whether families meet the activity test. Greater access to early education for these children will significantly improve educational and wellbeing outcomes. This is particularly true of early education programs like Indi Kindi that are holistic, community-led, target the most vulnerable children and delivered in a culturally relevant framework.

There is strong evidence that Indi Kindi is instrumental in supporting a number of the Australia Government's Closing the Gap targets, including for 95% of Indigenous children to receive early childhood education services by 2025.

The enclosed, independent **Bahrava Report** details a range of impacts delivered by the program.

Educational impacts

- Indi Kindi improves school readiness for children before entering primary school.
- 78 per cent attendance of under 5s in Borroloola and Robinson River communities
- 97-100% of families agreed in surveys that their children have shown an improvement in developmental milestones (Dec 2018 and 2019 parent surveys, each including >35 respondents).
- 100 per cent staff training in Certificate 3 in Early Childhood Education and Care in collaboration with Batchelor Institute as well as supplementary training across first aid, safe food handling, lifesaving accreditation, Indigenous mental health first aid

Health impacts

- Indi Kindi helps address poor health through its provision of 3000 hot meals per year from a dietician designed menu, ensuring improved nutrition for children enrolled in the program, staff, and family members who attend the sessions.



Employment impacts

- The Indi Kindi program has a track record of keeping local women employed, with 60% of the current staff having been with the program for 4-5 years. In the Australian early education sector, average tenure for similar early childhood workers nationally is 1.6 years. (2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census).

Multi-disciplinary response to families with complex and multiple needs

- Indi Kindi operates in a highly challenging remote community environment with multiple risk factors, yet provides a strong opportunity to engage with that community as the majority (approximately 80%) of 0-4s and their families in the communities of Borroloola and Robinson River take part in the program.



Indi Kindi Tenant Creek, focusing on healthy eating habits

2) Acknowledge the barriers to providing service delivery in very remote and deprived communities

In order to improve access to early education for Indigenous Australian children, policymakers must acknowledge the barriers to providing effective service delivery in very remote and disadvantaged communities and tailor the funding profile accordingly. Indi Kindi's model has worked hard to overcome obstacles such as socio-economic, cultural and historical challenges, as well as the



disruptions caused by crises. Despite this, Indi Kindi receives little in the way of financial support from the Australian Government to deliver its services.

The community where Indi Kindi established its service is one of the most remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Located 670km from the nearest town, Katherine, and 850km south east of Darwin, Borroloola has a population of around 700 people, 74% of whom are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (2020 Census). Robinson River, where Indi Kindi operates one day a week, is 2.5 hours further from Katherine by car from Borroloola via unsealed roads where access is periodically cut off during the wet season.

Borroloola and its surrounding communities face complex multi-generational issues of disadvantage and trauma. Severe social challenges and lifelong poverty stemming from extremely low standards of education, health and employment are key barriers. Residents in the four town camps – Marra, Yanyuwa, Garawa 1, and Garawa 2 – face overcrowding, insecure tenancy, water contamination, and failing health hardware. The recently released Town Camps Review classifies 25% of Borroloola housing to be in 'poor' and 34% in 'very poor' condition.

Unemployment and underemployment rates in Borroloola are high, as in many other remote communities. It is estimated that approximately 50% of families with children under 15 in Borroloola are jobless. The majority (64.4%) of Indigenous people in Borroloola live in crowded housing, and 27% are in severely crowded housing. For instance, some 2-room dwellings are used to house 20 people. The poor condition and quality of houses in Borroloola carry multiple repercussions involving health, social and emotional consequences as noted in the 2016 Town Camps Review.

Early education services must mindfully and appropriately navigate the many challenges faced by remote and regional Indigenous communities. These include, building capacity in the community through providing local paid employment when very high unemployment is the norm, sustainability, cultural relevance, embedded mental health drivers, adaptability to the needs of the families, and integrated partnerships with other community organisations.

Section 3 details the community-led approach to education which has enabled Indi Kindi to successfully navigate these challenges. In addition to this, Indi Kindi employs, trains, and builds the capacity of local Indigenous women to run the programs.

The program has employed more than 30 local Indigenous women in total since 2012. We build capacity in the community through meaningful local employment and its focus on employee development, including mental health. It provides ongoing training and is supporting staff members to achieve a Certificate III Early Childhood Education and Care in collaboration with the Batchelor Institute.

3) Acknowledge and invest in culturally appropriate early education services

Culturally appropriate early education brings significant benefits for Indigenous children and should be prioritised as a means to increase engagement and levels of school readiness. Indi Kindi's high attendance rate is a reflection of our innovative early learning model and curriculum specifically designed for young Aboriginal learners.



Indi Kindi has been co-designed by the community and overseen by a Community Advisory Group which is made up of local Traditional Owners, Elders, families, and key community stakeholders who provide support and guidance. Our Aboriginal teaching methodology is informed by over 65,000 years of knowledge and culture and emulates how Dreaming has always been taught.

Indi Kindi’s unique “Walking Learning” outdoor teaching model enables movement, freedom and creative expression suited to the cognitive strengths of young Aboriginal learners. Indi Kindi builds on the measurable link between movement and cognitive function to boost positive behaviour, engagement and performance. It encourages creativity, resourcefulness, traditional learning, and curiosity—all skills learned through the dynamic interaction of children with each other and connection to the world around them.

Outdoor learning is particularly important for Aboriginal children, many of whom experience difficulties with auditory processing through hearing loss. In a traditional classroom where sound bounces off the wall it can be disorientating, and affect the cooperation and attention spans of very young Aboriginal children. National and international research shows interacting with the environment provides optimum conditions for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning for the very young. The research strongly endorses walking learning delivered outdoors to improve behaviour and engagement for learning rather than within a classroom environment in purpose-built rooms.



An example of ‘Walking Learning’, Turtle hunting in Borroloola, NT



4) Increase access to holistic, culturally appropriate early education in remote communities

There are around 150,000 Indigenous Australians living in more than 1,200 remote and very remote communities around the country. Increasing access to holistic, culturally appropriate early education services like Indi Kindi in more of these remote communities should be a priority for the Australian Government. Changes to the childcare subsidy will not reach the majority of vulnerable children in these communities. Nor do childcare centres recognise a remote region cultural preference for young children to be educated on Country by family, which Indi Kindi provides through cultural programming and the employment of local women.

We have requested additional financial support to develop our Indi Kindi model in additional communities, noting the long-term social benefits of integrating health, wellbeing, education and development to give children the best start in life. To achieve this at the scale needed to Close the Gap, funding also needs to be provided on a longer-term basis than previous arrangements. Longer term (e.g. 3 year) funding arrangements will provide greater stability and security for the program and the community to drive impacts and create lasting change in the lives of Australia's most vulnerable children and families.

5) Invest in data and reporting to support targeted investment and reform

Longer term funding arrangements will also enable quantitative impact measurements to be planned and consistently collected. Measurement and Evaluation of the Indi Kindi program has been limited to date since the funding level has been comparatively low and financial resources have necessarily been focused on service delivery. Funding has not been available for external evaluations or to develop an internal evaluation or data collection capacity. The attached **Bahrava Report** was prepared pro bono by Dr Galia Barhava-Monteith, an independent consultant and facilitator specialised in knowledge mobilisation, and Margot Tong, a management consultant with the Boston Consulting Group, specialising in health and family services.

Furthermore, the sector acknowledges the challenges of measuring social programs that are community-wide, and that address multi-faceted, complex problems, in particular in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Nonetheless, investment in data and reporting will enable Indi Kindi to prove scalability and identify factors which make early education programs for Indigenous Australian children more or less successful.

About the Moriarty Foundation

Moriarty Foundation is an Aboriginal-founded organisation established in 2011 to enable families and communities to unlock their children's potential. It was founded by Yanyuwa man John Moriarty AM and Ros Moriarty at the request of senior Aboriginal Law women in Borroloola, a remote community in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Territory where John was born. These elders wanted to see their grandchildren educated.

Moriarty Foundation is one of the very few support services offered in Indigenous communities which is gaining evidenced traction and having a transformational impact. Its embedded relationships of trust, respect and mutual benefit within Indigenous communities have enabled the delivery of two interrelated, highly successful and locally-led programs, John Moriarty Football (JMF)



and Indi Kindi. These programs have been successful in mindfully navigating the many challenges faced by remote and regional Indigenous communities. These include, building capacity in the community through providing local paid employment when very high unemployment is the norm, sustainability, cultural relevance, embedded mental health drivers, adaptability to the needs of the families, and integrated partnerships with other community organisations.

Both JMF and Indi Kindi are co-designed by the community and overseen by a Community Advisory Group which is made up of local Traditional Owners, Elders, families, and key community stakeholders who provide support and guidance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022 and to provide our perspective on opportunities to improve early education access for Indigenous Australian children.

The enclosed **Bahrava Report: Indi Kindi Impact Report** provides further information about Indi Kindi. If you require any further information on Indi Kindi or the Moriarty Foundation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ros Moriarty
Honorary Managing Director Moriarty Foundation

